

## Teacher's Guide

### *Dark Sons*

written by Nikki Grimes

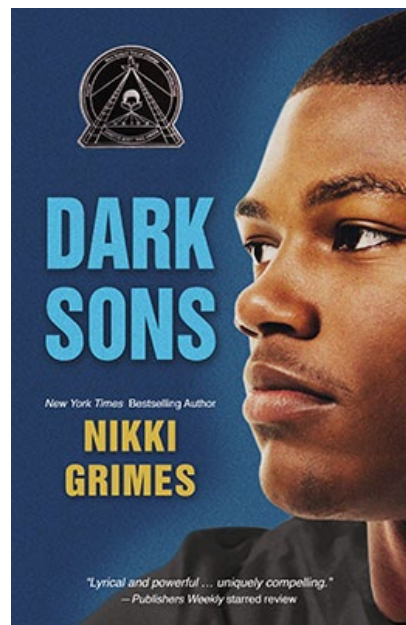
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#### About the Book

*Dark Sons* volleys between the stories of the biblical Ishmael, (the surrogate son to Sarah) and Sam, a modern-day son whose father betrays his mother. Told in stunning verse, Grimes explores the themes of fatherhood, faith, and forgiveness.

#### About the author

*Dark Sons* is the 31st trade book for the distinguished author, Nikki Grimes. Ms. Grimes received the 2003 Coretta Scott King Award for her novel *Bronx Masquerade*, as well as a 2003 Coretta Scott King Author Honor for her picture book *Talkin' about Bessie: The story of Aviator Elizabeth Coleman*.



#### Author interview

1. What type of research did you have to do to bring Ishmael and Sam's story to life?
1. Which character's story from was most difficult to write? Why?
2. How did you make the decision to tell this story in verse rather than traditional prose or some other genre?
3. Are there other stories in the Bible you would like to explore in this manner? If so, what are they?
4. What advice would you give to young people who face similar relationships to that of Sam or Ishmael with one or both of their parents?
5. Can you share a bit about your process for writing this type of poetry? How do you sculpt these narrative poems?
6. What advice do you have for young writers?

#### About the guide

This guide includes discussion questions and projects intended to extend the use of the novel into classrooms, book clubs, and literature circles. It should promote discussion on the themes of the novel including faith, betrayal, family relationships and forgiveness.

## Discussion Guide:

1. Were you surprised to learn the story of Ishmael's surrogate birth from biblical times? How did this complicated relationship with Sarah and Hagar shape Ishmael's personality? What do you think it would be like to be raised under these circumstances? Which of these three characters- Sarah, Hagar or Ishmael did you feel most connected to? Why?
2. Why do you think the author chose to tell this story in poems rather than prose? What does it add to the story? What poetic elements did you find throughout? How would this story be different if it was written as a play? A script? In a series of letters?
3. Discuss the relationships both Sam and Ishmael have with their biological fathers. What do they have in common? What is missing? Which father would you prefer? Why? Both learn to depend on their Father in Heaven. How do you think their stories would be different if they hadn't?
4. Betrayal is a key element in the novel. Sam's father leaves his family for another woman, Abraham denies Sarah is his wife, and he also allows Hagar and Ishmael to leave, unprotected. Are there levels of betrayal like people allow for lying (white lies, for example) or is it a one-size-fits all proposition? Can you say whose betrayal is worse? And if you can, whose is it?
5. Although their lives occur thousands of miles and years apart there are elements that remain constant across cultures and generations. What are they? What do these young men both have in common? What is important about their differences?
6. Faith is an important matter in all these character's lives. Even through their adversity rarely do they question their faith. Why, do you think, do some people have such strong belief systems while others question theirs? How does one develop a strong faith in whatever their religion may be? How is faith expressed?
7. Ishmael says, "Sometimes I think/all I'm made of/ is anger/ with a dash of jealousy/ thrown in for taste." (p. 148) Do you blame him? How would you feel if this were your life? What might you have done?
8. Abraham and Sarah await the son of their own marriage. His destiny is to make his father's name great. Is destiny something you are born with or make? Who decides? Do you believe in destiny? Why or why not?
9. Sam relies on his youth group and church as he struggles with the changes in his family. Do you have a similar group of people you could turn to when things become difficult? How would the world be different if everyone did?
10. In the end, both sons manage to move on with their lives. How do you think what has happened to them will change their futures? What kind of man will each become? What type of father do you think they might one day be? Will they repeat the mistakes of their own fathers or rise above them? What makes you think this?

## Projects:

1. Create a Venn diagram comparing Sam and Ishmael.
2. Write a scene of dialogue between Sam and Ishmael. What might they say to each other?
3. Write a letter from Sam or Ishmael to their biological fathers. Show your knowledge of the complete text.
4. Create two pieces of art, one for Ishmael, the other for Sam. Explain your piece in a brief paragraph describing why you chose the media, color, and figures you created.