



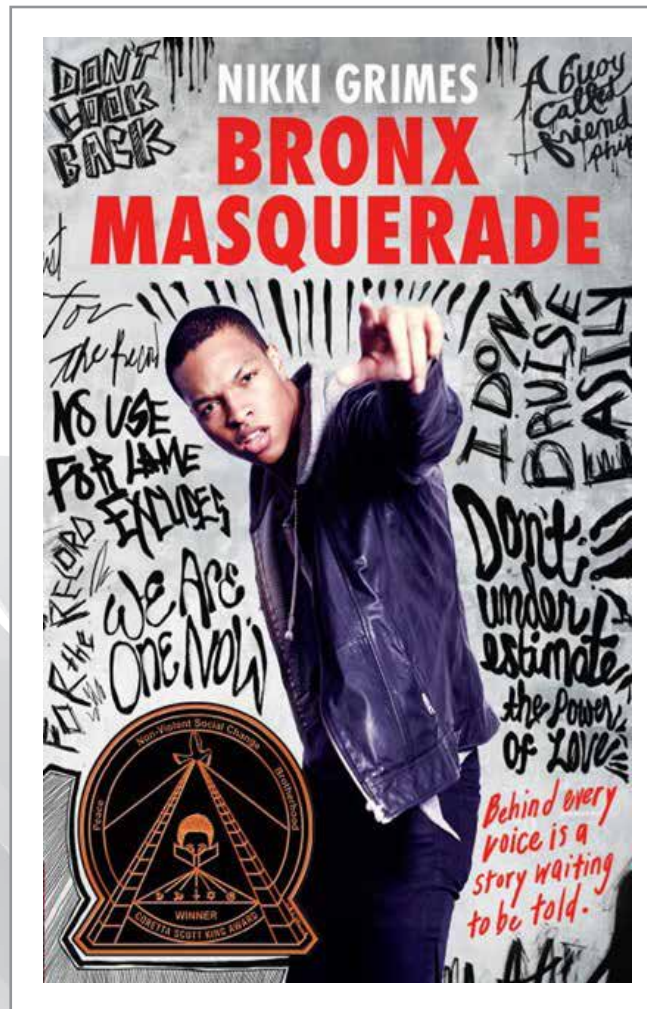
TEACHER GUIDE

GRADES 9-12

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

Bronx Masquerade

Nikki Grimes



READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT

Bronx Masquerade

Nikki Grimes

TEACHER GUIDE

NOTE:

The trade book edition of the novel used to prepare this guide is found in the Novel Units catalog and on the Novel Units website. Using other editions may have varied page references.

Please note: We have assigned Interest Levels based on our knowledge of the themes and ideas of the books included in the Novel Units sets, however, please assess the appropriateness of this novel or trade book for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading with them. You know your students best!

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Skills and Strategies

Thinking

Analysis, compare/contrast,
brainstorming, inferring,
predicting

Comprehension

Cause/effect, summarizing,
conflict/resolution,
decision-making

Literary Elements

Theme, literary devices, style,
point of view, character analysis,
irony, tone, text format/structure,
symbolism

Writing

Journal, poetry, essay,
newspaper article, letter,
report, summary

Vocabulary

Target words, definitions,
application, slang, vernacular

Listening/Speaking

Cipher, dramatization,
multimedia presentation,
poetry reading

Across the Curriculum

History—Harlem Renaissance,
poetry slams; Health—
self-esteem issues; Art—
watercolor painting, collage,
sketch, book cover; Current
Events—modern-day Harlem;
Literature—poetry of Pedro Pietri,
writing of Zora Neale Hurston

Genre: fiction and poetry

Setting: the Bronx, New York; present-day

Themes: identity, friendship, family dynamics, acceptance, life goals, speaking out, dispelling judgments/stereotypes

Conflicts: person vs. self, person vs. person, person vs. society

Tone: realistic, subjective, alternately serious and humorous

Mood: both hopeless and hopeful, dark and light

Point of View: first person, told in 18 students' voices with an additional voice in the Epilogue

Date of First Publication: 2002

Summary

Mr. Ward, a high-school English teacher, is having his students study the Harlem Renaissance. Inspired by a poet, one of Mr. Ward's more reluctant students responds to an essay assignment with a variety of poems. Mr. Ward decides to initiate Open Mike Fridays to allow students to showcase their work. The culturally diverse students unite, encouraged by their ability and desire to express themselves through poetry. With the quiet guidance of Mr. Ward, the students confront their fears and learn about themselves, their peers, their families, and the choices they will face throughout their lives.

About the Author

Nikki Grimes was born and raised in New York City. She began writing at a young age, her repertoire eventually expanding to include books and collections of poetry. Though Grimes writes for a variety of age groups, she is best known for her children's and young-adult fiction, including *Jazmin's Notebook* (1998), *Bronx Masquerade* (2002), *Dark Sons* (2005), and *The Road to Paris* (2006). She has won many awards for her writing, perhaps most notably the Coretta Scott King Award for *Bronx Masquerade*. Aside from novel and poetry writing, Grimes has also written for many well-known magazines, co-produced and hosted a radio show, and sung and danced professionally. Her various career interests have taken her to countries such as China, Sweden, Tanzania, Russia, and Haiti. In her spare time, Grimes enjoys hobbies such as photography, fiber art, and beadwork. She currently resides in Corona, California.

Pages 3–33

In this section, the reader is introduced to several of the book's narrators. There is Wesley, a self-proclaimed "bad boy" with a penchant for self-expression; Tyrone, who thinks school is a waste of time; and Chankara, whose no-nonsense attitude did not save her from date violence. Then there is Raul, whose confidence is often perceived as conceit; Diondra, whose self-proclaimed awkwardness contributes to a low self-esteem; and Devon, who longs to be viewed as more than just an athlete. The reader is also introduced to Mr. Ward through his students' descriptions of him. Open Mike Fridays are instituted, and poetry begins flowing freely in Mr. Ward's classroom.

