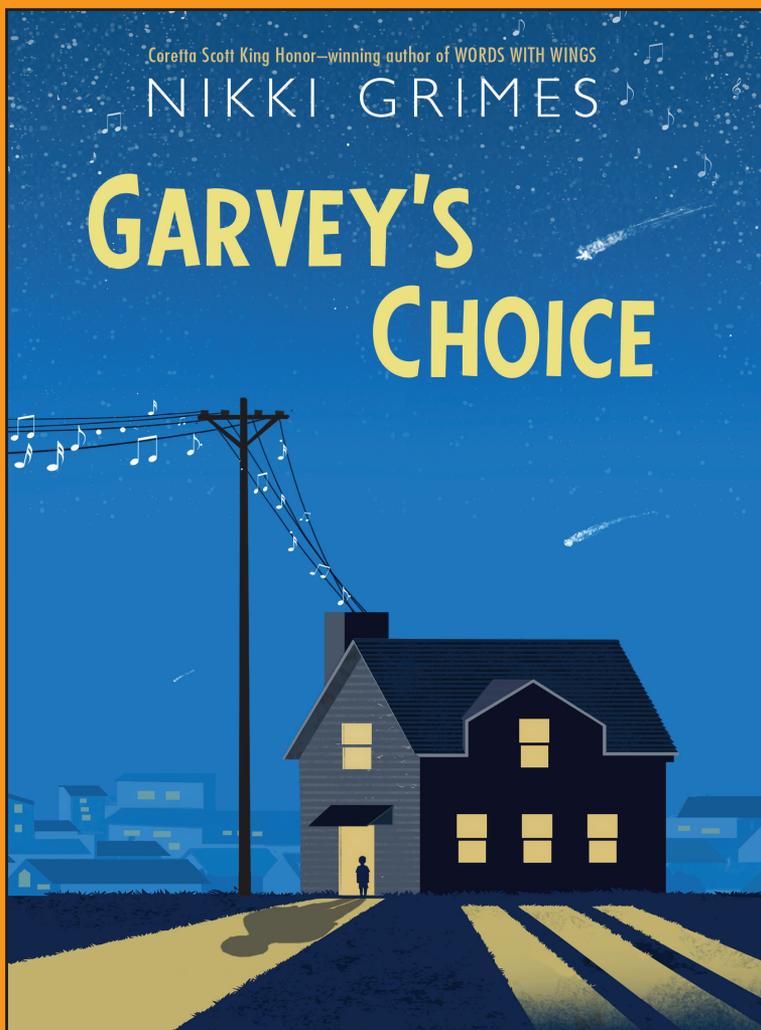


# Educator's Guide



WORDSONG

BOYDS MILLS PRESS

Highlights

## COMMON CORE ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THIS GUIDE:

RI—Reading: Informational Text

RL—Reading: Literature

SL—Speaking and Listening

W—Writing

## ABOUT THE BOOK

Garvey’s father has always wanted Garvey to be athletic, but Garvey is interested in astronomy, science fiction, reading—anything but sports. Feeling like a failure, he comforts himself with food. Garvey is kind, funny, smart, and a loyal friend, but he is also overweight, teased by bullies, and lonely. When his only friend encourages him to join the school chorus, Garvey’s life changes. The chorus finds a new soloist in Garvey, and, through chorus, Garvey finds a way to accept himself and a way to finally reach his distant father—by speaking the language of music instead of the language of sports. This emotionally resonant novel in verse by award-winning author Nikki Grimes celebrates choosing to be true to yourself.

## PRE-READING: SETTING THE STAGE

Before sharing this book, talk about how we all struggle with other people’s expectations of us—those of family members, friends, teachers, or others who have opinions about who we are and how we should act. Talk about how this book offers a look at one boy’s struggle with his father’s expectations, and talk about how it does so through the lens of poetry, with each page being a tanka poem. Challenge students to consider each character’s point of view as Garvey tells his story through poems.

[RL 3.1, 4.1, 5.1, 6.1, 7.1]

## CHARACTERS, NAMES, AND NICKNAMES

As students read or listen to this verse novel, encourage them to visualize each of the main characters and talk about what they look like and how they talk and act. Work together to draw character sketches or find magazine or web-based images that look like how they envision each of the characters, including Garvey, Dad, Mom, Angela, Joe, and Emmanuel.

[RL 3.3, 4.3, 4.6, 4.7, 5.3, 5.6, 5.7, 6.6, 7.6; SL 4.5, 5.5, 6.5, 7.5]

Names, nicknames, and name-calling are an important part of this story. To begin, Garvey may have been named after Marcus Garvey, as suggested in “Rhymes with Harvey” (page 9). Challenge students to research who Marcus Garvey was and why Garvey might be named after him.

Challenge students to find out the derivation or story behind their own names or nicknames by interviewing their parents and researching online.

