

Bronx Masquerade Study Guide

Bronx Masquerade by Nikki Grimes

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Wesley Bad Boy Boone to Tyrone p. 23

Wesley Bad Boy Boone to Tyrone p. 23 Summary

Bronx Masquerade centers on Mr. Ward's English class of mixed-race high school students. They have Open Mike Fridays, in which they read their poetry. The poems help break down racial and cultural barriers and show the students that they are not that different, especially in regards to their hopes and dreams.

In "Wesley 'Bad Boy' Boone," Wesley says he does not like homework. Tyrone, his friend, does not care about school, but Wesley keeps Tyrone going to school. Tyrone wants to be a hip-hop star, but he does not think he will live long enough to fulfill his dream. Wesley does not think about dying; he concerns himself with living. In Mr. Ward's English class, they study the Harlem Renaissance. Wesley writes a tribute poem to Langston Hughes' poetry greatness called "Long Live Langston" and Mr. Ward asks him to read it aloud to the class. He does and the other students want to bring their poetry in to read aloud. Mr. Ward says to bring their poems in tomorrow.

In "Tyrone Bittings," Tyrone is an angry kid. He thinks school is a joke. He only goes to school for Wesley and his other friends. White folks tell him about a future that will never happen. His father has not skipped out on his family, but rather was shot and killed before he turned 30 years-old in a drive-by shooting. Tyrone says he could use a future. Tyrone gets excited when Mr. Ward announces Open Mike Fridays, or poetry readings by the students, at the end of every month. Tyrone digs out his old rap poems. He says if he does ever have a future, he wants to be a rap artist and poet. He writes a poem called "Attendance" about his love for rap, his harsh neighborhood and not underestimating the power of love.

In "Chankara Troupe," Chankara has been beat up by a boy. She has bruises on her face. Her friends say she does not deserve this. What happened is the boy had tried to be more sexually aggressive than she wanted, so she hit him and he hit her back. She had kicked him out of the house. It is Chankara's turn to read her poem called "Bruised Love." It is about her sister who gets beaten up by her boyfriend on a regular basis. Chankara knows her sister will continue to get beat up because she will let the boyfriend do it.

In "Tyrone," he says his father used to hit his mother like that. Before his father died, he finally got clean and sober, so Tyrone has some good memories of him. After Chankara reads her poem, no one wants to read because of the heavy subject matter.

In "Raul Ramirez," Raul cannot stop staring at Chankara's bruises. He is a painter. Mr. Ward leaves out brushes and paper for him. Raul thinks he is a great artist and calls himself the next Diego Rivera. Tyrone says Raul wastes his time because art will never make him money, but Raul disagrees. Raul wants to be a poet and have a Nuyorican poetry cafe. Raul wants to show the beauty of his mother in his art because she does



everything for him. His poem "Zorro" discusses how Zorro is neither a hero or a bandit. People want to put labels on Zorro.

In "Tyrone," Tyrone says he likes Raul's poem "Zorro" because white folks think they know who black people are, but they really have no idea.

Wesley Bad Boy Boone to Tyrone p. 23 Analysis

The students are not what they appear to be. On the outside, they are tough kids who endure harsh neighborhood conditions in the Bronx. However, much of their swagger is due to appearing tough. Their motivations vary, but for Tyrone, he starts without motivation, which is representative of many black youths living in low-income sections of cities. Tyrone only begins to find motivation through poetry and the promise that he can perform and it will be soon. Tyrone represents the young black male of today's society who does not think he will live for very long. Therefore, the low-income black male starts out with no goals. Once Tyrone gets a taste of reading his poetry, he wants to achieve his dream of becoming a hip-hop star.

Raul represents a dual artist, since he wants to be both a painter and poet. His motivations are to keep with his cultural roots since he desires to be like Diego Rivera and capture his mother's Puerto Rican motherly beauty. His poem "Zorro" reflects this idea because he does not want labels put on him. He just wants to be Raul.

Chankara's motivation is not to end up like her sister. Ironically, she counters violence with violence because she hits the boy first. She does not choose a peaceful solution, which represents the cycle of abuse being passed down. However, she stops the cycle when she throws the boy out of her house and then announces in her poem, she will not be like her sister. Chankara represents a strong, female character who learns early on what love is about.



Diondra Jordan p. 24 to Tyrone, p. 45

Diondra Jordan p. 24 to Tyrone, p. 45 Summary

In "Diondra Jordan," Diondra is incredibly shy. She wishes she could be bold like Raul. She gets teased because she is six feet tall, but she cannot play basketball. In Diondra's unnamed poem, she says people make fun of her because she cannot play basketball, but what if they knew she painted? Would they make fun of her then?

In "Tyrone," Tyrone comments on how fast Diondra reads. She shakes because she is so nervous. Tyrone tells her to calm down, but she does not. Four other kids are scared to read as well.

In "Devon Hope," Devon is tall and he is a good basketball player. He pretends to be practicing basketball, but he really goes to the library and reads poetry. He loves poetry. He loves Langston Hughes and Claude McKay. Devon is glad Mr. Ward has them reading poetry because he can say he reads for homework. Janelle, a classmate, slips him his favorite Langston Hughes book without saying a word. He realizes that Janelle has noticed him in the library. Devon's poem entitled "Bronx Masquerade" discusses how on the outside he appears to be a basketball player, but he is actually a poet.

In "Tyrone," Tyrone comments that if he was a good basketball player like Devon, he would be in the pros. Tyrone says Devon needs to work on his poetry.

In "Lupe Algarin," Lupe says Open Mike Fridays are becoming so popular that kids from other classes are coming in and hiding just to listen. Other teachers are getting mad. She talks about her niece Rosa, who is her sister's daughter. Lupe's siblings left her house a long time ago. It is now just her, her Mami and Mami's husband Berto. They do not care about Lupe. Lupe is desperate for love. She wants to be like her friend Gloria Martinez, who has a baby. Lupe thinks if she has a baby then someone will love her. Lupe's poem "Brown Hands" talks about having a baby and he would be all the love she ever wants.

In "Tyrone," Tyrone comments that Lupe looks like she is always somewhere else. Tyrone interprets the poem to be about a guy and says that maybe Lupe thinks about this guy all the time. But if she is, why does she not smile?

