



A Discussion Guide to

AMERICA IS UNDER ATTACK
September 11, 2011: The Day the Towers Fell
By Don Brown

Grade Range: 1 to 5, Age Range: 6 to 10

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Middle-Grade Nonfiction, 64 pages, full color throughout

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With the tenth anniversary of September 11, 2001, approaching, the increase in media coverage and adult discussion is bound to make young people more curious. Don Brown gives teachers, families, and young people a welcome resource to use for talking about the events of that day. *America Is Under Attack* is an accessible, linear retelling of what happened, from the planes in the sky to the crashes in New York City, the Pentagon, and Pennsylvania, and the resulting confusion, rescue attempts, and loss of life. Don Brown weaves stories of individual experiences together with his compelling watercolor illustrations to convey the destruction, fear, and ultimately the courageous community of the day.

Although *America Is Under Attack* is a picture book, it is not recommended for use as a classroom read-aloud with children under nine years old. Most typically developing younger children do not have the contextual understanding of time and place to make sense of the harsh information. That said, teachers will find reading this book useful for their own knowledge and background, for sharing specific pages, and for recommending selectively to families.

Preparing to read the book with students

Since the nonfiction content is intense and detailed, pre-read *America Is Under Attack* prior to using it with students. Additionally, find out if anyone in the class might be dealing with a direct loss of a loved one or family member from 9/11. In such situations, particular care and preparation are needed when deciding how to use the book.

In classes without immediate connections to the events of September 11, you can find out what students already know by facilitating a conversation before reading the book. The discussion can be kept safe for everyone by establishing ground rules, such as respecting all contributions and questions, not putting anyone down for what they say, allowing for disagreement by saying, "I

have a different idea . . ." or "I disagree . . ." rather than shouting or teasing, and permitting expressions of sadness or other vulnerable feelings. Some questions to use include:

- Has anyone heard about 9/11 or September 11? What have you heard?
- How did you learn about it? (from family, friends, television?)
- What do you think and feel about what we are discussing?
- What else do you wonder about and want to know?

Some key things to remember during this discussion:

- All contributions are valid.
- It is appropriate to correct misinformation. For example, if a child says that one of the planes crashed in Boston, you can decide whether the group needs accurate information right then or can ask the group to pay attention for that information when listening to or reading the book.
- Students may need the reassurance that this is not what usually happens on planes and when people travel; that grown-ups in the United States and in other countries have worked together since September 11 to keep everyone safer and to find other solutions to problems.
- Students might see and hear adults around them at home and in school being sad or emotional around September 11, 2011, because it's the tenth anniversary of 9/11. Although some anniversaries are happy celebrations, others, like the anniversary of September 11, can make people sad when they remember that day and think about what happened. As the anniversary gets closer, media coverage might make people who remember September 11 think about it more.

Reading the book

Explain that you're going to read from a book that will give more information about what happened on that day. While reading the book aloud, expect that some reactions and questions might be compelling enough to pause in the reading and talk about them right then and there. Open up a discussion after reading the book. First, students might have a quiet time to write or draw about their thoughts and reactions. Based on the needs and tone of the group, the questions that follow can be used selectively during the conversation.

1. What did you learn? What surprised you?

2. How does reading or listening to this book make you feel? Why?
3. What is a hero? Do you think anyone in this book is a hero? Explain.
4. It is often said that people pull together in difficult times. What examples of this can you find in the book? Why do you think this happens?
5. On the first page, the book says that the people who attacked the United States on 9/11 "hated America's power and influence." What does this mean? What do you think about this? How do you think people should handle their feelings and problems?
6. Are there other historical events that you would consider a tragedy like September 11? Why do events like these happen?
7. Do you think there can be peace in the world? Explain your thinking. What do you think would need to happen for there to be world peace?
8. September 11 happened in 2001. Is it a part of history? Why or why not? What is history? What makes something historical?
9. What do you like about how Don Brown wrote this book? He tells about September 11 through the stories of what happened to individual people. What did you think about this way of writing?
10. Don Brown is also the illustrator. What did you notice about the illustrations? How did they make you feel? Which pictures stood out to you? Why?
11. The Author's Note states how many people died in the events of September 11, 2001. How does this information make you feel? Around the world, people have varying ideas about death. What do you think about death?
12. What else do you want to know about September 11? How could you find more information?

A Note Regarding Younger Children

This book is not appropriate for most children under nine. However, if they hear about September 11, it is appropriate to talk with them about it in a calm, responsive way. You can ask them what they heard and what else they know about it. What do they think about what they have told you? How does it make them feel? You can correct misinformation simply and directly. If they ask questions, turn the question back to them before offering an answer. Often, children either know more than we expect or mean something different by their question than we interpret. Allowing children the opportunity to answer their own questions can give us further

information about what they're thinking (and buy us time for our own thinking!). The adult tendency is to give more information than a child needs or wants. If a child wants more information, he or she will likely ask more questions, either right then or at another time. If you do not know the answer to a question, it is more than okay to say that. In appropriate ways, you can find out together. *America Is Under Attack* is one resource for you. If a question or the direction of the conversation feels like more than you can handle at the time, you can say that you want to think about it and make a plan to talk more about it later. In the meantime, you can get some advice and consider what you want to say. To maintain a trusting relationship with your child, it is vital that you return to the topic as agreed. It is also okay to convey your values and feelings about what happened. Regarding real but mature topics like September 11, the best thing adults can do for our youngest children is to be available for conversations and questions when they arise.

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