

Katrina Turns Thirteen: Middle Grade Historical Fiction as Material-Discursive Act of Cultural Remembering

This summer marked the twelve year anniversary of Hurricane Katrina, which coincided with landfall of Hurricane Harvey and, less significantly, my teaching of Jesmyn Ward's *Salvage the Bones* in English 125: Literary Narrative. Students in that class in central Illinois brought with them only a partial, shadow story of Katrina, perhaps because of their geographical removal of several hundred miles or their temporal removal of more than a decade.

This presentation takes that experience as a starting point, examining historical fiction that retells the story of Katrina, including Julie T. Lamana's *Upside Down in the Middle of Nowhere* (2014), Denise Lewis Patrick's *Finding Someplace* (2015), and Jewell Parker Rhodes' *Ninth Ward* (2010). Working at the intersections of narrative theory, memory studies, and trauma theory, this presentation pays particular attention to these narratives as material-discursive acts of remembering, a concept that hinges on the fact that fixed, discrete "memories"—whether individual or cultural—do not exist but are constructed, maintained, and altered through narrative. Thus, this presentation will interrogate the ways in which these narratives reinscribe or counter the common cultural conceptions of Katrina, New Orleans, the Mississippi Gulf Coast, and residents, asking how these narratives process (or don't) the personal and public trauma of Katrina, serving as material-discursive acts of cultural remembering for middle grade readers divorced from the storm's context.