In "Gloria Martinez," Gloria writes a shopping list in class when she should be paying attention. She has a kid named Angel. Two weeks ago, Angel had been really sick with a fever. Raising Angel makes it impossible for her to do her schoolwork. She has two years until she graduates. She wants to go to college. Angel's father wants nothing to do with Gloria and Angel. Gloria says Lupe has no idea how lucky she is. Gloria wants to get through to Lupe. Gloria's poem entitled "Message to a Friend" is a message to Lupe about how hard it is to have a child, and when you have a child, you lose part of yourself.



In "Tyrone," Tyrone comments that Gloria has a lot of heart, especially coming to school after giving birth. Tyrone thinks she is beautiful, a good poet and she should put her poem on the wall.

Diondra Jordan p. 24 to Tyrone, p. 45 Analysis

Diondra and Devon represent the hidden artists. They both pretend to not have any interest in their art, but in reality, they live for their art. Diondra loves to draw and paint, but keeps her art a secret. This is due to her shyness. Devon does the same thing, but to fit in with the other boys. He will be an outcast if they know about his poetic side. Both Diondra and Devon's motivations are shaped by the society around them. They are not true to themselves in order to fit into society's mold. But this does not work for them as poets. They must reveal their art in order to reveal themselves in their poetry.

Gloria and Lupe represent the two ends of the spectrum of teenage motherhood. Gloria loves her son, but wishes she was not a teenage mother. It is a hard life. Lupe searches for love and she believes a baby will fill her void. Motherhood is represented as a duality, both as something unwanted and wanted. Both girls look at motherhood through very different eyes. Gloria's reality is not what Lupe dreams of. But Lupe's reality is not what Gloria sees. Both girls are at a standstill. This foreshadows that poetry may move both of them along to a better future.



Janelle Battle, p. 46 to Tyrone, p. 64

Janelle Battle, p. 46 to Tyrone, p. 64 Summary

In "Janelle Battle," Janelle is in love with Devon Hope. He is beautiful, but she is fat. Lupe says she has a pretty face and is smart. Janelle likes Devon because he is different from the other jocks because he reads poetry. Janelle cannot believe she reads poetry aloud; it is like acting on stage. The students stand in front of a video camera. Mr. Ward turns the lights off and turns them on when the poet is ready. Janelle says she can become somebody else and say anything she wants as long as it is in a poem. Janelle wishes she was not fat and she wishes to be beautiful. She wants people to see her beauty. Her poem entitled "Inside" discusses her fat as a shell, but at her core, she is sweet.

In "Tyrone," Tyrone comments that he feels badly because he teases Janelle a lot about her weight. He does not think it is funny now.

In "Leslie Lucas," Leslie questions what she has in common with any of her classmates. They are black and Hispanic and she is white. She grew up in Westchester County, in a white suburb. Her mom died and Leslie had to move down to the Bronx with her grandma. She hated moving; she misses her friends. She misses her mom all the time. She feels so lonely. One day, Leslie is in a bad mood and runs into Porscha Johnson, a girl with a violent past. Leslie explodes, saying she never wanted to move here. She had to move because her mom died. Leslie gets scared because she waits for Porscha to beat her, but Porscha says she is sorry and that her mom died too and she lives with her grandmother too. They form a strong friendship. Leslie joins a clique with other student poets. Mr. Ward gives the class an assignment to write about the scariest thing they know and Leslie thinks it is being alone in the world. Her poem entitled "Common Ground" discusses going into the unknown and reaching for a life preserver called friendship.

In "Tyrone," Tyrone comments that the little white girl (Leslie) is deep. This surprises him. He wishes more guys would read their poetry too.

In "Judianne Alexander," Judianne likes to sleep in class. She stays up at night designing and sewing outfits for herself. She thinks it is funny that she writes poetry, but Mr. Ward says she is smarter than she realizes. Open Mike Fridays is an opportunity for her to get Tyrone's attention. She has a huge crush on him. Judianne has a beautiful body, but she hates her bluish-black skin and hair. She is jealous of the other girls. Her stepfather makes fun of her looks and her mother does not defend her. Judianne has no self-esteem in regard to her looks. She sits at her sewing machine and dreams about how she is going to be beautiful one day. Her poem entitled "Cocoon" discusses how she sews a cocoon and one day, she will clip away at it to hear people cheering about her transformation.



In "Tyrone," Tyrone comments that he does not understand why any of the girls like the way they look. The guys do not have this problem.

Janelle Battle, p. 46 to Tyrone, p. 64 Analysis

The idea of physical beauty is at the forefront of this section. It is interesting because Janelle and Judianne struggle with their looks as black women. Leslie, a white girl, does not mention her looks. Instead, she is focused on her inner loneliness. Janelle and Judianne represent many black females in today's society, since a high percentage of the black female population is overweight and the black community teases each other about having dark skin. These are major beauty concerns of black women. Janelle and Judianne must work through their self-esteem problems and begin to do so through the poetry. Beauty to them is everything, and they must find their own beauty as black women.

Leslie struggles with her identity because she does not know how to relate to her black and Hispanic classmates. She relates to Porscha via loneliness. Loneliness represents a bridge between Leslie and her classmates. They can identify with her and she can with them. The girls' poems all talk about loneliness in some form, whether it is loneliness of missing a mother or loneliness of feeling ugly. Leslie sees herself as an outsider, but in actuality, she is very much like her classmates.



Lupe, p. 65 to Tyrone, p. 81

Lupe, p. 65 to Tyrone, p. 81 Summary

In "Lupe," Lupe feels very alone because she has broken up with her boyfriend. She still wants a baby, but she does not want to raise it alone. She calls Leslie and Leslie consoles her. Leslie says Lupe sounded already alone in that relationship. Leslie says she feels alone sometimes too. After her mother's funeral when she moved in with her grandmother, she felt hollow, but she is better now. They talk for an hour. Leslie says they can be like family and they have each other. Lupe's poem entitled "El Noche" discusses how she stands out on a cold night and how she chokes on loneliness. But a white figure (Leslie) comes and helps her.

In "Tyrone, Tyrone comments that Lupe's voice is soft and he likes when she reads. He is glad Mr. Ward asks Lupe to read her poem again. Tyrone says women know how to be soft and strong at the same time.

