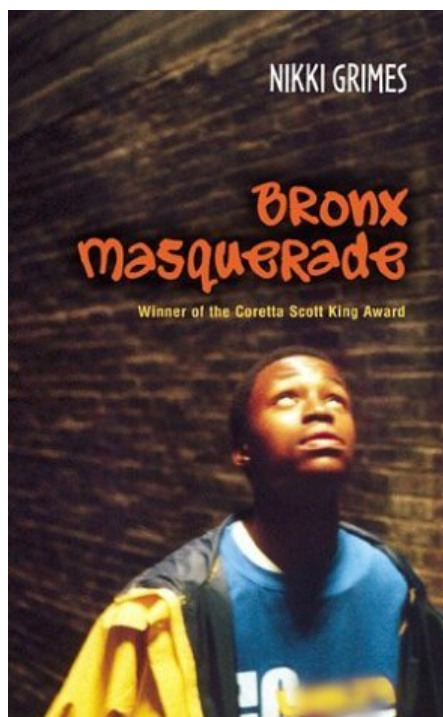




# Bronx Masquerade

*Nikki Grimes*

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## **Bronx Masquerade** Nikki Grimes

When Wesley Boone writes a poem for his high school English class, some of his classmates clamor to read their poems aloud too. Soon they're having weekly poetry sessions and, one by one, the eighteen students are opening up and taking on the risky challenge of self-revelation. There's Lupe Alvarin, desperate to have a baby so she will feel loved. Raynard Patterson, hiding a secret behind his silence. Porscha Johnson, needing an outlet for her anger after her mother OD's. Through the poetry they share and narratives in which they reveal their most intimate thoughts about themselves and one another, their words and lives show what lies beneath the skin, behind the eyes, beyond the masquerade.

## **Bronx Masquerade Details**

Date : Published December 29th 2003 by Speak (first published December 31st 2001)

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Author : Nikki Grimes

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## From Reader Review Bronx Masquerade for online ebook

### Jerrod Drye says

I enjoyed reading Bronx Masquerade it was cool because I learned about new poets at the beginning and I learned you can express yourself in words and not actions.

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### Carrie G says

If I were rating "Bronx Masquerade" from my students' perspectives, they would give it 4 or 5 stars; they LOVED this book! Me... not so much. First of all, there were too many characters from too many different backgrounds with too little character development. I couldn't keep everyone straight because almost every chapter introduced a new character, but the chapters were only 2-3 pages long on average. 2-3 pages is nowhere NEAR enough to really flesh out a character enough that I will remember him/her. And care about them... not hardly. When I've only "lived" with a character for a couple pages, how am I supposed to feel a connection, feel concern or joy or happiness. Also, the plot, or complete lack thereof, left me feeling "blah" about the book. Each character introduced himself or herself in each chapter, and we got a glimpse at what life was like for that character, then the story moved on to a different character with a completely different story, different life, and different set of problems. There was no real plot to speak of. Throughout the book there were some central themes (and these themes really resonated with my students): everyone is different and different is beautiful; everyone being different really makes us all the same; black, white, or brown we all have similar basic fears, hopes, wants, and needs; etc. But the fact that the author felt the need to have her "narrator," Tyrone, TELL us these things point blank made the theme feel forced to me. Let me have my own realizations; let me come up with my own "truths." TELLING me what you want me to take from your book makes me think you were afraid you weren't doing a good enough job of making it clear through the rest of the story, so you felt the need to say it outright; and that turns me off.

So... did I like this book? No. Will I read it again? Only if I have to for another book club. Did my students like this book? Yes, yes, yes! Boys and girls alike responded very positively to this novel - to the poems and the characters. They identified with the characters in the book and the struggles they were having. And that's a big plus, in my eyes.

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### Jenny Rae says

I loved everything about this book; the characters were all so funny yet so sincere and I loved hearing their stories. I wonder if at my school, if we did poetry writing like this, what the result would be. In the book it brought everyone together, which we need in this tiny town of Cartersville. I think the main purpose of this book is to realize that understanding is the most powerful force of them all. When we understand each other, we thrive. When we don't understand each other, we divide. And there's proof to justify that.

Read for school.

5/5 stars for being a book that everyone should read and take to heart. Also it had **amazing poems and wonderful writing!**

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### **Brianna Marie says**

Some of the poetry was good, but everything else was just terrible. The whole scenario seemed incredibly unlikely, and these characters didn't really have a lot of depth.

And please, SHUT UP TYRONE. His comments annoyed me so much. They were written way too simple and he just restated the obvious. It didn't add anything, and just managed to get on my nerves.

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### **Debbie says**

I read some previous reviews and I think they're missing the point.

Yes, there are a dozen characters (or more), and the story spans an entire school year. But there isn't really a big plot, per se, so there's not a lot of need for the reader to keep the characters straight. They reference each other enough that you can figure out, if you're really curious, but I think the poems and vignettes are more to illustrate how high school students have so much bubbling below the surface that others - classmates, teachers, family members - don't see.

