

READER/DISCUSSION GUIDE

GARVEY IN THE DARK

Written by Nikki Grimes

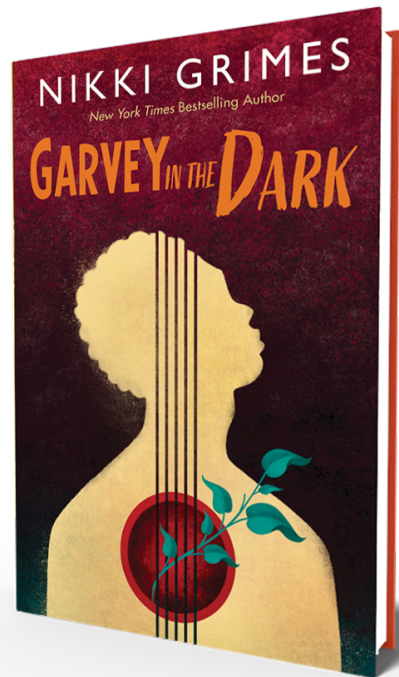
\$17.99 US / \$23.99 CAN

ISBN 978-1-63592-526-5 hc

ISBN 978-1-63592-545-6 eBook

Grades: 3–7

Ages: 8–12



ABOUT THE BOOK

Capturing the shock and impact of the COVID-19 pandemic through the eyes of the beloved character Garvey, Nikki Grimes’s newest novel in verse shows readers how to find hope in difficult times.

Garvey’s finally happy—he’s feeling close to his father through their shared love of music, bullies are no longer tormenting him, and his best friends Manny and Joe are by his side. But when the schools, stores, and restaurants close because people are getting sick, Garvey’s improved life goes into lockdown as well. And when Garvey’s father gets sick, Garvey must find a way to use his newfound musical skills to bring hope to both his father and himself. Moving, powerful, and beautifully told, this remarkable novel shows readers how even small acts have large reverberations, how every person can make a difference in this world, and how—even in the most difficult times—there are ways to reach for hope and healing.

Nikki Grimes is a *New York Times* bestselling author who has won the ALAN Award for outstanding contributions to young adult literature, the Children’s Literature Legacy Award, the Virginia Hamilton Award for Lifetime Achievement, and NCTE Award for Excellence in Poetry for Children. She has also received several ALSC Notables, a

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Coretta Scott King Author Award, Coretta Scott King Author Honors, Boston Globe–Horn Book Honors, a Printz Honor, and a Sibert Honor.

PRAISE FOR *GARVEY IN THE DARK*

“*Garvey in the Dark* is more than a beautifully crafted novel in verse. It’s a story that faces news headlines and captures the wild emotional roller coaster of the COVID-19 pandemic with honesty and courage. A must-read for young people who lived through the early days of the outbreak as well as those who will be curious about it in years to come.” —Kate Messner, *New York Times* bestselling author

“Few things could induce me to relive the first years of the pandemic; the invitation to read a spectacular book by Nikki Grimes is one of them. With deceptive simplicity, Grimes captures characters and emotions by wielding a poetic form—the tanka—with superb and superhuman strength, and the result is a beautiful and brilliant book about how faith, grace, and familial love can help us triumph over adversity...(t)his sequel is as much a triumph as *Garvey’s Choice*—a stunning example of how much can be accomplished with few words in the hands of a masterful poet.” —Padma Venkatraman, Walter Award-winning author of *The Bridge Home*

“With poignant clarity and in elegant verse, Grimes calls up the confusion, hope, and fear of the beginning of the pandemic . . . this offers a compelling chance to reflect on the discomfort of living through what will surely become fraught history.”
—*The Bulletin of the Center for Children’s Books*

“Grimes conveys many of the elements specific to Black life in 2020, focusing on how families adapted to Covid, not knowing whether a lasting resolution would arrive. [T]his story . . . tackles themes of family, friendship, grief, and coping with injustice and will inspire dialogue about this chaotic period as well as a sense of hope and healing. A way for young people to reflect on a troubled time.” —*Kirkus Reviews*

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ACTIVITIES AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Garvey's Choice and Garvey in the Dark

Although *Garvey in the Dark* stands on its own and doesn't require a prior reading of *Garvey's Choice*, it may be meaningful to discuss connections between the books, if students have read both. In particular, they may enjoy discussing the different characters that appear in both books and the relationships between the characters and how they evolve, especially: Garvey, Dad, Mom, Angela/Angie (Garvey's big sister), Joe and Emmanuel/Manny (Garvey's friends).

Timeline of the Pandemic

Grimes opens the book with "Garvey's California COVID-19 Timeline 2020," a chronological listing of major events from January 25, 2020 through July 17, 2020. As you read through this together, encourage students to share their memories of how things unfolded for them and their families during this timeframe. How did their families handle the gradual change in school, work, shopping, and daily life? What did they find most challenging? Most surprising?

