

Teacher's Guide

Oh, Brother

written by Nikki Grimes
illustrated by Mike Benny
Amistad, 2007

About the Book:

It's bad enough that Xavier's new stepbrother, Chris, has moved into Xavier's room, but now it looks like he's also trying to steal Mami by being the perfect kid. Chris's "Mr. Perfect" act may fool grown-ups, but Xavier can see straight through it. He promises himself that he'll never become real brothers with such a fake. In twenty powerful poems, two strangers learn to become brothers. Nikki Grimes captures the struggles – and eventual sweetness – of bringing together a family.

About the Author:

Nikki Grimes began writing at the age of six. Her many award-winning titles include the picture books *Talkin' About Bessie: The Story of Aviator Elizabeth Coleman*, which won the Coretta Scott King Illustrator Award and a Coretta Scott King Author Honor. She also wrote *Bronx Masquerade*, *Road to Paris*, *Jazmin's Notebook* and *Dark Sons*. She lives in Corona, California.

About the Illustrator:

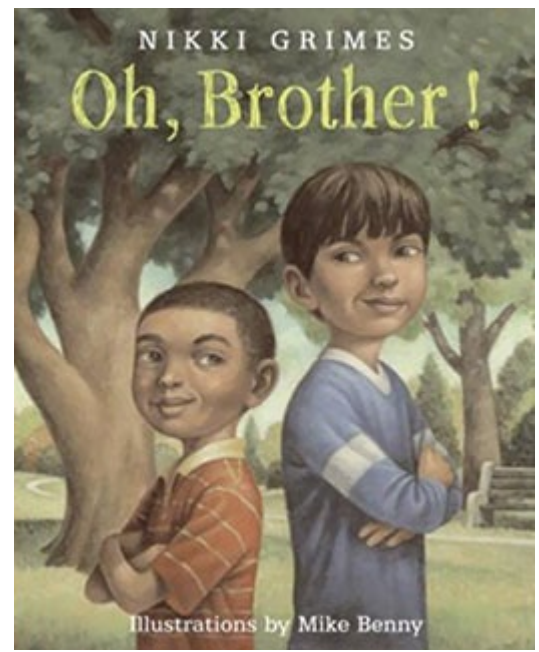
Mike Benny is the recipient of two Gold Medals from the Society of Illustrators. His first children's book was *America's White Table* by Margot Raven Theis. His illustrations have also appeared in well-known publications such as *Time*, *GQ*, *The New Yorker*, and *Sports Illustrated*. He lives in Austin, Texas, with his wife, daughter, and son.

Pre-Reading:

What do you think the title means? What is great about having a sibling? What is not so great? Is it easier, do you think, to get along with siblings you've known your whole life or ones you acquire later by adoption or marriage? What makes you think so?

Questions to Consider:

1. How has Xavier's life suddenly changed? What's the biggest change you ever faced? Is change easy or difficult?
2. Would it be hard to share your mom or dad with a new kid? Would you like to have a new brother or sister in your house? What if you had to share your room and toys?
3. Why does Xavier feel like he needs to turn into a mouse? Have you ever been asked to share when you weren't prepared to? How did it work out?



4. Which poems are in haiku? Why do you think Ms. Grimes decided to use this form? What other poetic elements does she use? What is your favorite form of poetry to try? Why?
5. How is Xavier's mom more than what Chris expects? How are you more than what people expect?
6. Why is Xavier having a difficult time with his new stepbrother, Chris? Do you think part of the problem could be the expectation of problems due to their different cultural backgrounds? How do we overcome the prejudices we learn from society or people we know?
7. Why does Chris try to act perfect? Have you ever felt the need to be perfect for other people? Is it possible? Why is that a lot of pressure for a kid?
8. What happened to Xavier's dad? How hard would it be to live far away from one of your parents? Do you think it is easier now (with free long distance, email, even video conferencing) to feel connected to people who live far away or not?
9. What does hermano mean? How does "The Name Game" show a change for Xavier?
10. How does the family change again? What does Xavier mean when he says, "we can add new notes/anytime we like"? How does your family add new notes to your family?
11. What pact do Chris and Xavier make with each other? Have you ever made a pact with anyone?
12. Which illustration is your favorite? Why? How would the story feel different if Mr. Benny used a different palette for the book?

Projects:

- Language arts: Using Nikki Grimes narrative poems as a model, create a poem that explores a moment in a character's life, inspired by a real person or a fictional one.
- Art: Create a double-sided piece of art which represents a before and after portrait of a big change in a family's life. Take inspiration from your own story or from Xavier and Chris's story.
- Reading: Character is one of the most important elements to any story. Fill out the following chart based on the characters in this wonderful family story told in bold poems.

<u>Characters</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>How They Change</u>
Xavier		
Chris		
Mami		
Stepdad		