There is no big conflict in the novel, aside from perhaps the students seeing each other as individuals, but it's not so much developed along a typical plot line as just repeated with each new student voice. Tyrone's regular contributions to the book after each student's poem is an effective repetend, bringing us back to "home base" as he voices what the other students/characters probably were thinking after the highlighted poet performed his or her poem.

As a purely visceral reading experience - my figuring-out brain turned off - this is a 4.5 stars. Grimes's wordsmithing and honest portrayal of the teenagers' concerns and insecurities is so spot-on it's scary. Some of these characters could be kids sitting in my classroom, they're so familiar. As an adult reader, I understand why others don't like it, and I'd give it 3 stars. So let's average to 4.

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### **Duchessbookworm says**

I loved this book. Poems are not really my thing. But this book is amazing.

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### **Elonna says**

This book is about young kids that live in the Bronx who are all in the same English class, and even though they all come from very different backgrounds they all come together through the poetry they share with each other. Before the poetry days, these were kids who never even talked to each other and were very distant from one another. The kids who would usually have bad grades were acing English class because they were enjoying sharing their pain through poetry. Basically these kids created a bond through something that was a pure accident, and started a tradition through their school.

I really enjoyed this book, because I love poetry and how they would have a poem at the end of each chapter. Each poem helped me to understand each character a bit more, and to understand why they are the way they

are. Also, the book shared what other characters thought about one another in the through out the book and and after hearing each poem every ones ideas about eachother changed. I really enjoyed this book, I wish it was longer so I could keep reading all of the beautiful poetry.

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### **Karen Betancourt says**

I chose 4 stars because it was a book with everyone's different perspectives. I liked how Tyrone said what he thought about the people's poems and how he thought only what he thought true. it could have been better if each person got more than one chapter like Wesley. Most of the characters changed throughout the story and they found who they really are on the inside, and Tyrone said that them doing the Open Mike's and the poems brought them together in a way. Some of the characters stopped being so shy like Janelle and she was proud of herself near the end of the book. I think that the characters felt they were like a family and they were all friends....Even Steve.

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### **Ellie says**

Nikki Grimes is one of my favorite writers and Bronx Masquerade is a delight. A group of teens in a Bronx (probably South Bronx from the sound of it) are studying the Harlem Renaissance in the English class when a student reads his own poem. Soon all the teens are writing and sharing poems about themselves, the struggles, their dreams.

Each chapter is a page or two about one teen, followed by the poem they write. What they discover that as different as they may be--body shape, skin color, jock or beauty queen or self-proclaimed misfit--they have more in common than not. In their poems, they allow themselves to be honest and vulnerable, even the toughest of them. Their feelings of being an outsider, the importance of their dreams, are all very similar.

Grimes creates a group of very different characters with identifiable voices. They may seem to be classic teen roles but Grimes manages to bring them all to life. I especially enjoyed the poems "they" wrote.

A quick but lovely read, filled with the energy of the teens it celebrates.

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### **Mangieto says**

3.5, tirando a 4

Creo que no me habría gustado leerlo, porque hay muchísimos personajes y estamos muy poco tiempo con cada uno de ellos. Pero escuché el audiolibro con la intención de consumir ficción mientras me ocupaba de mis cosas mundanas, y wow. Viene realmente bien escuchar una serie de historias, narradas por diferentes personas (y así los reconoces por su voz), mientras haces una cosa u otra. No pasa nada por pausarlo mil veces, las historias son pequeñas y bastante obvias en su intención. Y escuchar poesía es algo completamente nuevo para mí, quizá me haga fan.

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## Phil Jensen says

Here's the formula:

1. A 2-5 page inner monologue by a character
2. A 1-2 page poem by the character
3. A one paragraph response by Tyrone

Here's how good it is:

1. The inner monologues vary from cringey to pretty good. Grimes does noticeably better on female characters than on male characters, and better on people of color than on whites. For example, here's Tyrone:

School ain't nothin' but a joke. My moms don't want to hear that, but if it weren't for Wesley and my other homeys, I wouldn't even be here, aight? These white folk talking 'bout some future, telling me I need to be planning for some future-like I got one! (p. 7)

If you don't think that's forced and inauthentic, then maybe Walter Dean Myers can help you spot the difference.

Basketball is my thing. I can hoop. Case closed. I'm six four and I got the moves, the eye, and the heart. You can take my game to the bank and wait around for the interest. With me, it's not like playing a game, it's like the only time I'm being for real. (Slam! p. 1)

2. The poems are easily the strongest part of the book. They communicate ideas clearly, use imagery concisely, and evoke emotions through first-person details.

### Bronx Masquerade

I woke up this morning  
exhausted from hiding  
the me of me  
so I stand here confiding  
there's more to Devon  
than jump shot and rim.  
I'm more than tall  
and lengthy of limb.  
I dare you to peep  
behind these eyes,  
discover the poet  
in the tough-guy disguise.  
Don't call me Jump Shot.  
My name is Surprise.

