

When viewing *Telling Stories: Nikki Grimes* and participating in this guide's suggested activities, the following language arts standards sponsored by the National Council of Teachers of English and the International Reading Association will be addressed: 1, 2, 3, 6, 9, 11.



About the Program

Transported by Books

Nikki Grimes grew up with words. As a child in New York City, Grimes lived in a number of foster homes, often separated from her sister. In what surely was a lonely time, Grimes "survival tools" were libraries, books, and reading—a magical trio that transported the young writer to places and possibilities. She writes, "Word is magic. Word is all." But with all the books Grimes read as a child, one thing stood out for her: there were no books about children like her—African American children whose parents did not live together but rather in "dark places...through no fault of their own."

Grimes discovered early that poetry and storytelling gave her a voice. She wrote her first verse at the age of six. She believes that, "language is a powerful tool especially when mixed with imagination." Though she writes biographies, novels, and picture books, Grimes is perhaps best known as an accomplished poet. "Poetry makes a beeline for the heart in a way prose cannot." Grimes is also "challenged by the idea of painting a picture or telling a story in as few words as possible."

Real Characters, Real Stories

In 2006, Grimes was named the recipient for the NCTE Excellence in Poetry Award for literary excellence for her total body of work. This award should come as no surprise. In each poem or book she writes, Grimes creates characters that appear real, who confront real life situations, and who express real emotions ranging from joy to anguish. Readers identify with her characters regardless of the color of their skin or where or how they live.

Telling Stories: Nikki Grimes

Friday, November 3, 2006
11 a.m. – 12 p.m. ET
Grades 6-9



Growing up is unsettling—a time of discovery and change, sometimes requiring a facade to hide the true thoughts and feelings of a teenager. In *Bronx Masquerade*, prose and poetry vivify the voices of the individual high school students behind their masks when they share experiences and concerns during their English class' Open Mike Fridays. This novel was awarded the Coretta Scott King Award and named an ALA Best Book for Young Adults.

Dark Sons, juxtaposes the lives of Ishmael and Sam, two teenaged boys whose lives are separated by time and place, but connected in deeper, more meaningful ways. Their parallel stories are presented in free verse to form a story of fear and betrayal, hope and connection.

The life of the first licensed African-American female pilot is presented through the voices of those who knew her in *Talkin' About Bessie: The Story of Aviator Elizabeth Coleman*. A fictional framework presents the speakers' words (in free verse) at the funeral parlor as they mourn Coleman's death.

Paris is another foster child separated from her older sibling. *The Road to Paris* explores what "home" means, what it is like to be in a foster home, separated from a much loved sibling, and how one grows even in difficult circumstances.

Few children grow up without experiencing loss. In the powerful book, *What is Goodbye?*, Grimes takes on the subject of grief. Grimes "wanted to create a tool that would allow children who were grieving to access their feelings, to know that they were normal, and to also understand that it would pass."

Instructional Activities

Behind the Mask

Read *Bronx Masquerade*. Choose several characters. How does their poetry correspond with the prose narration? What distinguishes each character's voice? Does poetry affect the reader differently than prose? How? Why?

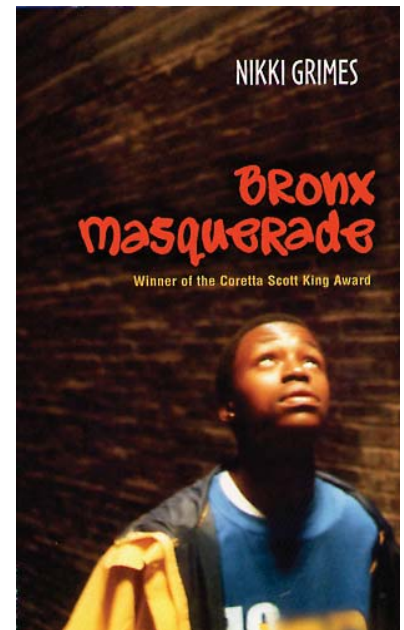
It's Your Turn

Write a poem or a short essay to share at an "open mike" using a topic or theme you have read about in one of Grimes' books. (Consider, for example, writing about the loss of a loved one, how it feels to discover something new about yourself, or what you remember about an older person in your family.)

Time Travel

Find and mark the location of where Ishmael and Sam lived on a world map. Create a timeline for each boy. What events punctuated their lives? What changes have occurred in the region of the world in which Ishmael lived?

Find out more about Elizabeth Coleman and early aviation. Research how aviation has changed since Coleman's time not only scientifically, but also socially. What made Elizabeth Coleman and her contributions so unique and significant?



Resources

Internet

nikkigrimes.com

Print

Grimes, Nikki.

Bronx Masquerade. Dial, 2002;

Dark Sons. Jump at the Sun/Hyperion, 2005;

Jazmin's Notebook. Putman, 1998;

The Road to Paris. Putman, 2006;

Talkin' About Bessie: The Story of Aviator Elizabeth Coleman. (illustrated by E.B. Lewis) Orchard/Scholastic, 2002;

What is Goodbye? (illustrations by Raul Colon) Hyperion, 2004.

