

ONE LAST WORD

WISDOM FROM THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE

NIKKI GRIMES

ABOUT THE BOOK

In this emotional and thought-provoking book of poetry, Nikki Grimes finds inspiration from poets of the Harlem Renaissance. Moved by the evocative verse of legendary writers, Grimes has composed gorgeous new poetry with timely themes for today's readers. Past and present come together in classic and newly composed poems that will inspire meaningful reflection.

This extraordinary collection is accompanied by unique, full color artwork from exciting African American illustrators including: Cozbi A. Cabrera, R. Gregory Christie, Pat Cummings, Jan Spivey Gilchrist, Ebony Glenn, E. B. Lewis, Frank Morrison, Brian Pinkney, Christopher Myers, Sean Qualls, James Ransome, Javaka Steptoe, Shadra Strickland, and Elizabeth Zunon.



HC: 978-1-6196-3554-8

★ “Grimes powerfully transposes the original poems’ themes of racial bias, hidden inner selves, beauty, and pride into the here and now.” —*Publishers Weekly*, starred review

★ “This striking, passionate anthology reminds young readers and adult fans of poetry alike that while black life remains ‘no crystal stair,’ there remains reason to hope and a reserve of courage from which to draw.” —*Kirkus Reviews*, starred review

★ “A beautiful new homage to the Harlem Renaissance but also a moving reflection on the African American experience and the resilience of the human spirit: ‘The past is a ladder/that can help you/keep climbing.’” —*School Library Journal*, starred review



COMMON CORE CONNECTIONS

CRAFT AND STRUCTURE:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.4

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of a specific word choice on meaning and tone

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.5

Analyze how a particular sentence, chapter, scene, or stanza fits into the overall structure of a text and contributes to the development of the theme, setting, or plot.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.6

Explain how an author develops the point of view of the narrator or speaker in a text.

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.7

Compare and contrast the experience of reading a story, drama, or poem to listening to or viewing an audio, video, or live version of the text, including contrasting what they “see” and “hear” when reading the text to what they perceive when they listen or watch.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.9

Compare and contrast texts in different forms or genres (e.g., stories and poems; historical novels and fantasy stories) in terms of their approaches to similar themes and topics.

RANGE OF READING AND LEVEL OF TEXT COMPLEXITY:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.10

By the end of the year, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, in the grades 6-8 text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range.

KEY IDEAS AND DETAILS:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.1

Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.2

Determine a theme or central idea of a text and how it is conveyed through particular details; provide a summary of the text distinct from personal opinions or judgments.



VOCABULARY ACQUISITION AND USE:**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.6.4**

Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on grade 6 reading and content, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.6.4.A

Use context (e.g., the overall meaning of a sentence or paragraph; a word's position or function in a sentence) as a clue to the meaning of a word or phrase.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.6.4.B

Use common, grade-appropriate Greek or Latin affixes and roots as clues to the meaning of a word (e.g., audience, auditory, audible).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.6.4.D

Verify the preliminary determination of the meaning of a word or phrase (e.g., by checking the inferred meaning in context or in a dictionary).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.6.5

Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.6.5.A

Interpret figures of speech (e.g., personification) in context.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.6.5.B

Use the relationship between particular words (e.g., cause/effect, part/whole, item/category) to better understand each of the words.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.6.5.C

Distinguish among the connotations (associations) of words with similar denotations (definitions) (e.g., stingy, scrimping, economical, un wasteful, thrifty).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.6.6

Acquire and use accurately grade-appropriate general academic and domain-specific words and phrases; gather vocabulary knowledge when considering a word or phrase important to comprehension or expression.

Tracie Vaughn, author and teacher, created this guide.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

PREFACE

Describe the author's early interactions with poetry, especially that of the Harlem Renaissance. What does she hope to accomplish with this book?

After reading the section on the Harlem Renaissance (or use it to take notes during reading) fill out the following graphic organizer on the information:

Key Players:	
Location (and why there):	
Types of contributions to the movement:	
Time Period:	
Why it's important to study:	

POETRY FORM

What is unique about the form of this book? Why do you think Grimes decided to use the Golden Shovel? How does it connect her to the poets she so admired?



