



THE
BOOK BUG

NIKKI GRIMES'

WILD RIDE

by Raven Howell

Prolific poet and bestselling author Nikki Grimes has written many award-winning children's and young adult books. Most recently, Nikki received the 2022 Virginia Hamilton Lifetime Achievement Award, the 2020 ALAN award for outstanding contributions to young adult literature, and the 2017 Children's Literature Legacy Award. The list goes on, as does the list of her distinguished books, which includes *Bronx Masquerade*, *Jazmin's Notebook*, *Talkin' About Bessie*, *Words with Wings*, *Barack Obama: Son of Promise*, *Child of Hope*, and, most recently, *Garvey's Choice*.

A Californian, born and raised in New York City, Nikki began composing verse at age six. One of her literary influences during childhood was *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*. "It's the first book I can remember that taught me—even in the midst of challenge and trauma—I was not all alone in the world. The power of that story was something I went on to strive to emulate in my own work as a storyteller. It also taught me not to be afraid of dark stories, and I never have. Such stories ultimately have the power to heal."

Presently, Nikki is reading *¡Ándale, Prieta!* "It's a wonderfully written book by the beautiful author Yasmin Ramirez. I love her voice in this story."

Hypothetically, if Nikki's best friend wrote a book about her... "It would be an adventure because my life has certainly been a wild ride."

Self-described as "stubborn, curious, and funny," Nikki's happiness relies on tranquility. "It's peace in the eye of a storm, and I have had to weather many of those in my life." Her writing time and space is uncomplicated. "Quiet is all I need, but it must be complete quiet, that quality of quiet you find in nature, one that allows you to hear your own heart, one that creates space for your thoughts to sing."

In Nikki's 2016 release, *Garvey's Choice*, young Garvey has a strained relationship with his father until he learns to overcome feelings of failure by accepting himself as he is and using the power of music to heal the connections.

In the new *Garvey in the Dark*, the journey continues, but this time it's the COVID-19 pandemic that causes havoc as Garvey struggles to find hope when his father gets sick.

Garvey is an interesting and unique name. "I wanted my character to have a strong name, especially because he was such a sensitive soul. I thought immediately of Marcus Garvey,



a strong man and an independent thinker. The character in *Garvey's Choice*—and later in *Garvey in the Dark*—needed to be both.”

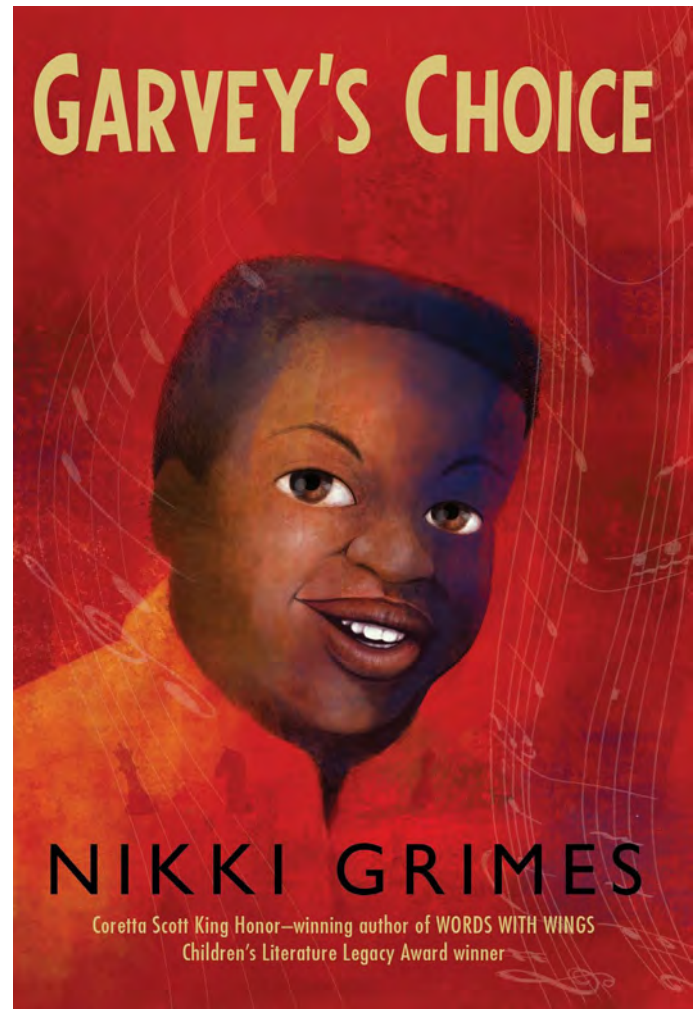
The potent plotlines in both the *Garvey* books are written in Nikki's ingenious verse. “Actually, the idea to write a novel in tanka came first. The storyline for *Garvey's Choice* followed shortly thereafter.”

