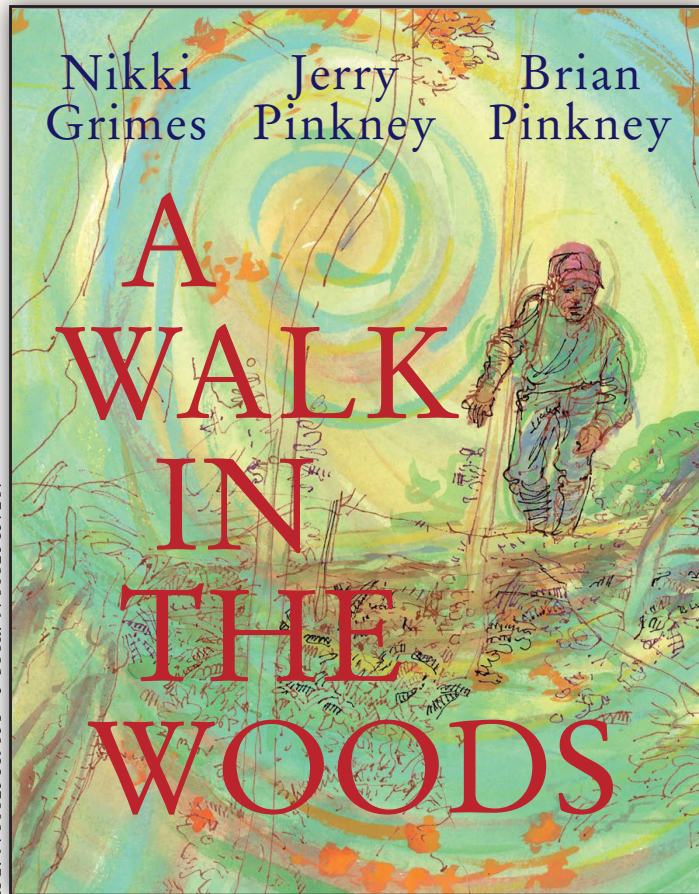


HOLIDAY HOUSE EDUCATOR'S GUIDE



NEAL PORTER BOOKS

A Walk in the Woods

by **Nikki Grimes**
illustrated by **Jerry Pinkney**
and **Brian Pinkney**

- ★“Touching.”
—*The Horn Book*, Starred Review
- ★“Powerfully layered.”
—*Publishers Weekly*, Starred Review
- ★“Unforgettable.”
—*Kirkus Reviews*, Starred Review
- ★“Inspiring.”
—*Booklist*, Starred Review
- ★“A true wonder.”
—*The Bulletin*, Starred Review

A Junior Library Guide Gold Standard Selection

ABOUT THE BOOK

In this moving account of loss, a boy takes a walk in the woods and makes a discovery that changes his understanding of his father.

Confused and distraught after the death of his father, a boy opens an envelope his dad left behind and is surprised to find a map of the woods beyond their house, with one spot marked in bright red. What the boy discovers shows him a side of his dad he never knew, and something even deeper for them to share together.

BEHIND THE BOOK

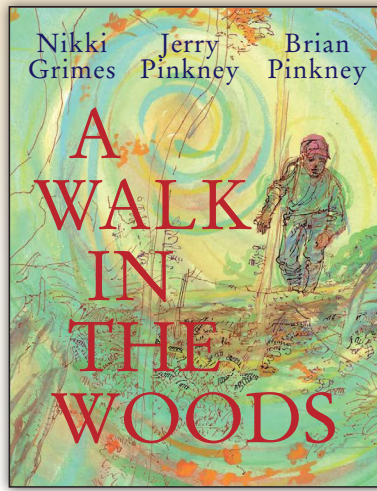
New York Times bestselling author Nikki Grimes and the Caldecott Award-winning illustrator Jerry Pinkney spent the early days of the pandemic emailing back and forth and talking about collaborating on a book, with Jerry sharing all of the pictures he took of the woods around his house. From this, they conjured a story of a boy's struggle with grief, and all the things he sees and feels on a walk through the forest.