COVID-19

The disease of COVID-19 is at the center of this story as Garvey, his family, his friends, his church, and his community cope with this disease and its effects. For some students, it may be cathartic to talk about how this illness affected their family circle, for others it may be too painful. Handle this with kindness and sensitivity. Work with students to identify poems in the book that describe characters coping with the illness such as "FaceTime" (p. 100), "Nowhere to Hide" (p. 122) and "Off-Limits" (p. 117). It may also be helpful to lead a discussion on the science behind identifying this illness and the efforts to treat it and find a vaccine to protect people against it. What health and safety protocols that we learned about during the pandemic does Grimes incorporate within the poems?

School During the Pandemic

All students experienced how school continued during the pandemic although it took very different forms. Use some of the poems in this book to jumpstart a discussion of how students learned to cope with these changes, as well as what

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specific challenges they encountered. For example, “Compared to What” (p. 47) and “One Bright Note” (p. 79) raise the question of children who depend on meals at school; “Take a Break, Mom” (p. 49) and “Get Packing” (pp. 61–62) look at how teachers had to learn quickly how to teach online and bring their teaching materials home from school; and “First Day Back to School, Sort Of” (p. 69) depicts that first day in an online class; and “Pre-algebra” (p. 83) conveys some of the frustrations of online learning. Use these (and other poems) to jumpstart a discussion of the “highs” and “lows” of online learning during the pandemic.

Black Lives Matter

Another painful topic that emerged during the pandemic was the systemic racism that exists in the United States, particularly apparent to our society at large with the murder of George Floyd. Several poems address this event, its impact, and the aftermath, particularly “Tic, Tic, Tic” (p. 129), “Going Numb” (p. 130), “Floyd’s Final Breath” (p. 131), and “After” (p. 132). Again, handle this topic with openness and sensitivity and encourage students to listen to one another as you open the floor to discussion. Challenge them to find poems in *Garvey in the Dark* that address the issue of racism as a way to talk about these events, as well as their responses and experiences. What do we learn about racism through the poems in this book? As a Black child, how does this affect Garvey and his family? What can we do individually and collectively to be more actively anti-racist?

Pandemic Outlets

During the pandemic everyone also learned how to seek out meaningful activities that provided recreation or release. Like Garvey, many students had to find new outlets for fun when they could no longer see friends in person, gather to socialize during lunch, sing in the school choir, play competitive sports, attend in-person church services, etc. Many of the poems in *Garvey in the Dark* address this frustration, but also show how Garvey (and Angie) became more flexible and resourceful in finding fun things to do like reading books together, watching movies online, playing basketball or hiking outdoors, or even playing music and singing (to help his dad recover). Identify poem examples and invite students to share how they coped with isolation, boredom, or loneliness during the pandemic. Which of these activities have they continued to enjoy?

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Doing Good

After Manny's grandma returns from the hospital and Garvey's dad is recovering from COVID, Garvey has the idea of holding an outdoor concert at the hospital to lift the spirits of the doctors, nurses, and patients still dealing with COVID there. Talk with students about why he chose to do that and what was involved in making that happen. How can young people make a difference in their communities even during difficult circumstances? What kind of a project could your students undertake to make a difference in your own community? Work together to research options and make a plan.

Discussion Questions

As students read or listen to *Garvey in the Dark*, invite them to consider the characters, relationships, issues, and surprises in the story. Ask open-ended questions that motivate them to dig deep and challenge them to find poems or passages that support their opinions or analysis. Possible discussion questions include:

1. How do Garvey, Joe, and Manny keep their friendship going through the pandemic?
2. How does Garvey's relationship with his sister, Angie, grow and change during the course of this story?
3. What is *The Invisible Beast*?
4. What does the lockdown mean for Garvey and his family?
5. How does Garvey help his father recover from COVID?
6. How does Garvey's love of music get him through the pandemic, despite the restrictions and isolation?
7. What is the difference between a riot and a protest? Why is this important in this story?
8. How did young people make a difference during the pandemic (in this story)?
9. In this story, which is worse: racism or COVID-19? Why?
10. Why do you think this book is entitled *Garvey in the Dark*?

Tanka Poetry

The entire text of *Garvey in the Dark* is written in tanka poems and Grimes provides a helpful note about this poetic form in the back matter on page 167. Invite students to talk about the form and how it impacts their reading of the novel. Do they have any favorite poems? For example, there are several pages that feature a

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single, tanka poem (“After” (p. 132) and “Stroll” (p. 162). Why might the poet make that choice? After some discussion about the form, the author’s note, and some favorite example poems, invite students to try writing their own tankas—perhaps continuing Garvey’s story or taking the point of view of one of the other characters in the book or on a topic of their own choosing.

Guide written by Sylvia Vardell