PART 1: EMERGENCY MEASURES

“EMERGENCY MEASURES” BY NIKKI GRIMES

1. What is the author talking about when she says that the news “...spells out/our worth in the world”?
2. Do you, like the narrator, feel that there is both “fear and hate” outside your door? Do you think all Americans feel this way or not? Why?
3. Define the words hearsay (line 7) and disprove (line 9) by using the context in which they appear. If you're uncertain, check to denotation in a dictionary or reliable online source.

“STORM ENDING” BY JEAN TOOMER

1. What is Toomer describing in the poem? Why do you think it might be important?
2. Explain the simile in the 2nd to last line: “Dripping rain like golden honey—“ How is rain like honey?

“TRUTH” BY NIKKI GRIMES

1. How do you know (or can you know) whether a day can be made of ...”garish or gorgeously disguised memories-to-be”? Does our attitude about a day determine how it turns out or not? What makes you think so or not?
2. What is our job, according to Grimes? Do you follow this advice?

“LIFE AND DEATH” BY CLARA ANN THOMPSON

1. Thompson writes this poem from the point of view of what event or occasion? Why do you think she chose it?
2. Why does she urge the reader “not to envy or weep” the loss?
3. Define the following vocabulary from the poem in your own words: strife, quest, relinquish, crucial, laurel, envy, trodden, wrought

“CRUCIBLE OF CHAMPIONS” BY NIKKI GRIMES

1. Define the desire of each speaker in this poem. Then, decide which ones follow Grime's advice from “Truth?”
2. Whose story resonates most with your own? Do you think everyone's life holds some type of strife or not? Be prepared to defend your answer.



“FOR A POET” BY COUNTEE CULLEN

1. Why do you think the narrator puts his dream in a box of gold? What does that tell you about his dreams?
2. Do you think the speaker's dreams have a chance of being brought to life or not? Defend your answer with evidence (a key quote) directly from the poem.

“A SAFE PLACE” BY NIKKI GRIMES

1. Explain the meaning of the last two lines.
2. Where do you believe dreams should be stored—in public or private? What benefits and cons are there to either choice?
3. Why does she urge the reader “not to envy or weep” the loss?
4. Define the following vocabulary from the poem in your own words: strife, quest, relinquish, crucial, laurel, envy, trodden, wrought

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PART II: CALLING DREAMS

“CALLING DREAMS” BY GEORGIA DOUGLAS JOHNSON

1. Given the definitions above, explain, in your own words, what the first stanza means.
2. Reread the first two lines. How would you describe the author's tone (attitude/stance) in these lines? What does it reveal about her?
3. Should we ask for our dreams to come true or should we demand them? Why?

Vocabulary:

contraband: illicit, illegal
goods

impede: prevent

countermand: reverse

“THE SCULPTOR” BY NIKKI GRIMES

1. What connection or application can you make to your own life with the line from the poem “...hard work is the clay dream/are molded from.”
2. Would the narrator's writers of these two poems (“Calling Dreams” and “The Sculptor”) be friends? Why do you think so or not? Be prepared to defend your answer with examples from each poem.

“WE WEAR THE MASK” BY PAUL LAURENCE DUNBAR

1. Explain how everyone wears a mask from time to time, and often in public.
2. Historically, what masks would the poet Dunbar probably had to wear? Do the masks change over time or not? How?
3. Define the following words from the poem: guile, myriad, vile

“JABARI UNMASKED” BY NIKKI GRIMES

1. Create a list of advice for young people inspired by this poem.
2. Discuss how we might be able to stop ignoring the subtleties of emotions of other people? What techniques or acts might improve one's snap judgements toward others?



“MOTHER TO SON” BY LANGSTON HUGHES

1. Why do you think the author had the speaker/narrator’s words sound like everyday speech?
2. This is an example of an extended metaphor (a comparison made across several lines of a poem). What is the narrator comparing life to for her son? Why?
3. What is her advice to her son? Why do you think she feels the need to offer it?