Jerry sadly passed away in the fall of 2021, but not before he delivered tight pencil sketches of the forests he loved. When his son Brian took on the task of completing the illustrations, he found himself connecting with his father in a whole new way, his experience mirroring that of the boy in the book. The result is a simultaneously touching and deeply authentic story about the ways shared pastimes keep us close to those we've lost.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Poetry attempts to stir readers' imaginations or emotions. How is the text of this book poetry? Talk about the emotions that author Nikki Grimes stirs within you. Contrast what you feel at the beginning and the end of the book.
- Discuss the meaning of the opening sentence: "A week after the funeral, I stare in the morning mirror, angry that my father's eyes stare back at me." How does this sentence introduce the main character? Why is the boy angry? What does the author mean when she says the father's eyes stare back at the boy?
- The theme of a poem or story is the overall meaning. What is the theme of this poem? Explain why the woods are so special to the boy.
- Take a close look at the illustration opposite the title page. Who is the woman? Why does she have a hand on the boy's shoulder? Point out other times hands appear in the illustrations of the book. Draw a connection between these hands and the main theme of the poem.
- Explain why the boy is angry that his father left him a map rather than a letter. What is the meaning of the map?
- Describe the walk that the boy takes. Along the way, he encounters the past. Discuss what the boy's dad meant when he told him, "There's always something that remains." What is the connection between past and present in this book? How does following the map through the woods help the boy deal with his sadness?
- What is the true treasure that the boy's father leaves? How did the boy's father know his son needed these treasures? What is significant about the illustration where the deer watches the boy leave the woods? Explain what the woods gave the boy. What did the boy leave behind?
- Study the illustration of the boy looking at his dad's sketches. Then look at the picture of Jerry Pinkney at the end of the book. How does the boy resemble Pinkney?
- Read "A Walk to My Heart," which Brian Pinkney writes at the end of the book. How might Brian Pinkney identify with the boy in the poem? Explain how *A Walk in the Woods* is a gift to all readers.

Guide created by Pat Scales, retired school librarian and independent consultant, Greenville, South Carolina.



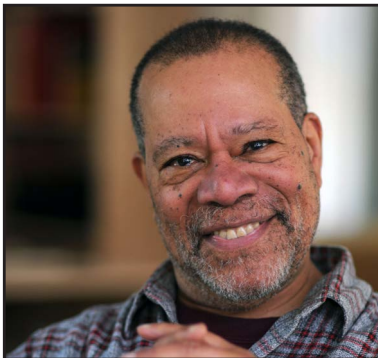
ABOUT THE CREATORS

Photo Credit: Aaron Lemen



Nikki Grimes is the recipient of the Virginia Hamilton Lifetime Achievement Award, the ALAN Award for outstanding contributions to young adult literature, the Children's Literature Legacy Award, the Virginia Hamilton Literary Award, and the NCTE Award for Excellence in Poetry for Children. Ms. Grimes lives in Corona, California.

Photo Credit: Thomas Kristich



Jerry Pinkney (1939–2021) was the author and/or illustrator of many books for young readers, including the Orbis Pictus Award winner *A Place to Land* by Barry Wittenstein and *The Lion & the Mouse*, for which he earned a Caldecott Medal. He received five Caldecott Honors, five Coretta Scott King Book Awards, four Coretta Scott King Honors, and five *New York Times* Best Illustrated Book citations.

Photo Credit: Chloe Pinkney



Brian Pinkney is the son of Jerry Pinkney. He continued illustration of *A Walk in the Woods* after his father passed away, supplementing Jerry's sketches with watercolor painting. Brian has illustrated many books for children, including *Duke Ellington* by his wife, Andrea Pinkney, and *The Faithful Friend* by Robert D. San Souci, both of which received Caldecott Honors. He also received the Coretta Scott King Book Award for *In the Time of the Drums* by Kim L. Siegelson. He lives with his family in Brooklyn, New York.