Vocabulary

cocked
stoking
deferred
wards
discriminate
brutality
fatality
commences
indigestion
piecework
pamper
dutifully
tirade
adrift

Discussion Questions

1. Do you think the nickname "Bad Boy" fits Wesley? Why or why not? *(Answers will vary. Wesley does not seem as rebellious as his nickname implies. Although he seems uninterested in school, he attends regularly and encourages his friend Tyrone to do the same. While he often skips homework assignments, he does write several poems in response to studying the Harlem Renaissance in Mr. Ward's class. This proves that Wesley pays attention in class and is capable of producing quality work. Wesley's nickname seems more about maintaining a certain image.)*
2. Do you think Tyrone's fears are legitimate, or are they simply an excuse to perform poorly in school? *(Answers will vary. Because his father was an accidental victim of a drive-by, Tyrone understands that he is helpless to a certain degree. He most likely reasons that excelling in school and "succeeding" in life would be a waste, since terrible things can befall anyone—even if they are a good person, student, father, etc. Some students may think that Tyrone simply doesn't want to exert any effort in school and uses his fears as an excuse to shirk his academic responsibilities.)*
3. What attitude does Chankara convey, and why? How does she demonstrate this attitude through her actions and words? *(Chankara conveys a bold, no-nonsense, and unapologetic attitude. She refuses to tolerate violence, as her sister has done in the past. She demonstrates this through her reactions to her friends' outrage at her injury, her brashness toward the girls who stare at her in school, her actions toward her date the night before, and her comment that "a woman ain't no punching bag" [p. 14].)*
4. How is it apparent that Raul is motivated to achieve a goal? How would you describe his personality? *(He finishes his lunch quickly so he will have time to paint in Mr. Ward's classroom. He expresses a desire to become a professional painter-poet and often practices painting. He ignores others' negative comments about his dream and stays focused on achieving it. Answers will vary, but some students may interpret Raul's confidence as arrogance. Others may feel Raul is simply aware of his own talents.)*
5. Why does Diondra's opinion of her artistic abilities differ from Raul's opinion of his abilities? *(Though Diondra is a good artist, she doesn't receive any support from her family. Though Raul's brothers ridicule his art, his mother and grandmother seem supportive of his talent. Diondra works in secret and never asks others' opinions of her work, while Raul [who paints at Mr. Ward's desk] likes to display his work and receive feedback from his peers. Unlike Raul, Diondra is extremely self-conscious.)*

6. How does Devon judge his peers, and why is this contradictory? What causes Devon to consider just being himself at school? (*Devon labels Wesley and Tyrone slackers, criticizes Sterling for “giving [people] the benefit of the doubt” [p. 30], points out that Raynard hardly speaks and has few friends, and expects Janelle to point and laugh at him for reading. This is contradictory because Devon stereotypes others while simultaneously loathing people’s stereotype of him as a “jock.” When he realizes that Janelle is not afraid to display her intelligence, Devon contemplates whether he, too, should just be himself around others and stop hiding.*)
7. What are some of Tyrone’s observations after hearing Chankara’s, Raul’s, Diondra’s, and Devon’s poems? What do his observations add to the reader’s understanding of the book? (*Tyrone identifies with Chankara, since his father used to hit his mother. He calls Chankara’s poem “deep” and respects her message. Tyrone also identifies with Raul’s opinion of “confining categories” [i.e., stereotypes] and, ironically, is surprised to realize how well Raul knows English. Tyrone admires Diondra’s courage and progress by reading in front of the class, and he even offers her some words of encouragement. Tyrone still seems more impressed with Devon’s basketball skills than his poetry, but he does give Devon credit as another “word-man on the court” [p. 33]. Answers will vary, but readers probably find Tyrone’s commentary helpful, as it gives informative sidenotes about each poet and the class’s reaction to each poem.*)
8. What judgments/stereotypes does Tyrone perpetuate with his comments? Give examples from the book. (*Tyrone judges Raynard as unintelligent, saying “...like he’s smart enough to know. From what I hear, that boy can’t hardly read” [p. 7]! He also judges the white race by saying “Who they think they kidding? ...’cause a Black man’s got no chance in this country” [p. 8]. After agreeing with Raul that people have to take initiative and avoid being stereotyped, he stereotypes white people again, saying, “...they ain’t got a clue” [p. 23]. He also expresses surprise at Raul’s fluent English. Tyrone makes an unfair assumption about Diondra when he thinks to himself, “She sure spooks easy for somebody so tall” [p. 28]. He also perpetuates the stereotype Devon hates—that Devon is a basketball player and not much else.*)
9. **Prediction:** How will the class become unified through their poetry?

Supplementary Activities

1. Choose one poem from this section, and analyze its style, tone, and figurative language. Then, explain how it enhances the narration of the character who wrote it.
2. Begin the Characterization chart on page 23 of this guide for Mr. Ward, using students’ comments and observations to make inferences about the teacher. Continue to fill in information about Mr. Ward as you read the book.
3. Use the Slang by Association chart on page 24 of this guide to analyze the vernacular used by Mr. Ward’s students throughout the book.
4. Begin the Character Growth chart on page 25 of this guide for Tyrone. Continue to fill in information about Tyrone as you read the book.

Characterization

Directions: In each oval, write an adjective that describes Mr. Ward's personality. Then, fill in each dotted rectangle with a detail about Mr. Ward that illustrates that part of his personality.

