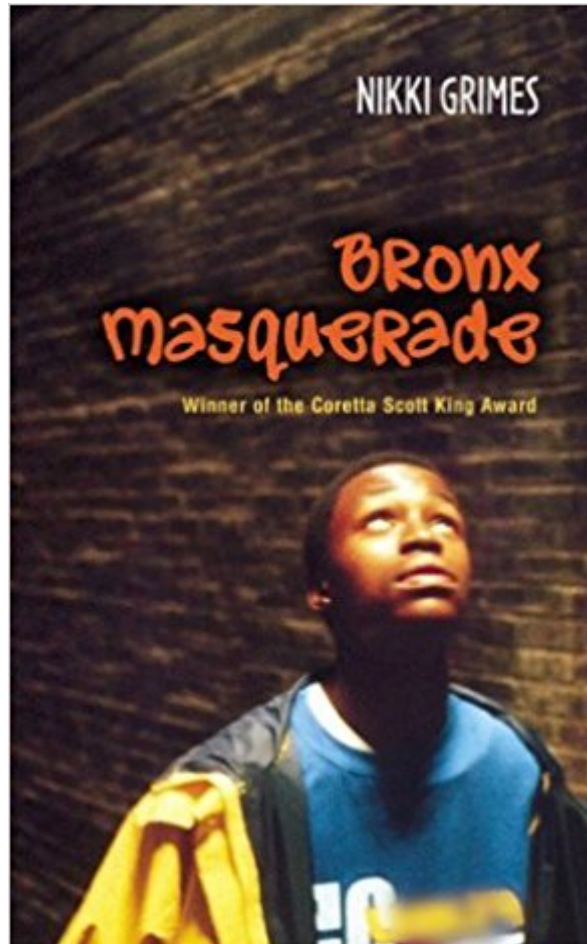




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Bronx Masquerade



Synopsis

A Coretta Scott King Award winner! Using the structure of a poetry slam, Nikki Grimes' award-winning novel is a powerful exploration of self, an homage to spoken-word poetry, and an intriguing look into the life of eighteen urban teens. This anniversary edition--celebrating ten years of this wonderfully evocative work--will feature discussion questions, testimonials from teachers, and an all new introduction from the author. "All of the [students], black, Latino, white, male, and female, talk about the unease and alienation endemic to their ages, and they do it in fresh and appealing voices. Rich and complex." "Kirkus Reviews" "As always, Grimes gives young people exactly what they're looking for--real characters who show them they are not alone." "School Library Journal" "Readers will enjoy the lively, smart voices that talk bravely, about real issues and secret fears. A fantastic choice." "Booklist"

Book Information

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Age Range: 12 and up

Grade Level: 7 and up

Customer Reviews

This is the first book of Nikki Grimes' that I have ever read and I loved it. "Bronx Masquerade" gives teens a whole new perspective on not only the importance and enjoyment of literature and poetry but also the identities of individuals in a multicultural society. The fact that this book is composed of kids' thoughts about themselves and others and the poems they create in response to these thoughts really capture your attention. Each of the 18 students learns something about himself that changes his perspective about his future. A young black teenager who sees no future for himself in

a community where guns and violence have taken over suddenly realizes he has a passion for words. A chubby teenage girl notices that her friends no longer pay attention to the way she looks because they have become so immersed in her beautiful poetry. All of this comes from writing poems and reading them in front of the class on what their teacher calls Open Mike Friday. The poems these students "write" are so creative and really make this book quite unique. I could not put it down because I was so eager to read how these kids were going to write about their lives in their next poem. This book shows kids that they are allowed to be different and they are allowed to be smart. It's ok to want to read and do well in school. I think that any teen that is interested in poetry, or rap for that matter, even in the slightest should read this book. As a future teacher, I see books like these as leading our students in the right direction toward enlightenment. The only thing I think could have been added to this book would be the teacher's perspective on what is taking place in his classroom. I wonder what he would say? This book makes me want to write my own poems!! I am truly inspired.