[SL 3.1, 4.1, 5.1, 6.1, 7.1; W 3.7, 3.8, 4.7, 4.8, 5.7, 5.8, 6.7, 6.8, 7.7, 7.8]

Next, talk with students about how nicknames can be endearing or insulting, depending on the context. Garvey endures many insulting nicknames because of his larger size (e.g., “fatso,” “lard butt,” “Mister Tubs,” “Two Ton,” “Sweet Chunk,” “Chocolate Chunk,” “little piggy”). Even his big sister calls him names that she thinks are funny, but slowly Garvey reveals that they’re hurtful to him. Have students examine “Advice” (page 66), “His Words” (page 67), “The Change Bell” (page 84), and “Good Company” (page 86). How do Garvey and Manny cope with their nicknames? Challenge students to consider how they address one another and how they might handle it when they are called something they do not like to be called.

[RL 3.1, 3.2, 3.4; SL 3.1A, 3.1D]

## FATHERS AND SONS

One of the major conflicts in Garvey’s story stems from his father’s expectations, particularly regarding Garvey’s participation in organized sports and his concerns about Garvey’s weight. Invite students to trace the evolving relationship of father and son through the poems in the book. Challenge them to find a poem that shows the initial tension between them, the dawning of understanding, emerging details of things Garvey and his dad might have in common, and the final conclusion of their mutual interest in music. Discuss the language the author uses to convey Garvey’s emotions throughout.

[RL 3.3, 3.5, 4.3, 4.5, 5.3, 5.5, 6.3, 6.5, 7.5, 7.6]

## READING ALOUD

Talk about how the author uses titles for each poem to set the stage for each page of the story. If you only read the titles of the poems (and not the poems themselves), what do you surmise about the story? Try it. Read the poem titles aloud as a group by passing the book around the class. How do the titles alone set the stage or move the story along?

[SL 3.1, 4.1, 5.1, 6.1, 7.1]

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

As students read or listen to *Garvey's Choice*, invite them to consider the relationships, conflicts, 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 and Joe (and Manny) keep their friendship strong?
2. Grimes writes, “Do friends make better mirrors?” (page 14). What does this mean, and do you think it’s true? How do Garvey’s friends help him see himself in different ways?
3. Why is “Garvey’s Choice” (page 54) the titular poem? What is so important about this poem?
4. Why are music and singing so important to Garvey?
5. How does Garvey handle the tension with his father?
6. What can you do when a good friend is being called names or being bullied? What do Garvey and his friends do?
7. How does your family shape what you’re like? How do your friends shape what you’re like? How is that the same or different? How do Garvey’s friends and family shape him, and how does Garvey shape them?
8. Using the book as an example, how can kids show courage?
9. Again using the book as an example, what can young people teach adults?

Encourage students to cite lines or examples from the poems to support their responses.

[RL 3.1, 4.1, 5.1, 6.1, 7.1]

## READERS' THEATER

Another feature of this book is the use of dialogue indicated by quotation marks when someone is speaking within the poems. This creates the sense that characters are speaking to one another in the poem, which can be very effective when read aloud. Try readers’ theater performance, so that students can get a sense of the characters’ voices. Select poems with two parts—plain text and dialogue—for two volunteers or two groups to read aloud in turn. Then talk about how that helps us understand the poem and the points of view better.

Use VoiceThread or a recording app to tape the choral reading of your favorite poems. Share your recording during morning announcements or at a parent meeting just for fun.

[RL 5.6, 6.6, 6.7, 7.6, 7.7]

## WORDS OF WISDOM

Garvey is happy to have a very good friend in Joe and makes a new friend (Manny) in the story, too. In the face of Garvey’s body image issues and the bullying he endures, it’s his friends who help him make peace with who he is and discover new talents (singing) that help him blossom. Several characters offer him advice along the way. Encourage students to identify poems that communicate the value of friendship and that show these friends in action. Challenge students to identify a key line, phrase, or passage that is pivotal to the story or meaningful to them and talk about why. Talk about why friends are important in life and how true friends accept us as we are, as well as help us be our best selves. Encourage students to choose their favorite line as a personal motto and then create simple band bracelets or make a button and write their mottos on them.

[RL 3.2, 5.2, 6.2, 7.2]

## POEM FORM: TANKA

Grimes uses the tanka form of poetry for every poem in this book. Share the author’s note about the tanka on page 107 and talk about the components of this form: the five lines, the designated number of syllables for each line, the focus on communicating mood and story. Use one sample poem such as “Summer Lost and Found” (page 4) to identify all the components.

In addition, Grimes incorporates rhyme in some of the poems, but not in others. Create a simple table with two columns and challenge students to find 5 examples of each: tanka with rhyme and tanka without rhyme. Grimes even employs internal rhyme with rhyming words within the same line. See if students can find one example of internal rhyme. Then, after reading about the form of the tanka poem and discussing many examples, encourage them to try writing their own five-line tanka poem following the syllable count that Grimes uses. Encourage them to share their poems, too.

[RL 3.5, 4.5, 5.5, 6.5, 7.5; W 3.3, 4.3, 5.3, 6.3, 7.3]

## CONNECTIONS ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

### MUSIC

Music is a very important part of *Garvey's Choice*, and Grimes weaves several references to songs and music throughout this novel in verse, including work by Luther Vandross and Natasha Bedingfield. Work with students to learn more about the music and lives of these artists; be sure to check their personal websites and listen to some audio tracks. Then ask students why Grimes might have singled out these two singers for Garvey's story. Why is their music important to Garvey?