In "Janelle," Janelle is surprised by Judianne's poem because Judianne always exudes self-confidence and her nickname is "Miss Fifth Avenue." Janelle runs into Judianne in the bathroom. Janelle says she likes Judianne's poem, which focuses on low self esteem, and that she feels that way too. Judianne nods in agreement and is about to say something, but another girl comes out of the bathroom stall. Judianne snaps and tells Janelle she is fat, they have nothing in common and her poem is just words. Janelle holds her tears back, but she knows Judianne's poem is more than just words on a page. Janelle's poem entitled "Mirror, Mirror" discusses how two sisters are mirror images of each other. One does not like what she sees, so she smashes the mirror.

In "Tyrone," Tyrone says that Janelle does a good job reading her poem. He says Open Mike Fridays are now once a week because so many people want to read their poetry.

In "Tanisha Scott," Tanisha is a gorgeous, black girl. She is the envy of all black girls. She has light hair, light skin and green eyes. She has good hair. She catches Judianne touching her hair. As a protest, Tanisha cuts her hair and her mom freaks out. Tanisha downplays her looks, but it does not matter. The boys hit on her and the girls hate her. Tanisha asks Mr. Ward if she, Janelle and Diondra can do an extra credit project on Harlem Renaissance women writers. Tanisha nominates Diondra to draw the portraits of the writers. Tanisha's poem "For the Record" discusses being African, the roots of her African heritage and the fact that she is black too.

In "Tyrone," Tyrone comments he understands now why Tanisha gets angry when he calls her "caramel cutie" because she is a proud African American woman. He says maybe he can hook up some African drum music to go with her poetry.



Lupe, p. 65 to Tyrone, p. 81 Analysis

The idea of the mirror symbolizes a self-examination. In the mirror, a person must see exactly what she is and there is no lying. To look in a mirror and be comfortable, one must be accepting of her flaws. This is difficult for women in society. It is interesting because Janelle and Judianne meet in front of the mirror and they see each other for what they are. Judianne is about to reveal her true self, but she stops and reverts to her nasty outer self. In Janelle's poem, a mirror is used to examine two women who are identical. The mirror shows the truth, but one woman cannot accept it. She smashes the mirror, thus she refuses to self-examine in an honest way.

On the other hand, the reader is introduced to a girl who is gorgeous. Tanisha is the epitome of beauty in the black community, but she loathes herself. Beauty is a burden for her because it causes negative attention. Thus, Tanisha represents a woman who does not want to be judged by her looks. There is more to her than just beauty. Her beauty is an outer shell, just like Janelle's fat.



Devon, p. 82 to Tyrone, p. 101

Devon, p. 82 to Tyrone, p. 101 Summary

In Devon, Devon thinks Tanisha is gorgeous, but he does not hit on her because he knows she gets tired of being hit on by all the other guys. Tanisha tells Devon she gets tired of judgments; people look at her and think she is just a doll. He feels the same way because people classify him as a dumb jock. They put him in a box and label him. Devon reads an advanced poetry book, but he decides not to hide his love of poetry anymore. His friend makes fun of him, but Devon says he will take the book on the basketball team bus and make sure everyone sees it. Devon's poem entitled "Black Box" says that everything has a box, but he is made of muscles, skin, and other body parts. The poem is about his insides and asks that people not put him in a box.

In "Tyrone," Tyrone comments Devon is right. No one fits into a box, especially Mr. Ward; he is not just a do-gooder. Mr. Ward says you have to see what is in a person's mind and heart before judging her/him.

In "Sterling S. Hughes," Sterling wants to be a science teacher, plays guitar and preaches about God. He goes to church every Sunday. When a kid spills honey on Sterling's new shoes, Sterling counts to calm himself down and then grabs the kid and kisses him loudly on both cheeks, hugs him and says he forgives him. The kid and his friends call Sterling a freak and walk away. All his life, Sterling has seen his mother pray and she gets what she wants. Mr. Ward turns him onto a poet named Reverend Pedro Pietri, who puts God and the street in the same sentence. Sterling's poem "D-Train" discusses how a guy gets on a subway train and wants to rob an old woman for his cocaine habit. But God comes down and saves her. And the poem ends with him saying he is good, but not that good.

In "Tyrone," Tyrone comments that Sterling's poem had taken him to a whole other place. He wonders, if Sterling is not good, what does that make him? He says Sterling is a poet.

In "Diondra," she goes into class early, takes out a photo of her father and sketches him. When they get the reports back, Mr. Ward holds up Diondra's portraits for everyone to see. She is embarrassed, but everyone thinks she is a great artist, especially Raul. He says he wishes he could draw eyes like she does. She now draws two to three times a week. Diondra's poem "High Dive" discusses diving into a pool and wonders what happens if she forgets to swim or if there is no water. But she sees shades of blue in a perfect palette and she starts to paint.

In "Tyrone," Tyrone comments that they should have a poetry slam. He will pitch this idea to Mr. Ward. No one from any other school can beat them, not even Bronx Science.



Devon, p. 82 to Tyrone, p. 101 Analysis

The reader can see in the characters of Devon and Tanisha that there is more to them than beauty and basketball. They are characters with depth, but they are misunderstood by society. They are stuck in a Catch-22 because, if they follow society, they are not true to themselves. But if they go against society, they will be teased. Devon makes the choice to be himself, even though he receives teasing. His motivation is for people to see who he really is. But Tanisha's problem is harder to solve. Her motivation is to blend in, but in fact, she cannot change her beauty. She must find a way to accept her beauty and ignore society's expectations of her as a dumb girl.

This is the first time the reader sees a religious character. Sterling is almost like a young preacher. Unlike the other characters, he is not afraid to be different. When he confronts the bullies in an unorthodox way, he is not embarrassed or ashamed. He is proud of being religious and of who he is. He is the first character who seems to be happy with himself for the most part. It is ironic, since he is the strangest character. He represents the idea of being happy with who you are, no matter what others might say.