“*Garvey in the Dark* was more challenging to write by far. A sequel is always a scary proposition, because you wrestle to make the second book at least as good as the first. Beyond that, the fact that COVID was both a universal and a regional experience meant that I was forced to set Garvey and his family in a particular region that I would need to name. And since the Pandemic was on-going, and the major events were factually based, I had to make sure details of this fictional story aligned with the facts of each real-life event included. To ensure that readers would not be distracted by any of the differences between Garvey's experiences of the pandemic and their own, I established a timeline that paralleled Garvey's story based on the region he lived in, which was Southern California. I had to choose SoCal because that's where I live, and my experience of the pandemic forms the basis of Garvey's experience, and the experiences of his family and friends. The two could not be separated. It is through my lens that my characters view and experience the world within the world of their story.”

Nikki continues, “Young people across the globe have experienced—and continue to experience—the impacts of COVID-19 and the social justice issues that exploded in tandem with it, so I hope *Garvey in the Dark* travels far and wide, meeting young readers wherever they may be.”

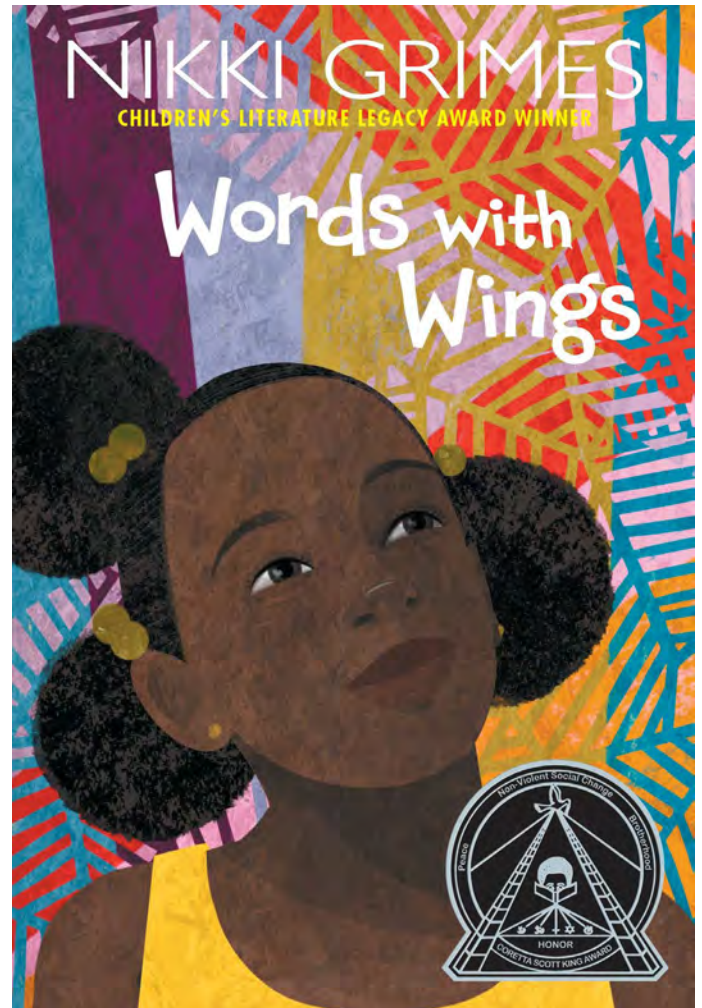
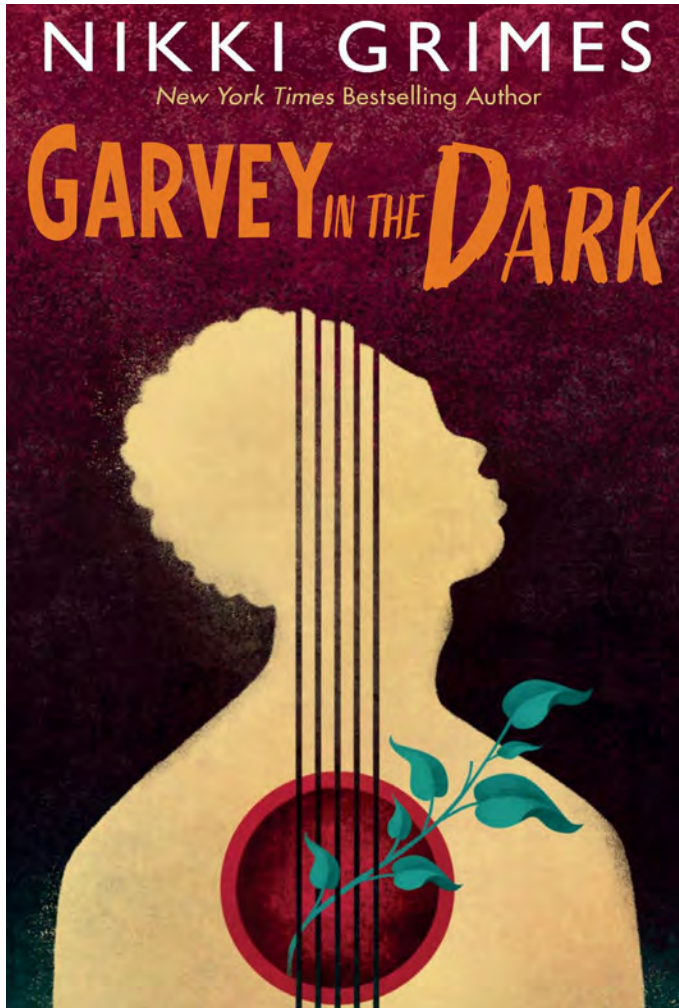
Protagonist Garvey is a loving, real, and engaging child, and I wonder what the evening would be like if Garvey visited Nikki. She speculates, “The night would be filled with music. We would talk about our fathers and their love of music, and I would share stories of my father playing the violin and how I attempted to learn the instrument simply because my dad loved it so much. I would serve Thai curry since Thai is my favorite cuisine, and I know how to make a healthy version of that dish. By evening's end, I would coax Garvey to sing.”