“LESSONS” BY NIKKI GRIMES

1. What inference can you draw about Grimes’ chose to write a stanza to match each line of the Hughes poem?
2. What’s the crystal symbol in this poem? How does that appeal to a modern audience?
3. Even when things are at their very worst, what does the narrator remind her son to remember?
4. Compare and contrast the advice given by the two mothers in these poems.

“AS THE EAGLE SOARS” BY JEAN TOOMER

1. Define the following words before reading/analyzing the poem: dislocated, conformative, formative, egotism
2. Make a connection to your own life to the fifth line of the poem.
3. What is sacred to you? Do you think the same (or similar) things are sacred to others? Why or why not?

“NO HAMSTERS HERE” BY NIKKI GRIMES

1. What does “exercise in futility” mean? Do you ever participate in one? Why?
2. Define exhibition as it’s used in the last line. Then, explain what the last line means in this poem to you.

AN EXCERPT FROM “TO USWARD” BY GWENDOLYN BENNETT

1. Define the words you don’t know. Then reread the poem with the synonyms in place.
2. Translate the poem into at least three sentences of good advice to live by for each of us.



“IN SEARCH OF A SUPERPOWER” BY NIKKI GRIMES

1. Sort the images and ideas from the poem into these two categories: those to admire/emulate and those to disdain/avoid. Be prepared to defend your sort!
2. Which stanza speaks to you most as a person? Why? What connections do you make to your own life?

“HOPE” BY GEORGIA DOUGLAS JOHNSON

1. Who, do you think, is the intended audience of this poem? Which line makes you think so?
2. How would you describe the mood of this poem? What words create this mood for you, the reader?
3. Explain the significance of the last line.

“ON BULLY PATROL” BY NIKKI GRIMES

1. What poetic element is represented in the line: “sorrow/clings to her like skin.” Why do you think the author chose to use this element over others?
2. “On Bully Patrol” is a narrative poem told through what speaker’s eyes? What are her dreams? How would you characterize her relationship with her family?
3. Which line means the most to you? Why?

“THE NEGRO SPEAKS OF RIVERS” BY LANGSTON HUGHES

1. Why does the writer call out to the rivers across great swaths of time and place? What is he trying to say to the reader with this choice?
2. What great natural features do you live near? How are they a part of your everyday life?
3. What could be symbolic of these great rivers? Explain the meaning of the final line of the poem.

“DAVID’S OLD SOUL” BY NIKKI GRIMES

1. What does it mean to be an “old soul?” Would you consider yourself one or not? Why?
2. Why must David stand tall like a tree? What must you stand tall for in your own life?



PART III: TO A DARK GIRL

“TO A DARK GIRL” BY GWENDOLYN BENNETT

1. What two ideas are being contrasted in this second stanza? Why do you think the author is using the opposite images?
2. The writer urges the reader to “Forget that you once were slave,” Do you agree that this is an important choice to gain confidence and move forward with her life?
3. What does she mean when she says, “And let your full lips laugh at Fate!”

“THROUGH THE EYES OF AN ARTIST” BY NIKKI GRIMES

1. Distill the message by the painter, dancer, and writer into one sentence for each.
2. Which artist’s message speaks most to you? Why?
3. How do the arts help everyone find their voice?

“COMMON DUST” BY GEORGIA DOUGLAS JOHNSON

1. Who might the author be referring to in the last two lines of the third stanza? What makes you think so?
2. What does the author remind readers is true about death?
3. How do we minimize the differences in opportunities in life when, in the end, we are made of the same substances in death?

“A DARK DATE FOR JOSH” BY NIKKI GRIMES

1. Describe the narrator’s conflict in this poem. How does it resolve?
2. Josh’s response to his mom is that “It’s not like that anymore. Not here.” Would this statement hold true for your school? Your town?
3. What is the source of his mother’s reticence? How is it overcome?