Amy Moscovitz, p. 102 to Tyrone, p. 113

Amy Moscovitz, p. 102 to Tyrone, p. 113 Summary

In "Amy Moscovitz," Amy is petite and Jewish. She says she is not soft; she is tough. She became tough after her parents' divorce. Her mother left her and her father to start another family. Her dad decided they needed to toughen up. A couple years ago, Amy had appendicitis and her father would not help her walk. She is angry about this still. She is jealous because she sees Mr. Ward with his daughter, who goes to the school. They laugh and Mr. Ward takes her backpack for her. She tells Sterling that she is jealous, but he says jealousy is a waste of anger. She cannot make friends because she does not trust anyone after the divorce. Sterling says to get out there and make friends with the other girls. He says Amy should be herself. Amy is scared no one will like her for how cold she is. Sterling says maybe, maybe not, but she should try. She is not sure if she will ever be ready to take that step. Amy's poem "Ode to Stone" discusses looking like a stone, different types of stones and wanting to be a stone. She says she is almost half rock.

In "Tyrone," Tyrone comments that someone must have hurt Amy badly because she is cold. He understands. Sometimes he wishes he could turn into stone. He felt that way after his father's funeral.

In "Sheila Gamberoni," Sheila tells Mr. Ward during attendance that she prefers to be called Natalina, an Africana name. Mr. Ward is confused and the class thinks she is nuts. The girls ask her what is wrong with her and say she will never be black. Sheila likes being Italian, but she does not look like her dark hair, olive skin and dark eyes family. She has blond hair and pale skin. She is different from her family because she hangs out with blacks and Latinos and she thinks highly of them. She wants to be a social worker to help minorities. The other women in her family just want babies, but she wants a career. Sometimes she feels she is adopted. She wants a more ethnic, Africana name. She explains this to Mr. Ward and he calls her Natalina. Sheila's poem "What's in a Name?" discusses how when strangers meet they exchange names. It digs up history and culture. It is okay to want a name change.

In "Tyrone," Tyrone comments that no one says anything after Sheila's reading. Everyone is in shock. Tyrone says something is wrong with Sheila. He thinks she is white and she has it good. Tyrone asks why Mr. Ward videotapes Open Mike Fridays and Mr. Ward says he is going to show them to his students next year to warm them up to the idea. Tyrone says to make sure he shows them his readings.

Amy Moscovitz, p. 102 to Tyrone, p. 113 Analysis

The stone represents toughness. It is a solid object that takes a heavy force to be broken. In Amy, that is what she tries to achieve. She learns it from her father, who also



uses the idea of a stone as a defense mechanism. However, turning into a stone makes Amy cold and inaccessible to others. She loses her ability to socialize and loses a bit of herself. Thus, the defense mechanism fails. Being a stone is not a good choice for a feeling human being. Amy must find the motivation in herself to reintegrate herself into society. This is opposed to the other students who try to separate themselves from society's norms. Either way, it is a struggle.

Sheila wants to be African American. She wants to be seen as ethnic. This is parallel to Tanisha, who is not white, but looks white and also wants to be thought of as black and African. Both girls' motivations are to have other people see a different side of them. Yet both girls cannot change their looks; Sheila will always be white and Tanisha will always look white. Sheila goes as far as to rename herself. This shows Sheila's motivation is strong to fit in. But she does so at the cost of losing her identity. Sheila struggles with not fitting in anywhere. At home, she is the black sheep of the family for her looks and her beliefs. In school, she is also a black sheep. She just wants to fit in somewhere.



Steve Ericson, p. 114 to News at Five, p. 132

Steve Ericson, p. 114 to News at Five, p. 132 Summary

In "Steve Ericson," Steve loves New York City. He wants to be a Broadway set designer. He designs miniature, cardboard sets for imaginary plays. His goal is to get into NYU to study set design and get to Broadway. His father says they have to move out of the city. Steve is devastated, but pretends not to be. He has an earring. Steve's ambitions are in his heart and he will not give up his Broadway dream for anyone. He hopes he does not have to move. Meanwhile, the class finds out a reporter will come to the next Open Mike Friday to do a story on them and take photos. Also, Reverend Pedro Pietri, the famous poet whom Sterling admires, will be there that same day. Steve's poem "Doubtless" describes how he does not confide in anyone about his dream and once he does, people laugh. But everyone has to go for their dreams and not look back.

In "Tyrone," Tyrone comments that Steve might be hanging out with black kids because of his poetry. Tyrone says that he and Steve can peacefully coexist, but he does not want any white boys in his crew. Tyrone admits that Steve is not half bad. He also says it had been cool having Pietri there because he read to them and then sat in the audience and listened to the students' readings like equals. The reporter and photographer came and took photos, but Tyrone is worried because the photographer is white. Tyrone hopes he gets in the newspaper for good reasons.

In "Raynard Patterson," Raynard is overwhelmed with all the homework, especially essays. He wishes they could put homework on a CD because he is very musical. Music comes easier to him than words. His cousin is Sterling. Sterling says one day the whole world will hear what he has to say. Raynard reads his poem in front of Pietri and this is a huge deal because Mr. Ward usually skips over him. The other kids think he is dumb, but he has a secret as to why he never wants to read aloud. Raynard's poem "Dyslexia" discusses what it is like to be dyslexic. The letters on the page dance around. It is like a traffic accident and people do not understand what he goes through.

In "Tyrone," Tyrone is surprised again. He is shocked by Steve and Raynard. Tyrone, Wesley and Sterling get up to do a free style poem. It is hard because one person starts the poem and the next person picks up where the other guy left off—it is like rapping. Sterling urges Steve to jump in and he does. Tyrone is really impressed by Steve's rapping skills.

In the poem "News at Five" by Tyrone, Wesley and Steve, they rap a poem. Tyrone raps in the news, black are killers with guns, but that is not what he is about. He has a dream and he wants to live his dream. Steve raps that he apologizes every day for being white and he listens to hip-hop too so he can rap too. He watches the news and says there is not anything good about teenagers and it is time to prove the media wrong. Wesley raps



that tomorrow they will be writing the news, but now they should knock down barriers between black and white.

Steve Ericson, p. 114 to News at Five, p. 132 Analysis

Steve represents an extreme, outsider character. He wants to be a set designer and he wears an earring. Both of these qualities go along with the stereotype of being gay. It is not said that he is gay, nor is there a discussion of his sexuality. But since almost every stereotype is represented in the book, the reader can assume Steve may be the gay character. Steve is a very motivated person. He has always been focused not only on his dreams, but also on building the steps to get there, such as getting into NYU. Steve's motivations are solely career-oriented and his motivations are so strong that he will not let anyone or anything take away his dream.