**[RL 3.1, 4.1, 5.1, 6.1, 7.1]**

Garvey's interest in music comes to the forefront and he finds his voice when he steps up and joins the school chorus and even performs a solo. Talk about how singing helps him gain confidence and helps him connect with his father. Identify poems or excerpts that highlight the importance of music and singing in Garvey's life.

**[RL 3.1, 4.1, 5.1, 6.1, 7.1]**

### SCIENCE

From the beginning, we see that Garvey loves astronomy, space, and science fiction. Invite your science fans to identify poems or lines with a science or space focus. This might include "Stars" (page 5), "Me and Joe" (page 16), and "Word Web" (page 81), among many others, as well as references to the television show *Star Trek* and the classic science fiction novel *Have Space Suit—Will Travel* by Robert Heinlein. Encourage your students to share their own favorite science-related books, games, programs, and interests. How might they weave those interests into poems about their own lives and identities? Is it surprising that a person who loves science would also love music? Why or why not? Are there ways that music can help us understand science, or vice versa?

**[SL 3.1, 4.1, 5.1, 6.1, 7.1]**

### SPORTS, GAMES, AND HOBBIES

One of the conflicts in this story is Garvey's lack of interest in participating in organized sports like football or basketball, despite his father's desire that he do so. Which poems depict this struggle?

**[RL 3.1, 4.1, 5.1, 6.1, 7.1]**

Garvey does enjoy the game of chess and plays it with his friend Joe, and he does some running with Joe, too. Brainstorm with students the sports, games, and hobbies that interest them and make a class list of their current

activities. Which have they tried and abandoned? Which would they like to try but haven't yet? Talk about how these kinds of activities can be a fun outlet outside of school, provide physical and mental exercise, and offer opportunities to participate in team activities and competitions. How do we see Garvey's character develop through his extracurricular interests?

**[RL 3.3, 4.3, 5.3, 6.3, 7.3]**

### COOKING, FOOD, AND COOKBOOKS

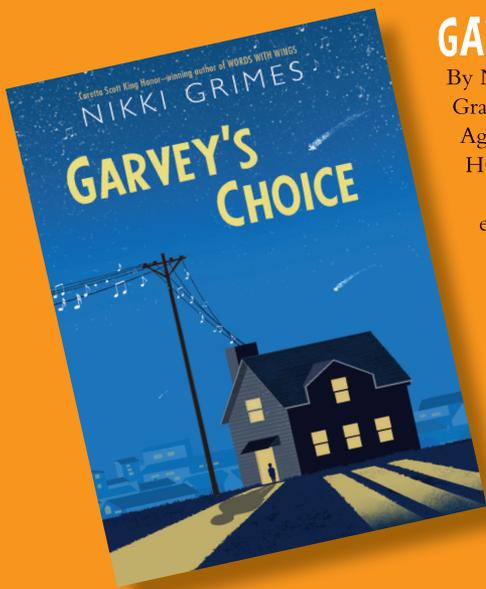
Garvey makes a new friend, Emmanuel or "Manny," who loves food and cooking and wants to be a chef when he grows up (despite his father's resistance). Invite students to create a list of the many foods included in the poems and talk about which ones they have tried and which ones they have not. Have students discuss the evolving role of food in Garvey's life, citing examples from the text. If possible, bring a cookbook for young people, like *Cool Kids Cook: Fresh & Fit* by Eliana (cited in the poems), and watch an excerpt or episode of the television program *MasterChef Junior* (also cited in the poems) and talk about how kids can cook (with supervision) and try new foods, too.

**[SL 3.1, 4.1, 5.1, 6.1, 7.1]**

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

<http://www.nikkigrimes.com>

You can find out more about author Nikki Grimes at her website, including current news, writing tips, photos and art, and much more. She also keeps two occasional blogs: *Nikki Sounds Off*, at <http://www.nikkigrimes.com/blog/> and *Backstory* at <http://www.nikkigrimes.com/backstory/>. Ms. Grimes also offers links to several Teacher Tips and guides at <http://www.nikkigrimes.com/teacher.html>.



## GARVEY'S CHOICE

By Nikki Grimes

Grades 3–7

Ages 8–12

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For the complete Common  
Core State Standards, visit  
[corestandards.org/ELA-literacy](http://corestandards.org/ELA-literacy).

★ “A Coretta Scott King Author Award–winning author and the recipient of the 2016 Virginia Hamilton Literary Award, Grimes returns to the novel-in-verse format, creating voice, characters, and plot in a series of pithy tanka poems. . . . Written from Garvey’s point of view, the succinct verses convey the narrative as well as his emotions with brevity, clarity, and finesse.”

—*Booklist*, STARRED REVIEW

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This guide was written by Sylvia Vardell, Professor in the School of Library and Information Studies at Texas Woman’s University, and the author of ALA’s popular *Poetry Aloud Here*. Ms. Vardell is also poetry columnist for *Book Links* magazine, co-editor of the Poetry Friday series, and keeper of the acclaimed *Poetry for Children* blog.

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