

An Educator's Guide to

Barack Obama: Son of Promise, Child of Hope

By Nikki Grimes

Illustrated by Bryan Collier

ABOUT THE BOOK

In short vignettes, a mother shares the story of Barack Obama, a man who brings hope and promise to the next generation of Americans. Share his story with a young person in your life so they can learn that anything is possible, especially in America.

PREREADING QUESTIONS:

This book is a biography. Why are books sometimes written about a single person? What do you know about Barack Obama? What do you think we might learn about him in this biography?

DISCUSSION TOPICS

Why does the mother offer to tell her son, David, the story of Barack Obama? Do your parents or grandparents ever tell you a story? Why is it important to read biographies?

Why do you think the author decided to share descriptions of Barack Obama's parents? Do you think this was an important fact for us to know? Why? What would be an important fact for readers of your biography to know?

Why is Hawaii an important place to understand how Barack Obama grew up? Would you like to grow up there? In Hawaii there were many people from many places but they all got along well together. Do you think this is true across America? What did this teach Barack Obama?

When Barack was a young man, he saw a beggar and wanted to help him. Have you ever seen anything that makes you want to help? Can kids do anything to make a difference? How?

Biographies always discuss the obstacles that a person overcame along the way. What were obstacles that Barack Obama faced in his childhood and as he became a man? Which one do you think was most difficult? Why?

What important decisions did Barack Obama have to make in his life? Which decision or choice do you think was the most important one he made? How do you make important decisions? What important decisions will you need to make in the next ten years?

Why do you think Nikki Grimes selected these events to show us Barack Obama's life? How do you think she learned this information? If you want to know about someone else's life how do you find out about it?

How was Barack a bridge between the different parts of his family? How did he use this to become a bridge between different kinds of people in America? What does it mean to "be a bridge"? How could you be a bridge in your own school, neighborhood, or community?

Bryan Collier uses paint and collage to bring stories to life. Which picture in the book is your favorite? Why? Why do you think he used the colors, patterns, and shapes that he did? Create a piece of art inspired by Bryan Collier's work, and in a brief artist's statement explain your choices on the back.

PROJECTS AND RESEARCH:

Language Arts:

Write a speech about how you would change the country if you became president. What issues would be most important to you, as a citizen? Share the speeches with your class or other classes in your grade!

History:

Create a time line of Barack Obama's life. Illustrate the event that you think was most important in shaping the man he has become. Research the life of another great American and again, try to discover the moment you think made the biggest difference in their life and career. Then create a time line of your own life, and push your story and time line into the future, setting dates for the years you will accomplish all your own dreams and ambitions.

Reading:

Create a chart in your reading journal, and as you read the story of Barack Obama, choose at least five quotes from the story that you think are important. Then write your response to each of them. What do they make you think about? What connections do you make? What do you wonder about? How do you feel?

Important quotes to you:

Ex. "Barry grew—swimming, surfing, and spear-fishing next to playmates from places like Portugal, China, India, and Japan."

What you think, feel, or wonder . . .

I wish I knew people from all those countries! And I would love to spearfish and surf after school instead of riding my bike.

Math:

Research the math used to determine a presidential election. What percentage of electoral votes must a candidate receive? Why do some states have more electoral votes than others? How do candidates decide where to spend their advertising dollars? When you run for president in the future, where will you focus your attention and money? Why?

Art:

On the outside of a small box (a shoebox is just fine) create a collage from magazines, newspapers, or illustrations of your own that represent what you'd like to see in your future. Fill this hope box with quotes, stories, and letters that inspire you to reach these dreams and goals.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Nikki Grimes began writing at the age of six. Her many award-winning titles include the picture books *Talkin' About Bessie: The Story of Aviator Elizabeth Coleman*, which won the Coretta Scott King Illustrator Award and a Coretta Scott King Author Honor. She also wrote *Bronx Masquerade*, *The Road to Paris*, *Jazmin's Notebook*, and *Dark Sons*. She lives in Corona, California.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Bryan Collier began painting at the age of fifteen and has developed an original style, combining collage with watercolors. Bryan is the author and illustrator of the Coretta Scott King Award-winning book *Uptown*. He received Caldecott Honors for the books *Martin's Big Words* by Doreen Rappaport, which was also a Coretta Scott King Illustrator Honor book and *Rosa* by Nikki Giovanni, which received the Coretta Scott King Illustrator Award. Mr. Collier lives in New York, where he directs mural programs for children.

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This guide was created by Tracie Vaughn Zimmer, a reading specialist and children's author.