The reader sees the breaking down of stereotypes in this section. Every character is an archetypal representation of kids in the city. There is a Hispanic teenage mother, an angry black kid, a white kid struggling with identity, and others. Now the kids begin to merge and break through these stereotypes. For example, Tyrone, Wesley and Steve rap together, which is something that would have never happened in the beginning of the book. The kids needed to go through a period of self-examination and see each other for their true selves. They represent a multiracial family, learning each other's traditions and culture. And when they blend, the end product is beautiful, like the boys' poem.



Sheila, p. 133 to Tyrone, p. 145

Sheila, p. 133 to Tyrone, p. 145 Summary

In "Sheila," Sheila imitates a black girl's walk. Wesley asks her why she is walking like that. Sheila says she just wants to fit in. She infers that Wesley does not understand because he is black. He says everyone is different inside and they all try to fit in. He says when Sheila goes to college and gets a job, everyone will be white, and ask if she will change herself again. This hits home for Sheila. Wesley says Sheila just needs to read her poetry to fit in. Sheila's poem "Private Puzzle" discusses how God must love puzzles. No two puzzle pieces are alike. She seeks the right slot to fit herself into. The podium is her slot and the poets make a single poem.

In "Tyrone," Tyrone comments that Sheila, Leslie and he are the only ones who have read a second week in a row. He is impressed by Sheila's poetry. He says that if she is not careful, she will end up with friends.

In "Janelle," Janelle tutors an eight year-old boy. He says she is the most beautiful lady in the world and he proposes to her. She is flattered that someone thinks she is beautiful despite her weight. She notices that the kids in Mr. Ward's class look at her differently. Everyone leans in and listens to her poetry; no one notices her weight. Janelle's poem "The Door" discusses carving out a door. When no one is looking she is insecure and shy and she thinks everyone else is like this too. Her heart is an onion in which the layers can be peeled away.

In "Tyrone," Tyrone says that the group made it into the paper. The reporter says their poetry is energetic and has rich social messages. Tyrone calls the reporter to thank him and says he should come out for the assembly. Tyrone wants another write up in the paper.

Sheila, p. 133 to Tyrone, p. 145 Analysis

Janelle finally feels beautiful. A boy compliments her on her beauty; she is flattered. But what means more to her is the class listening to her poetry and not looking at her weight. Janelle has taken a self-journey in this book. The reader first meets Janelle as a highly insecure girl. She pulls down her shirt to attempt to hide her rolls. But then she morphs into a confident, young woman. She is confident enough to read in front of the class. She can accept a compliment. This self-journey helps Janelle discover her true self. She is a far cry from her old self.

Tyrone makes strides as well. In the last section, he let Steve, a white kid, rap with him. Here, he calls the white reporter to thank him and invites him again. Tyrone begins to let down his barriers against white people. The reader first meets an angry Tyrone who does not trust whites. Now he befriends and welcomes them. Like Janelle, Tyrone's self-

journey throughout this book is significant. He develops and grows into an accepting person.



Lupe, p. 146 to Tyrone, p. 156

Lupe, p. 146 to Tyrone, p. 156 Summary

In "Lupe," Lupe is worried about studying. Mr. Ward says Lupe can go to a decent college if she pulls up her grades. She wants to go somewhere out of state, away from her stepfather. She wants to be a kindergarten teacher or pediatrician. Her sister says she is envious because Lupe is smart and she always wanted to go to college. Lupe's focus is on studying and not on having a baby to find love. Lupe's poem "Imagine" discusses her five year-old self walking by a mirror and hearing her father. She opens a drawer labeled tomorrow and stores her past in there.

In "Tyrone," Tyrone says Lupe's voice is strong, Lupe pays attention in class and she goes to the library.

In "Diondra," Diondra leaves art school brochures out at her house. Her father is furious. Mr. Ward says she has a good chance of getting a scholarship. She slips a poem and a drawing of Michael Jordan, her father's favorite athlete, under his television remote. Her father wants her to be a basketball player. Diondra's poem "Self-Portrait: A Poem for My Father" says that love is not expectation. She drowns in her father's expectation. She wishes her father would care about her. Her dad chose his life; he should now let her choose hers.

In "Tyrone," Tyrone likes this poem. Tyrone's mom is glad he has direction. Tyrone reads her his poem and she cries happy tears and encourages him to keep writing. He loves his mom.

Lupe, p. 146 to Tyrone, p. 156 Analysis

Lupe changes her motivations. She had started out wanting to have a baby to have someone to love. Now she focuses on improving herself and not on her loneliness. Lupe is goal-oriented and she is motivated to get good grades and go to college. This is a new Lupe; even Tyrone notices the changes in her. Her voice is stronger. She pays attention in class. She represents the Latina woman who makes something of herself. She will not be a statistic. She will rise above.

Love is a difficult concept for Diondra. Her father only loves her conditionally. That is something with which Diondra struggles because she wonders how can she love herself unconditionally when her parent does not. She is a character that does not have a happy ending. She must still go on a journey to improve her parental relationship. This foreshadows that Diondra may need more of a voice to speak up for herself. She is quiet. The poem to her father foreshadows that her voice is about to emerge. Unfortunately, the reader will not get a chance to see her fully develop.



Porscha Johnson, p. 157 to Epilogue

Porscha Johnson, p. 157 to Epilogue Summary

In "Porscha Johnson," the reader is told that last year, Porscha had had a bully for nine months. She finally lost it and beat the bully up. Porscha has gained a bad reputation for being violent, but she is calm. She does not know why no one remembers about how badly she had been bullied. She wishes the kids would remember. Violence is in her blood. Her mother was abusive. Porscha practices ways to calm herself. Leslie says Porscha needs to let people get to know her. Look at Tyrone; no one knew he was so deep. Porscha's poem "A Letter to My Mother" discusses her mom's drug overdose, about which Porscha had been angry, but now she forgives her and says goodbye.