Nikki Grimes's, "Bronx Masquerade" won the 2002 Coretta Scott King Award without debate. It has inspired numerous poetry slams in high schools across the country. The book is beloved and honored everywhere. I'm saying all this because I have a shameful secret. I didn't love this book like the rest of the world. It was well-written, for the most part, and dealt with issues that are very rarely touched on in ANY books today, let alone books for young adults. And yet I wasn't taken with it. "Bronx Masquerade" follows the individual stories of the students of a poetry class taught in a New York public high school. Each kid in the class begins with his or her own preconceptions about their fellow students. During the course of the book/class, these preconceptions are pounded to dust as the kids write and recite poetry about their problems and dreams. Grimes is adept at making each individual in the class a different and distinct personality. In the end, no one dislikes anyone else and everyone has high hopes, or at least higher hopes, for their future. The book is brave and endearing in what it wants to teach kids today. But there are some real problems with it that make me doubt its future staying power. To make this book realistic and applicable, Ms. Grimes has given the main character of the piece, Tyrone, some very slangy text. Tyrone refers to his "homies". He ends sentences with the phrase, "Word". Now, it's 2004 as I write this, and already I know that these terms are out of date. Any kid reading these phrases is going to doubt the legitimacy of the text. In five years, the book is going to seem dated. And in ten years it's possible the slang will obscure the message and render this book more of a historical piece than anything else. This is a real shame too. There's a lot in this book that the author is trying to convey, and in her opinion slang was the

best way to become "real". The fact that it may doom this book to future obscurity is a shame, but there's nothing to be done about that now. It was a choice made. Another slightly odd writing choice is how the author uses Tyrone. As every single person reads a poem the Tyrone point-of-view says something along the lines of, "Frankly, I didn't know Raul had it in him", or, "So, the daydreamer speaks". Tyrone, tough guy, never really ridicules any of the readers. Not even the ultra-religious Sterling. This strained my suspension of disbelief. The story takes on the feeling of a fantasy when EVERYBODY is accepted by everybody else. Couldn't Tyrone have disliked just one person and not accepted them instantly after reading a poem? Ah well. It's a nice book just the same. Nikki Grimes is a poet in her own right. And each child's writing is unique and distinct from anyone else's. For those interested in poetry written by REAL kids in the Bronx, you might want to consider "I Heard A Scream In the Street: Poetry By Young People In the City", selected by Nancy Larrick. It may have been written in 1970, but it speaks loud and clear to kids living today.

The Bronx Masquerade is a book about 18 students who all face challenges. It tells the tale of a high school of mixed ethnicity and culture. In the beginning, most of the students were bitter and unkind to each other, until an angel of mercy came to their school, also known as Open Mike Fridays. Their teacher, Mr. Ward, began a unit on the Harlem Renaissance. In this unit, all of the students were to write an essay about this period of time. One of the kids were outraged at the mere suggestion. Instead he wrote a poem about the great Renaissance poet Langston Hughes, which was called "Long Live Langston". Mr. Ward allowed the author of the poem, Wesley "Bad Boy" Boon, to read it to the class. After he presented the poem, all the other kids jumped on the bandwagon and began to write poems of their own. Once the students began to hear each other's poems, they started better understanding each other and the problems everyone is faced with. As the book progressed, the poems became more complex and rich with meaning. All of the poems dealt with the inner struggles of the poet. Also, as the book progressed, the students became more tolerant of each other and each other's work. All of a sudden, the students' various talents became more apparent. Raul's paintings, Judianne's sewing, Devon's intelligence, and Raynard's music, are all examples of this. Most of the students' work was displayed on the walls of Mr. Ward's classroom. That way, all of the students could enjoy everyone's abilities. Having read this novel in school, it inspired us to be more tolerant of others. It has shown us that you shouldn't be ashamed of what you can do, just because other people think you should do something else. Overall, we give The Bronx Masquerade an eight out of ten stars. But don't let that discourage you from reading the book.

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