



# With Their Eyes: September 11th--The View from a High School at Ground Zero

By Annie Thoms

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I could have died that day.

September 11, 2001

Monologues from Stuyvesant High School

Tuesday, September 11, started off like any other day at Stuyvesant High School, located only a few blocks away from the World Trade Center. The semester was just beginning, and the students, faculty, and staff were ready to begin a new year.

But within a few hours on that Tuesday morning, they would all share an experience that transformed their lives.

Now, on the tenth anniversary of September 11th, we remember those who were lost and those who were forced to witness this tragedy. Here, in their own words, are the firsthand stories of a day we will never forget.

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## **With Their Eyes: September 11th--The View from a High School at Ground Zero By Annie Thoms Bibliography**

- Sales Rank: #568335 in Books
- Brand: Harper Collins
- Published on: 2011-08-23
- Released on: 2011-08-23
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 7.13" h x .58" w x 5.00" l, .35 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 256 pages

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### Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Thoms, an English teacher at Stuyvesant High School, located four blocks from the site of the World Trade Center, spearheaded a school production last February based on 10 students' recorded interviews (with classmates, faculty and staff members). The students converted the transcripts into "poem-monologues," which they presented and the text of which appears here. In Thoms's introduction, she notes that the goal was "to capture the ways individual people express themselves in speech," and, indeed, the collective impression is one of a group therapy session that may well provide some healing for teen readers still struggling with the event's aftermath. Many of the monologues (at times laced with "um" and "like") probably work better in a dramatization; on the page, the narratives at times falter and a few repeat similar themes. The poignant "Precious Cargo," for instance, begins with a photograph of a student performing as a pregnant English teacher, and her words of protectiveness about both her unborn child and her students read well on the page, but would likely be even more moving onstage. Still, the emotional rhythms of the volume take on a credible ebb and flow. A welcome dash of humor comes through in a freshman's contention that the students' relocation to Brooklyn Tech (while their school functioned as a triage center) put everyone on equal footing ("Everybody was like/ 'Where the hell are my classes?'/ so it was kinda like everybody was a freshman"). In the closing entry, perhaps the most smoothly structured in the volume, the school theater manager recalls returning to a newly reopened Stuyvesant to find the flag missing from the stage. Later, he "came across a picture/ of firemen/ installing a flag/ on the mast of the World Trade Center/ and I looked at the picture and my jaw dropped./ It was our flag." Readers willing to overlook less relevant and revealing segments will find a number of moving moments here. Ages 13-up.

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From School Library Journal

Grade 7 Up--The terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 have changed the lives of all Americans. The students, faculty, and staff of Stuyvesant High School, located four blocks from Ground Zero, responded creatively with a unique work of reader's theater. In with their eyes, student actors transcribed monologues culled from interviews with their fellow classmates, teachers, custodians, and cafeteria workers. The pieces describe the pain of watching people jump to their deaths from office windows, the terror of being separated from their families, the lingering aftereffects of being temporarily housed in a different school, and the post-traumatic stress that nearly paralyzed all 3200 students. The monologues echo the individuals' everyday speech, including the "ums," "likes," and "you knows," which, while sometimes jarring to read, make them dramatically immediate and realistic when performed. This unique book rings with authenticity and resonates with power; it can be used in the curriculum or as an independent piece of theatrical art. Pair it with Michael Cart's excellent 911: The Book of Help (Cricket, 2002), Mitch Frank's Understanding September 11th: Answering Questions about the Attacks on America (Viking, 2002), or Mitchel Levitas's A Nation Challenged: A Visual History of 9/11 and Its Aftermath: Young Reader's Edition (Scholastic, 2002).

*Susan Riley, Mount Kisco Public Library, NY*

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From [Booklist](#)

Gr. 9-12. In response to September 11, the students of New York City's Stuyvesant High School, which is located just blocks from Ground Zero, staged a powerful theatrical event. Inspired by Anna Deavere Smith's interview-based monologue performances, the students talked with peers, faculty, and others in their community about personal responses to the tragedy. Based on the transcripts of those conversations, the

students created the monologues that are collected here with photographs of the performers, as well as excellent introductions by Smith and Thoms, who was the teacher who initiated the project. The speakers reveal their emotions with painful honesty, particularly when they speak about the mundane anxieties that mix with their overwhelming, global fears--how they continue the business of everyday life. The pieces retain each speaker's verbal ticks and rhythms--the "ums," the "you knows," and the half-sentences--and the startling immediacy of the words, set down the way people actually talk, gives these pieces even more impact. The book is an obvious choice for reader's theater and for use across the curriculum; its deeply affecting contents will also make compelling personal-interest reading. *Gillian Engberg*  
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