

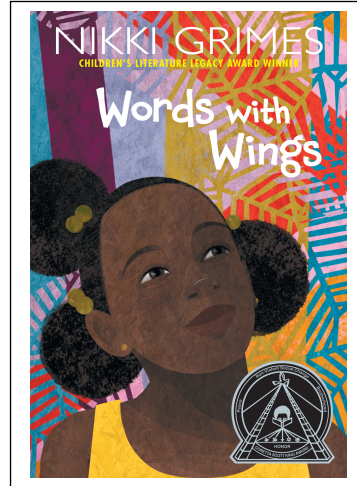
DISCUSSION GUIDE

WORDS WITH WINGS

Written by Nikki Grimes

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Grades: 3 - 7
Ages: 8 - 12



ABOUT THE BOOK

In **WORDS WITH WINGS**, author Nikki Grimes uses poetry to trace a girl's journey from daydreamer to writer. Over seventy prose poems serve as chapters in the life of Gabriella, and they chronicle everything from her struggles with her parents' divorce and her move to a new school, to her joy at finding a new friend and her flourishing with the help of an understanding teacher. This guide will help students explore the book's themes, characters, and structure.

PRAISE FOR **WORDS WITH WINGS**

Coretta Scott King Author Honor book • NCTE Notable Children's Books in the English Language Arts • Kirkus Reviews Best Book

★ ". . . Grimes has written a novel in verse that is an enthusiastic celebration of the power of words and imagination. . . Always accessible, Grimes' language is vivid, rhythmic, and figurative. . . Grimes' words speak to the daydreamer in every reader." — **Booklist, starred review**

★ " An inspirational exploration of caring among parent, teacher and child—one of Grimes' best." —**Kirkus Reviews, starred review**

" . . . Grimes packs substantial emotional heft into her poems, especially the way that Gabby's parents' separation weighs on her. . . her poems lovingly convey the rich inner life (and turmoil) of a girl in the process of finding her voice." —**Publishers Weekly**

ASTRA BOOKS FOR YOUNG READERS

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- In “Prologue,” the author describes how the main character received her name. What does this poem tell the reader about Gabriella’s father?
- In the second poem, “Two of a Kind,” we find out that Gabriella and her father are dreamers. What else do we learn in this poem?
- In “Summer Shift,” Gabby opens a dictionary and finds a word that takes her away. Where does she go, and how does the daydream help her deal with her fears about the changes going on her life?
- In “Cheri” and “Hope,” Gabriella remembers her best friend from her old school. Cheri encouraged Gabby’s imagination, and the poem uses a beautiful simile to describe Gabriella’s daydreaming. What is a simile? How does it make the poem “Cheri” more vivid?
- Gabby’s daydreams are images, but her words craft those images. In “First Day” and “Words with Wings,” Gabby uses happy imagery to describe the way her mind takes her away. However, in the next two poems, “Getting Started” and “Gone,” the author shows how Gabby’s daydreams don’t always spring from a joyful place. Sometimes she daydreams to escape the sad reality of her parents’ struggles. What do words mean to Gabby? Why does she daydream?
- Oftentimes, authors give information about characters between the lines. In the poems “Adjusting,” “Setting the Table,” “Washing Dishes,” and “Laundry,” the author gives clues about Gabby’s mother. What do these poems reveal about her? What does the author reveal about Gabby’s father in “Arabesque” and “A Trip to Thailand?”
- What do the poems “Maybe,” “Mom,” and “Favorite Words” say about Gabby’s character and her relationship with her mother?
- The transition to a new school is difficult for Gabby. She decides to abandon her daydreaming. Her teacher, Mr. Spicer, notices a change in her right away. Why does he tell her to keep daydreaming in “Persistent?” What does the word “persistent” mean?
- Who is David? Why does Gabby think she’s found another Cheri? How does David express himself? What do David and Gabby have in common?
- In the poem “Sand,” Gabby decides to write down one of her daydreams. What does Mr. Spicer do? What kind of teacher is Mr. Spicer?
- At the end of the book, Gabby is filling her notebook with daydreams and discovers her mother has some daydreams of her own. How has Gabby changed from the beginning of the book? How has her mother changed?

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POST-READING ACTIVITIES

- A single word, a song, even a smell can remind people of things that happened to them in the past. In “Concert,” “Games,” “Macaroni Memory,” and “Tent,” words bring back memories for Gabby. Make a list of several random words (for example: camping, apples, bicycle, toothpick, etc.). Give the list to a partner and ask them to share a memory triggered by one of the words.
- This book is a novel, but it’s different from most novels because each chapter is a poem. Imagine if this book were written like most other novels. How would it be different? How would it be the same? Would the characters come across differently? If so, how and why would they seem different?
- Prose poems use vivid and colorful language to create clear pictures. In the poem “Idea,” Gabby leaves the classroom on “giggly knees.” Find other examples of unexpected phrases in the book. Share your examples with the class. What pictures do these phrases paint in your mind?
- Words have wings—they fly thoughts to different places. Reread the poems “Snowflake,” “Waterfall,” “Spring,” “Butterfly,” “Dragon,” “Comet,” and “Firefly.” Write your own descriptive poem based on a single word.
- In the poems “Sled,” “Stilts,” and “Canyon,” the author uses words to make actual pictures. This is sometimes called concrete poetry or shape poetry. Do some research and find other examples of this type of poetry. Then write your own shape poem.
- The poem “Explain This, Please” is short (in fact, it’s only fifteen words long!), but it says a lot. Write an autobiographical prose poem. Think about how much you can say about yourself in very few words.
- Nikki Grimes honors a teacher named Ed Spicer in the book’s acknowledgements. Think about someone who has been an inspiration to you. Write a book proposal with that person as a main character.
- There are many books that explore how a child handles major changes in his or her life. Think of a book you have read that depicts a character dealing with life changes. Compare and contrast that character with Gabby.

Guide written by Jane Becker