In "Tyrone," Mr. Ward takes their poems down from the walls and makes a book for each student. At the assembly, Mr. Ward asks a student to talk about what Open Mike Fridays means to her/him. Everyone is scared, but Tyrone. Tyrone talks about how the class is made up of all different races, but he feels connected. They are not as different as he thought. He almost gets choked up. Mr. Ward will have Open Mike Fridays in all his classes next year and Tyrone says he will be there.

In Epilogue, Mai Tren, a black-Vietnamese girl, does not fit in. Blacks do not think she is black enough. Asians do not think she is purely Asian. Whites want her to help them with math, even though she hates math. At the assembly, she sees Mr. Ward's class is like a family and says she will try his class next year and see how it goes.

Porscha Johnson, p. 157 to Epilogue Analysis

Porscha is a character who represents the end of the cycle of abuse. Just as Chankara Troupe refuses to be abused, Porscha refuses to be the abuser. Her motivations are to prove people wrong. She wants to be a calm and nonviolent person. But she recognizes there is something inside of her that is dangerous and she motivates herself to remain calm and not give in to this side of herself. She forgives her mother for dying. This foreshadows that Porscha may now be able to forgive herself for beating up her bully. She can move forward to becoming the person she wants to be.

Mai Tren symbolizes the hope for the continuation of poetry. Students like her will keep the poetry of hopes and dreams alive. She represents another child who will be saved from alienation through poetry.



Characters

Tyrone Bittings appears in Tyrone

Tyrone is an angry kid. He does not care about school. The only reason he goes to school is for his friends. He wants to be a hip-hop star, but he does not think he will live long enough to do so. His father died before he was 30 years-old in a drive-by shooting. His father had become clean and sober before he died so Tyrone has some good memories of him. Tyrone loves to read his poetry. He reads at every Open Mike Friday. Tyrone is the main character in this book of 18 characters. Tyrone comments after every poem is read. He has a comment for everything. Tyrone is also a character in the sense that he says really funny things and has a good sense of humor.

Tyrone is distrustful of white people though. He thinks they do not know him nor can they relate to him. He seems almost racist until he starts to become friends with a couple white kids. In particular, he lets Steve, a white kid, rap in his crew. This is a huge step for Tyrone. Tyrone's feelings really come out when he speaks in front of the assembly and says the poetry makes him feel connected to his classmates and he realizes they are not that different. He almost gets choked up and he seems to be speaking for the entire class.

Wesley Bad Boy Boone appears in Wesley

Wesley "Bad Boy" Boone is an important character because he begins the Open Mike Fridays and introduces poetry to the entire class. Without Wesley being the poetry pioneer, the other kids would not have asked to read their poetry. Wesley does not like to do homework. He makes up excuses. He is also a protector. He looks after his friend Tyrone to make sure Tyrone goes to school. Wesley sees the value in school, even though Tyrone does not at first. As a homework assignment from Mr. Ward's class, Wesley must study the Harlem Renaissance. He ends up loving it and loving the poetry of Langston Hughes. He chooses not to write an essay on Hughes, but instead, he writes a tribute poem about Hughes and how great of a poet he is. Wesley is a risk taker for not handing in the essay and for presenting his poetry to Mr. Ward.

Wesley's risk is worth it. Mr. Ward surprises Wesley and asks him to read his poem to the class. Wesley is embarrassed at first, usually not in his nature, but he does not want the other kids to laugh at him. He reads and they do not. Wesley feels good about himself. This inspires the other kids to bring in their poetry and read. Wesley is an important character because he sparks the class's love for poetry. Though only one section of the book is dedicated to him, he is always in the background as Tyrone's best friend and he gives advice to Sheila to be true to herself. Wesley is almost like a wise sage. He is also a poetry pioneer.



Mr. Ward appears in Bronx Masquerade

Mr. Ward is the teacher for this high school English class. It is his idea to have Open Mike Fridays, so the kids can read their poetry. He believes in his students and wants them to be high achievers.

Chankara Troupe appears in Chankara

Chankara gets beat up by a boy, but she throws him out of her house. She will not be like her sister, who has a physically abusive boyfriend. Chankara does not want to be in the cycle of abuse.

Raul Ramirez appears in Raul

Raul is a painter and poet. He likens himself to Diego Rivera. He wants to paint and write about the beauty of his Puerto Rican culture.

Diondra Jordan appears in Diondra

Diondra is six feet tall and shy. People think she should play basketball, but she is secretly an artist. She gets teased for not being good at basketball.

Devon Hope appears in Devon

Devon is a good basketball player. He is also very handsome. Devon pretends to practice basketball, but he really goes to the library to read poetry. He hides his love of poetry to fit in with the other boys.

Lupe Algarin appears in Lupe

Lupe Algarin adores her niece, her sister's daughter. Lupe wants to have a baby to feel loved. Her mother and her mother's husband only care about themselves and Lupe's siblings have all moved out.

Gloria Martinez appears in Gloria

Gloria is a teenage mother with a baby named Angel. Gloria loves him, but life as a teenage mom is hard. Her schoolwork suffers. She strives to graduate high school and go to college.



Leslie Lucas appears in Leslie

Leslie Lucas is a white girl from the suburbs. She feels she has nothing in common with her black and Hispanic classmates. She is lonely because her mother died and she had to move to the Bronx and live with her grandmother. Loneliness consumes Leslie.

Judianne Alexander appears in Judianne

Judianne loves to design and sew her own clothes. She has low self-esteem because she believes her bluish-black skin and hair are ugly. Her stepfather makes fun of her looks and her mother does not defend her.

Tanisha Scott appears in Tanisha

Tanisha is a gorgeous, black girl. She is the envy of all the other black girls. She has light skin and hair and green eyes. She has good hair. Her beauty causes negative attention such as boys hitting on her and girls hating her. She tries to downplay her looks, so people can see the real her.

Sterling S. Hughes appears in Sterling

Sterling wants to be a science teacher, plays guitar and loves God. He lives his life by praying and believing in God. He sees his mother get everything she needs because she prays to God. He likes the poet Reverend Pedro Pietri because he writes about God and the street.

Amy Moscovitz appears in Amy

Amy is Jewish. Her parents divorced and her mom left her and her father to start another family. Her father and she become tough and cold to not get hurt again. But Amy is now too cold and does not know how to make friends.