3. Tyrone's reflections are hilariously bad. Tyrone Bittings is a special character. He's a thug with a heart of gold. He learns to overcome thuggishness with sensitivity every 10 pages. Like clockwork. No matter how many life lessons he gets, he is continually surprised that his classmates have feelings. Does he forget easily? Why does he have to relearn every ten pages?

In addition, Tyrone's responses add nothing whatsoever to the book. The reader has just seen an internal monologue and a poem from a character's perspective; no one needs Tyrone to explain it to them a third time. In fact, Tyrone's responses are invariably stupid, semi-caveman versions of what came before, so they feel patronizing. It's as if Nikki Grimes is worried that you missed her point the first two times. CRINGE!

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### **Gina says**

This book reminded me a lot of The Brimstone Journals, with the shifting narrative from kid to kid. It truly does take an incredibly talented author to have so many characters and still give them unique personalities that are memorable but not overblown, and connect them at that.

However, I have to say I liked this one a bit better than Brimstone, partly because it wasn't entirely poetry, which I find easier to follow. Although poetry can give a different kind of understanding - and the excerpts of poems between almost every entry certainly did - prose can allow the author to go more in depth, and I really enjoyed that aspect.

It was just really well done and I enjoyed it a lot.

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### **Matthew says**

"Bronx Masquerade" is a book about a group of teenagers attending high school in the Bronx. Each chapter is told from the perspective of a different student, concluding with a poem that the student wrote. These students in Mr. Ward's English class are about of an evolutionary process in classroom structure; after one student asks to read a poem in front of the class, more students express interest in reading their poems. Eventually, Mr. Ward hosts weekly open mics in his classroom. Hearing their peers express themselves, these students realize that they are not alone in their struggles, and learn about not only their peers but about themselves in the process.

The concept of the book really resonated with me as a prospective teacher. The idea of having students share their own work on a regular basis, becoming so invested and engaged by the process and experience, and then compiling all of the poems written by the students into an anthology for the students to keep is a very inspiring idea. However, the book itself did not resonate with me. I had a different time remembering each character's story, which made the reading process rather choppy and lacking fluidity. The characters and their stories also just seemed too forced, like the author was trying too hard to create this "troubled urban youth finding themselves through expressive and creative means" type of story. I just wasn't able to become invested in the characters, perhaps because none of them were fully developed, as their dialogues were short. Overall, I think the poetry idea in Mr. Ward's classroom was very inspiring and provoked thoughts for my own prospective classroom, but the book itself did not particularly move me.

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## Kate Olson says

I read this one in advance of Grimes' companion title BETWEEN THE LINES (Feb 2018) and am SO happy I did! It is a YA mix of accessible prose and fabulous verse that should be in every high school library if it isn't already. Themes of identity, family, race, and life in the Bronx are covered expertly.

The new cover is a must-buy - all libraries and classrooms should replace their copies ASAP.

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## Brina says

Nikki Grimes is a poet and author who previously won the Coretta Scott King Award for her Jazmin's Notebook. In Bronx Masquerade, Grimes has created a tapestry of cultures taking place in a Harlem high school. As part of a Black History Month challenge, I have read this young adult novel about teenagers creating poetry as a means of dealing with the challenges of everyday life.

Mr Ward, a hip eleventh grade English teacher, has inspired his students to share their poetry as part of their unit on the Harlem Renaissance. Over the course of the novel, we meet eighteen students from all walks of life who have found a safe space in Mr Ward's classroom. Most are African American but there are a few Puerto Rican, Italian, Jewish, and Caucasian students. Many believe that they have few friends apart from their immediate family members. All aspire to attend college and move beyond the teenage angst their face on a daily basis. The poetry they write and share in Mr Ward's class has allowed all the students to reflect on their lives and realize just who they are, and what dreams and aspirations they have.

The poetry Grimes has created for each student is raw and powerful. We meet Devon, a basketball player and honors student who desires to be known as more than a jock. Lupe at first wants to have a baby like her best friend Gloria and sister Christina but would like to be the first one in her family to go to college. Tanisha is the class beauty who designs her own clothes and strives to be recognized for more than her looks. Steve the lone Caucasian student would like a career in the theater and just wants to fit in during his school career. Finally, Wesley and Tyrone are the students who have the most to gain by the poetry slams and encourage both Mr Ward and their classmates to keep sharing their work.

A deserving winner of the Coretta Scott King Award, Grimes' Bronx Masquerade is a poignant book that takes much effort to create eighteen distinct voices. While always searching for quality books for my children, Bronx Masquerade is such a book that shows teenagers in a positive light both in and out of the classroom. Portraying eighteen students who aspire to lofty goals, Nikki Grimes relates that everyone can attain their dreams if they work hard toward them. A beautiful collection of teenaged voices and poetry, Grimes' Bronx Masquerade is a solid 4 stars.

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