Garvey's message to other young people these days is loving. Nikki notes, “Always follow your own heart, and remember that—no matter how young, or shy, or even afraid you might



be—everyone has a gift to share with the world that makes life better than it could ever be without your contribution.”

Nikki's website is chock-full of tips and advice for young students who are interested in becoming writers. You'll find podcasts, publishing information, and wordsmithing. I am reminded of Nikki's book, *Words with Wings*. In the book, spirited main character Gabby grapples with her parents split. With the help of her teacher, Gabby eventually finds her own “voice” and expression in writing. Nikki says, “Joy and daydreaming gave Gabby emotional release, and writing those daydreams down did the same.” A great writing prompt, though Nikki's own experience differs. “I didn't have to find my writing spark. I was born with it. Writing has always been the way I make sense of the world and what's going on around me. Just as you cannot stop breathing by holding your breath, I could not survive without writing. It's as natural and as necessary to me as air.”



“Always follow your own heart, and remember that—no matter how young, or shy, or even afraid you might be—everyone has a gift to share with the world that makes life better than it could ever be without your contribution.”

At the end of the day, Nikki keeps gratitude close to her heart. “Like most authors, I love awards and I’ve been fortunate to receive some prestigious ones. But, long after the plaques have been hung on the wall, or the sculptures have been placed on the shelves, what stays with me are the letters from readers telling me how my stories have moved them, opened their minds, altered their thinking, encouraged them, made them feel seen for the first time, planted seeds of empathy and compassion in their hearts for groups of people they had formerly dismissed as “other.” Those letters

remind me why I wanted to write books in the first place: I wanted to write stories that had the power to inspire, to uplift, to help heal the hearts of my readers, or to engender hope. Those letters tell me that I have done exactly that—and I’ve made many poetry converts along the way. At the end of the day, there is no higher reward than having lived into your purposes.”

Nikki contends, “I’ve finally slowed down enough to not only smell the roses, but to dream about new hybrids, or new

colors and fragrances yet to be imagined. And this slower pace creates space to invest more time with friends and loved ones, which serves to enrich my life and inspire new, more creative work.”

And roses are a source of inspiration to her. “Whenever I spot a new rosebud in my garden, I get excited, and when it blooms fully, it takes my breath away—every single time. The same is true of a spring vegetable sending up its first shoots, or the first tomato as it ripens. It just never gets old for me. I can paint a rose, but I can’t make one. Anything that grows is a miracle, and I can’t get enough of witnessing that growth.”

Nikki has an ample still-to-write list including, “A book about my father and his music; a collection of poems celebrating my personal heroes; a novel in verse for adults; and I want to

travel to Australia, South and Central America, and Ireland. These are a few of things on my bucket list.”

For today, the wild ride continues. “I look forward to a trip to Singapore for their international book festival this spring! Moving at this slower pace, I’m bound to enjoy such an adventure more than I ever would have before. That’s something wonderful to look forward to, don’t you think?”

For more information about Nikki Grimes and her books, visit nikkigrimes.com.

Raven Howell is an award-winning children’s author and poet.

ravenhowell.com

THE END OF MANKIND...





The Bridge to Magic is a story of a life between two deaths and an impossible choice to make. It is a story of finding hope, love, and survival in a world where none seems possible.”


“This is Dark Fantasy at its best.”

—The Book Commentary

Available on Amazon.com and BarnesandNoble.com

WWW.ALEXTHORNBURY.COM

 [alexthornbury.author](https://www.instagram.com/alexthornbury.author)  [author.alexthornbury](https://www.facebook.com/author.alexthornbury)

 [author/show/22845843.Alex_Thornbury](https://www.youtube.com/author/show/22845843.Alex_Thornbury)