“NO IMAGES” BY WARING CUNEY

1. Do you think it is true of all women, regardless of culture that “she does not know/Her beauty”?
2. How do we raise health conscious but not body-conscious young women?
3. How does the media impact the way young people view their bodies and the choices they make with them?

“BLURRED BEAUTY” BY NIKKI GRIMES

1. What poetic elements does Grime use to bring this crush to life?
2. What advice would you give to the narrator of this poem?

“THE MINOR KEY” BY CLARA ANN THOMPSON

1. What does the narrator lament about life?
2. How do we know the faith of the speaker is important? Find a key quote to support your assertion.
3. What is the theme of the poem?

“COMMON DENOMINATOR” BY NIKKI GRIMES

1. What does the author mean when she states: “love, envy fear—we all hear their echo”?
2. Grimes states, “Peel us to the core, we’re indistinguishable.” So, brainstorm everything all people have in common regardless of race, country or faith.

“I LEAVE THE GLORY DAYS” BY NIKKI GRIMES

1. Explain the lines: “The past is a ladder/that can help you/keep climbing.”
2. How does the narrator feel after exploring her cultural history and reading the words of those who went before? Whose words can shore up your own courage and tenacity?



PARAPHRASING

Paraphrasing is a key skill for academic life. Learning how to master it is essential for comprehension, research, and writing.

TIPS ON PARAPHRASING:

1. Take note/make an outline: don't attempt to rewrite complete sentences in your own words. Plagiarism, even unintentional, is likely to happen.
2. Use the least amount of words and make them your own
3. Summarize
4. Look away from the original
5. Think about what might end up on a quiz
6. Use symbols and other shorthand whenever possible
7. Think bullets points, not paragraphs

This is an example paraphrase from the "Poet Biographies" included in the back:

Gwendolyn Bennett: Harlem
Renaissance poet (1902-1981)
Highly educated: Columbia University,
Pratt Institute, Sorbonne
Taught: Howard University
Assistant Editor of magazine:
Opportunity
Column: "The Ebony Flute"
Published: in many magazines, journals,
and anthologies
Promoted: Langston Hughes & other
H.R. poets
Director: Harlem Community Art
Center (1939-1944)



Now, you practice this skill by filling out the graphic organizer below:

Countee Cullen	(William) Waring Cuney	Paul Laurence Dunbar

Compare your paraphrases to a partner's work, then continue with these biographies:

Langston Hughes	Georgia Douglas Johnson	Clara Ann Thompson	Jean Toomer

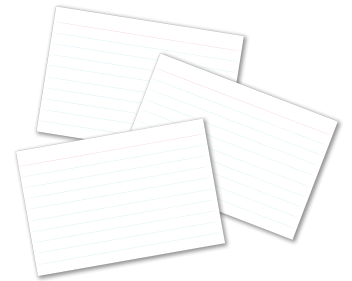


WRITING

Find a piece of writing that greatly inspires you and then write a golden shovel poem inspired by it. Remember to cite the original source. Review the form and how to accomplish it by rereading the “Poetry Form” section of the book first.

VOCABULARY

The poems are rich in rigorous words that will help you build an extensive vocabulary. Choose ten words to make your own! For each word put the following on an index card: word, definition, synonyms, antonyms, a picture to help you remember the definition, and a sentence that shows you understand it in context.

**ART**

Inspired by your favorite poem in the book, create an original piece of art inspired by it. Then, in an artist's statement, explain your choice of form, color, shape, size, texture and any figures included.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

NIKKI GRIMES is a *New York Times* bestselling author and recipient of the 2006 NCTE Award for Excellence in Poetry for Children. Her distinguished works include ALA Notable book *What is Goodbye?*, Coretta Scott King Award winner *Bronx Masquerade*, and Coretta Scott King Author Honor books *Jazmin's Notebook*, *Talkin' About Bessie*, *Dark Sons*, *The Road to Paris*, and *Words with Wings*. She lives in Corona, California.

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