Sheila Gamberoni appears in Sheila

Sheila is Italian with blond hair and pale skin. She does not look like her dark hair and eyes and olive skin family. She wants to be a social worker for minorities. She wants to be more ethnic. She is the black sheep of her family and in school. She does not fit in anywhere.



Steve Ericson appears in Steve

Steve is a white kid who loves hip-hop. He wants to be a Broadway set designer. He works toward getting good grades to get into NYU and become a set designer. He is upset because his parents want to move out of the city. Nothing will deter Steve from his Broadway dream.

Raynard Patterson appears in Raynard

Raynard does not read his poetry aloud. The kids think he is stupid, but he has been hiding a secret: he has dyslexia. He finally gets the courage to read his poem about dyslexia in front of the class.

Porscha Johnson appears in Porscha

Porscha had been bullied last year for nine months. She beat up her bully after nine months of torture. Kids are scared of her. Porscha says she is nonviolent, but the cycle of abuse runs in her family. Her mother abused her. Her mother died of an overdose and Porscha lives with her grandmother.



Objects/Places

Harlem Renaissance appears in Wesley Bad Boy Boone

The Harlem Renaissance is a famous time period in American history in which black writers, artists and musicians showcased their work in New York's City Harlem section.

Lenox and 7th appears in Wesley Bad Boy Boone

Lenox and 7th are streets in Harlem, New York City.

The Apollo appears in Wesley Bad Boy Boone

The Apollo is a famous music hall and theater in Harlem. Many black musicians and comedians started their careers there.

Homeys appears in Tyrone Bittings

Homeys are friends.

Open Mike Fridays appears in Tyrone Bittings

Open Mike Fridays occur in Mr. Ward's English class. Student poets stand in front of the class and read their poetry.

Kufi appears in Tyrone

A kufi is a beanie-like hat worn by Africans. It is short without a brim and rounded. It is usually a knitted cap.

Geritol appears in D-Train

Geritol is a vitamin supplement for senior citizens.

Five-O appears in News at Five

Five-O is slang for the police. It comes from the old television show, Hawaii Five-O.



Piece appears in News at Five

A piece is a gun.

Hypodermic Needle appears in A Letter to My Mother

A hypodermic needle is what drug addicts use to shoot drugs into the veins of their arms.



Themes

Racial Tension

One major theme in *Bronx Masquerade* is racial tension. Many of the characters have issues with either their race or the race of their classmates. For example, Tyrone is a racist, for all intents and purposes. He openly says he does not trust or like white people. He does not allow himself to be friends with them. When a white reporter comes to visit their class, Tyrone automatically assumes he will write something bad about them or not understand their poetry. Tyrone also originally does not let Steve, a white classmate, rap in his crew. Tyrone says whites and blacks can peacefully coexist, but he does not want a white boy in his crew. Tyrone is an angry kid, who is consumed with hatred for the white race. Anytime he encounters a white person, the racial tension is at the forefront.

Conversely, Sheila is a white girl. However, she does not want to be white. She desires to be ethnic or African. She has racial tension inside of her because she does not know how to be herself. Instead, she wants to be any other race. This causes racial tension amongst her classmates because they do not know how to respond to her racial identity crisis.

Mr. Ward's class is full of kids from various races and cultures. Until they read poetry aloud, they do not know much about each other. This closed atmosphere creates racial tension. It is only the poetry that ends the racial tension in the book.

Defining Beauty

One of the major themes in *Bronx Masquerade* is defining beauty. A couple of the girl characters struggle to define their beauty. They feel ugly and unwanted and suffer from low self-esteem. For example, Janelle is overweight. The kids make fun of her to her face. She pulls down her shirt to try and hide her rolls of fat. She does not feel beautiful. She feels that thin defines beauty in the culture around her, and since she is not thin, she is not beautiful. She struggles to find the beauty within herself. Meanwhile, Judianne has a beautiful body and she knows it. But she hates her bluish-black skin and hair. She longs to be beautiful as defined by the fashion industry, since she worships fashion. She defines beauty as being light skinned and having good hair. Her stepfather also makes fun of her looks, which only compounds Judianne's definition of beauty. Her self-esteem is so low, that it is hard to find beauty within herself.

On the other hand, Tanisha is a gorgeous, black girl. She is the envy of all the other girls. She has light skin, green eyes and good hair. Men hit on her constantly and girls hate her for her beauty. Tanisha hates being defined by beauty. She wants to be defined by her inner spirit and she wants people to acknowledge her African roots. She wants to feel like part of the black community. Tanisha does everything to downplay her beauty,



but it does not work. She is too stunning and this physical beauty defines her to other people. When she reads her poetry, her classmates see that she wants to be defined by more than her looks.

Identity Crisis

One of the major themes of *Bronx Masquerade* is identity crisis. Many of the characters are in an identity crisis, especially due to racial and cultural differences. The character who is most afflicted is Sheila. She is a white, Italian-American girl who has pale skin and blond hair. But her family all has dark hair, eyes and olive skin. In school, she feels out of place as well because her classmates are black and Latino. Sheila wants to be ethnic or African, so she takes on an African name. She is in such an identity crisis, she does not know who she is, literally. Sheila does not know how to be herself, nor is she comfortable with her identity. She struggles with finding the right identity for herself. In comparison, Judianne struggles with her identity of looking "too black" because she has bluish-black skin. She is in an identity crisis because she believes her African qualities make her ugly and define her to others as "too black."

Devon struggles with his identity as well. He is known as a jock. He is a good basketball player. But that is not his true identity. He pretends to practice basketball, but in reality, he goes to the library and reads poetry. His true identity is as a poet and poetry lover, but it is not cool for the other guys to know this. So he continues with his untrue identity as a dumb jock. Finally, he reveals his true identity when he brings his poetry book on the basketball team bus. Meanwhile, Raynard has an identity as being dumb. He refuses to read in class and Mr. Ward skips over him. So everyone thinks he is stupid. But in reality, Raynard has a secret: he is dyslexic. Finally, Raynard gets the courage to write a poem and read it aloud. Everyone is stunned because he never talks and everyone assumes he is stupid. Raynard reveals his true identity in the form of a beautiful poem.

