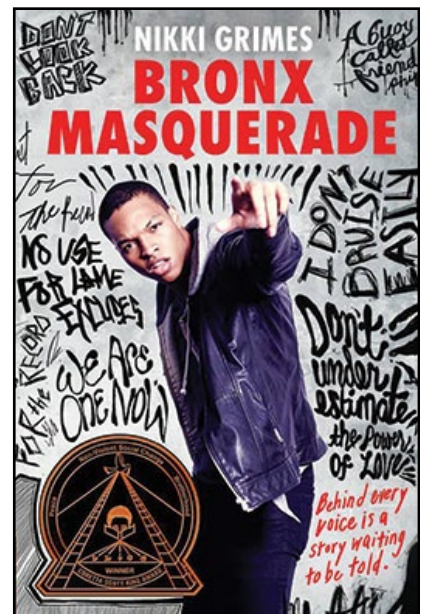


**Coretta Scott King Award 2002**  
**Author Award Acceptance Speech**

*Bronx Masquerade*

written by Nikki Grimes

Dial Books for Young Readers, 2002



This morning, I feel a little bit like Halle Berry receiving the Oscar. It took me so long to get here, I just want to take my time! But I have promised to be brief, and so I will.

In Matthew 17, verse 20, it says, "If you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,'" and it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you."

Sometimes my faith in the possibility of this day was no bigger than a mustard seed. But, thank God, that's all that was required!

Having the opportunity to address this august body twice in the same year, on the same day, is an honor even a prolific poet such as myself is hard-pressed to put into words.

Earlier, I shared a little of the story behind *Talkin' About Bessie*. Now, it is my joy to share a bit of my journey in writing *Bronx Masquerade*.

Several years ago, I got the idea to write a collection of monologues and poems about a classroom of high school students, over the course of a year. I sketched thirty-three possible characters and the issues each would contend with. When I was done, I shoved the sketches into a file folder and put them away. I was clear on the idea for the novel, but I realized I didn't yet possess the skills for its execution. And so, I waited and, in the interim, I wrote several new poetry collections and, eventually, slogged my way through the novel, *Jazmin's Notebook*. Working on *Jazmin* afforded me a valuable opportunity to forge a solid working relationship with Editor Toby Sherry. We fought occasionally, but I learned to respect her deft analytical skills, and to appreciate her creative input. Both would prove critical in the development of *Bronx Masquerade*, the most challenging work I had ever attempted. It felt like a high-wire act, and Toby was my net!

Something of equal importance happened between concept and creation. I visited a high school in California where dear friend and gifted teacher, Drew Ward, inspired his students to share their poetry with one another in what became a regular series of open-mike readings. Word of these readings spread throughout the school, and soon students in other classes were scoring passes to visit Mr. Ward's room, to watch and participate in the goings-on. I was fortunate enough to witness this phenomenon up close. Like most experiences in my life, I filed this one away for later use.

Another year and a half passed before I sat down to write *Bronx Masquerade*. Then, after I'd written the poems and monologues that made up my first draft, I remembered that school and the poetry movement that was in full swing there, and realized it was the perfect skeleton upon which to hang my poems and monologues. And with that memory, the marriage of fact and fiction was complete.

As I tour the country speaking to teachers and librarians, I love to talk about the power of poetry. *Bronx Masquerade* allowed me to display that power — the power poetry has to shape lives, to create community, and to underscore the vital truth that the most important common denominator in our universe is the human heart.

I hope readers come away from this book inspired to explore the world of poetry, and poetry performance, on their own. For my part, I'll continue striving to craft books that meet young readers where they are, books that encourage them to write their own tomorrows, books that are worthy of the award I'm honored to accept today.

I want to thank Dial Books and Penguin Putnam for supporting this book with such enthusiasm; Cecile Goyette for flap copy to die for; Elizabeth Harding of Curtis Brown, my personal cheerleader. You are not only my agent, but my friend. Thanks to my arts group, Montage, who gave me valuable feedback while the manuscript was in progress, and to Bryan Green, the savvy and articulate teen who read the manuscript at an early stage. Thanks to my sister, Carol, who believed more than I did that I would stand here someday.

Finally, I thank the CSK committee for this embarrassment of riches. And I thank God for his faithfulness.