



A day America will never forget

Twenty years ago, an attack shook the nation and changed history.

On September 11, 2001, the world was shocked by the largest foreign attack on US soil. Thousands of people died on the day that became known as 9/11.



The Twin Towers before 9/11

What happened on September 11?

Nineteen members of a terrorist group called al Qaeda hijacked (took control of) four airplanes. Two planes headed for the World Trade Center in New York City, where up to 50,000 people worked in skyscrapers known as the Twin Towers. At 8:46 am, a plane flew into the North Tower. At 9:03, another struck the South Tower. Both buildings collapsed. At 9:37 am, a third plane hit the Pentagon (headquarters of the US military) in Arlington, Virginia. The fourth flight was headed for Washington, DC, but passengers fought the hijackers. At 10:03 am, that plane went down in a field near Shanksville, Pennsylvania. Many first responders (firefighters, police officers, members of the military, doctors, nurses, and other emergency workers) ran into burning buildings to save people and pulled others from the rubble. A total of 2,977 people were killed, including 184 in Virginia, 40 in Pennsylvania, and 2,753 in New York—412 of whom were first responders.

Who did this and why?

Al Qaeda is an Islamic extremist organization, a group of Muslims (people who follow Islam) with hateful views toward others. Most Muslims do not agree with these beliefs, and on 9/11, al Qaeda had fewer than 100 members. The group's founder, Osama bin Laden, planned the attack to punish America for its role in conflicts in the Middle East, especially in Saudi Arabia, where he was born.



SOARING STRUCTURES
At 110 stories high, the Twin Towers were the tallest buildings in the world when they were completed in 1973.

DID YOU KNOW?
The Pentagon is the world's largest office building. About 27,000 people work there.

The names of people who died that day are inscribed at the 9/11 Memorial in New York City.

NEW ROOTS
Volunteers have planted 129,918 seedlings at the site of the crash in Pennsylvania.

Messages from children

First responders saved many lives on 9/11 and spent months afterward cleaning up the crash sites. To thank them and boost their spirits during this difficult time, children around the world sent thousands of letters and drawings. They were displayed at Ground Zero, public memorials, and firehouses around New York City. A book of children's art and messages was published in 2002, and many items hang at the 9/11 Memorial & Museum.



Children's tributes displayed on a fire truck

One principal's story

High school principal Ada Rosario Dolch was greeting students at school three blocks from the Twin Towers when the planes crashed. Dolch got her students and staff to safety, but her sister Wendy, who worked in the North Tower, did not survive. After 9/11, Dolch helped start a school in Afghanistan in Wendy's memory. She also encouraged her students to share the story of how people helped one another that day. "I tell them, 'You are history makers,'" she said.



Ada Dolch (third from right) with students



President George W. Bush speaks to firefighters after 9/11.

What happened afterward?

Support poured in from around the world as recovery and cleanup efforts continued for nearly nine months. Ash and debris covered 16 acres around the Twin Towers site, called "Ground Zero." Anger over the attacks led to a rise in prejudice against Muslims in the US, but government and religious leaders called for unity. "The face of terror is not the true faith of Islam. Islam is peace," said George W. Bush, the President at the time. "Let us...work together in a spirit of friendship and cooperation." The US government investigated 9/11 and issued an official report in 2004, recommending changes to protect against terrorist threats. A new US agency was created to oversee national security, and security at airports and other locations was heavily increased. In October 2001, the US invaded Afghanistan, seeking the leaders of al Qaeda. Bin Laden was killed by US troops in 2011.



The "Tribute in Light" memorial shines every September.

Remembering 9/11

Many family members of those who died have come together to support one another and honor their loved ones. Every year on September 11, they gather at the World Trade Center site, where a memorial now stands alongside a new tower, to read out the names of the people who died. Memorials were also created at the Pentagon, in Pennsylvania, and in cities worldwide. Since 2013, 9/11 has been a National Day of Service and Remembrance, when people throughout America volunteer at schools, parks, and food banks. Beginning at 8:46 am, many honor the day by observing a moment of silence.



4 uplifting books related to 9/11

One way to mark the 20th anniversary is by reading these compelling stories.



This Very Tree

By Sean Rubin

(Henry Holt and Co.)

This nonfiction book is written from the point of view of a tree that used to stand between the Twin Towers (the two tall buildings in New York City that collapsed on 9/11). The tree was buried under rubble but survived. Workers moved it to help it heal. The illustrations are beautiful. *All ages*



Big Apple Diaries

By Alyssa Bermudez

(Roaring Brook Press)

The author's diaries from middle school inspired this graphic novel. It starts when she's in seventh grade. She struggles with friends and thinks her parents are too overprotective. In eighth grade, 9/11 happens and her parents work at the World Trade Center. Her father comes up with a clever way to get back home. *Ages 8–12*



Nine, Ten: A September 11 Story

By Nora Raleigh Baskin

(Atheneum Books for Young Readers)

A few days before 9/11, four middle schoolers from different parts of the country are at the airport in Chicago. This fictional story follows what happens in each of their lives from September 9 to 11, 2001. It then skips ahead to one year later. There are tense and hopeful moments. *Ages 8–12*



Towers Falling

By Jewell Parker Rhodes

(Little, Brown Books for Young Readers)

This fiction book takes place 15 years after 9/11. Déja is in fifth grade, and her class is learning what happened when the Twin Towers fell. While Déja is happy at school, her father is upset about what they're studying. A twist in this story helps explain his feelings. The experience brings the family together. *Ages 8–12*