Style

Point of View

Bronx Masquerade is told from the first person point of view of all the major characters. Each section is dedicated to a character and that character continues their own story from a first person point of view. This perspective allows the reader to see what each character goes through in a deeply personal way. Also, all the characters are children of around 15 years of age. Thus, the perspective is a young one of teenagers who struggle with identity and are growing and developing. The perspective allows the readers into the characters' private thoughts, including what their identities are as opposed to what everyone else thinks. For example, Diondra is shy outwardly, but due to her first person point of view, the reader sees she is much more than that. She is an artist and a poet who struggles with her identity.

The only perspective the reader receives repeatedly is that of Tyrone. Tyrone is used as an authoritative perspective in the book because he comments on the other students' poetry readings. He confirms the student's identity and how the student reveals her/himself. For example, Raynard says he never reads in front of the class due to his dyslexia. The reader has no way of knowing this is true, but with Tyrone's first person point of view, he confirms Raynard does not read and everyone thinks he is stupid because of this. Tyrone is shocked by Raynard's great poem and says so. Thus, Tyrone confirms what the students think of each other.

Setting

The setting of Bronx Masquerade is the Bronx, New York City. It is set in a public school in the Bronx. The school is comprised of high school students of all races, but it is heavily populated with black and Hispanic children. The school itself is hardly described, nor is the actual Bronx neighborhood. The action takes place in Mr. Ward's English class, which is a safe haven for the kids to reveal their true identities. The classroom seems like a regular room, but Mr. Ward hangs the students' poetry on the walls. The poetry is in paper frames. When the students get up to read their poetry, Mr. Ward shuts off most of the lights. When the student gets to the front, he turns on the lights as the student stands in front of the video camera. It has a similar effect to being stage, which makes sense for Open Mike Fridays.

The students' neighborhoods in the Bronx and houses or apartments are not described. The non-descriptive classroom is the main setting, especially from Tyrone's point of view as he sits in his seat. The reader gets a small glimpse at the end of the book of the assembly. It is some type of big hall, presumably the gymnasium, where the students get up to perform their poetry in front of the entire school. The assembly is an important place because all the students in the school gather there and the student poets are finally recognized by their peers.



The author probably does not give description of setting to make this school sound like any city school in the US.

Language and Meaning

The language of the book is young-sounding and urban. The book is set in the Bronx and the language reflects this setting. For example, the black kids speak in an urban voice using some slang. For example, they say "ain't" instead of "isn't" and sometimes, they do not complete sentences in a grammatically correct way. Tyrone is the repeated, authoritative voice in the book. His language has a lot of slang such as "ain't," "homeys" and "my moms." But through this street language, the reader can tell the kids are intelligent. Both their thoughts and the way they verbalize their thoughts are shown as sophisticated. When they give advice to each other, the reader can see their sophistication. For example, Wesley advises Sheila if she changes herself now, she will always have to change herself. He speaks to her in his urban voice, but he sounds like a wise, old man.

The Latino characters speak in a normal sounding voice, but occasionally use Spanish words. The white characters seem to speak with grammatically perfect language; they do not seem as urban, even though they grow up in the same place as the black characters. Thus, the black characters have a more black slang/urban type of language.

When the students read their poetry, most of the minority students use the urban language for their choice of words. The white students again use grammatically perfect language. The exception is Steve, a white kid, who raps along with Tyrone and Wesley, two black kids. Steve loves hip-hop and uses the urban, black slang along with Tyrone and Wesley. So the poetry reflects the language of the student poets.

Structure

This book is comprised of many chapters. Each chapter has a title of a student poet and the chapter tells the story of the student from her/his first person point of view. Each chapter ranges in length from one page to approximately four pages long. After each chapter, there is a poem by that student. After each poem is a small commentary chapter from Tyrone. The chapters have short paragraphs that lack description. The book follows the time line of roughly a school year in a Bronx public high school in current day. The reader can easily follow the characters from one story to the next.

The plot of the book is easy to understand revolving student poets in a Bronx public school and how they use poetry to understand each other and themselves.

The book's pace is normal and moves moderately being neither fast-paced nor slow. It is the right speed for a modern day, young adult reader. It is an easy read with some moderately-difficult vocabulary interspersed throughout the story as well as urban slang terms. The plot engrosses the reader into this world of urban, student poetry moving

from one student's story to the next. The book is an easy read and entertains as a whole.



Quotes

"I'm more worried about figuring out what I want to do if I live." Wesley "Bad Boy" Boone, p. 3

"School ain't nothin' but a joke." Tyrone Bittings, p. 7

"Life is cold. Future? What I got is right now, right here, spending time with my homeys." Tyrone Bittings, p. 8

"I could use me some future." Tyrone Bittings, p. 8

"Maybe it's time I just started being who I am." Devon Hope, p. 31

"For I am coconut / and the heart of me / is sweeter / than you know." Inside by Janelle Battle, p. 49

"Just be yourself." Amy Moscovitz, p. 104

"If a dream is in your heart, you never lose it." Steve Ericson, p. 116

"Last week, my English class was the world." Raynard Patterson, p. 129

"The world ain't but one big surprise after another." Tyrone, p. 128

"All I ever think about is now, because now hurts so bad." Sheila, p. 135

"I feel like we connected. I feel like I know you now." Tyrone, p. 164



Topics for Discussion

How is the character of Mr. Ward used in this book? He does not have a section, but he has a strong voice. What does that voice say? How do Mr. Ward's actions and words influence the other characters?

What is the "masquerade" in regard to the title of the book? Who masquerades in the book? Who does not? Where do you see the idea of masquerade at the forefront of the book?

What does the author try to say about race? How does she use stereotypes to drive home her message? What is her message?

The book takes place in a Bronx school. Do you think the book would have as much power set in another city? Or could this book be set in suburbia and have the same power? Why or why not?

The author uses 18 different characters to compose this book. Which character is the strongest? Which is the weakest? Which character do you relate to the most? Which character is the opposite of you? Explain why.

Beauty is a major theme. Which character is the most beautiful to you and why? How is beauty defined in your world? How does the media define beauty? Does the media's definition of beauty relate to this book?

Which character develops the most in the book? How does s/he develop? Which character learns to be her/himself successfully and how? Do you feel like you are successful at being yourself? Why or why not?