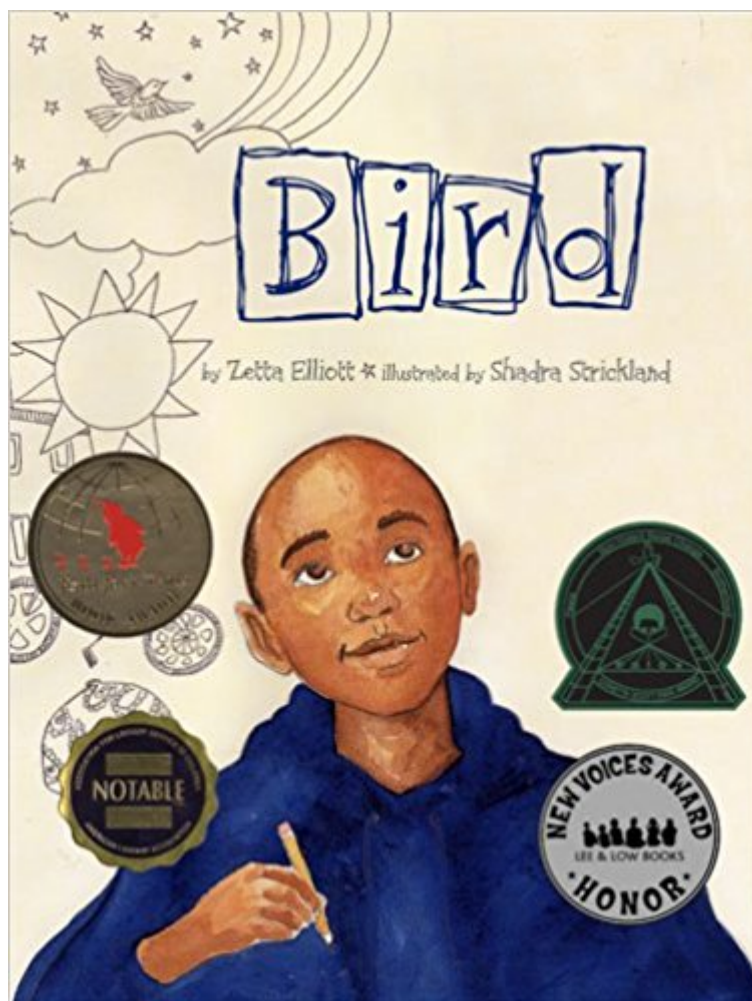


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# Bird



## Synopsis

Young Mekhai, better known as Bird, loves to draw. With drawings, he can erase the things that don't turn out right. In real life, problems aren't so easily fixed. As Bird struggles to understand the death of his beloved grandfather and his older brother's drug addiction, he escapes into his art. Drawing is an outlet for Bird's emotions and imagination, and provides a path to making sense of his world. In time, with the help of his grandfather's friend, Bird finds his own special somethin' and wings to fly. Told with spare grace, Bird is a touching look at a young boy coping with real-life troubles. Readers will be heartened by Bird's quiet resilience, and moved by the healing power of putting pencil to paper.

## Book Information

Lexile Measure: 720L (What's this?)

Hardcover: 48 pages

Publisher: Lee & Low Books; First Edition edition (October 1, 2008)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 160060241X

ISBN-13: 978-1600602412

Product Dimensions: 0.5 x 8 x 10 inches

Shipping Weight: 12.6 ounces

Average Customer Review: 4.2 out of 5 stars 11 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #881,136 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #104 in [Books > Children's Books > Growing Up & Facts of Life > Difficult Discussions > Drugs](#) #637 in [Books > Children's Books > Growing Up & Facts of Life > Difficult Discussions > Death & Dying](#) #1129 in [Books > Children's Books > Growing Up & Facts of Life > Fiction](#)

Age Range: 7 - 10 years

Grade Level: 2 - 5

## Customer Reviews

Grade 1-5 • An urban African-American boy transcends the loss of loved ones with help from a caring elderly mentor and from the sustaining ability to create art. Bird looks back and remembers his once-admired older brother Marcus's slow descent into drug addiction, expulsion from the family home, and ultimate death—a death that ostensibly led to the decline and death of his beloved grandfather as well. Wise Uncle Son picks up where Granddad leaves off and becomes the steadying and inspiring influence in Bird's life as he learns not only the hard lesson

that, "You can't fix a broken soul," but also to look to the future with confidence. Despite the plainspoken, accessible language, the author's flashback structure may not be as successful with this audience as a more linear story arc. The illustrations, rendered with a delicate touch in watercolor, gouache, charcoal, and pen, emphasize the textual theme of resilience in adversity, even while Marcus's appearances are often shrouded in a palette of grays. Bird's own pencil drawings of city life and the repetition of Marcus's symbolic bright cap add interest and meaning to the visual narrative. From a first-time author and illustrator comes a sad truth of contemporary life successfully leavened with hopeful optimism.

—Kate McClelland, Perrot Memorial Library, Old Greenwich, CT Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

In this beautiful picture book for older readers, Elliott and Strickland tell a moving story in spare free verse and clear mixed-media pictures of an African American boy who loves to draw. At first Bird's mentor is his older brother, Marcus, a graffiti artist. Then Marcus becomes a junkie who is eventually kicked out of their home. Drug use among family members is a reality for some young people, but it is rare to find books for the age group that reflect that experience. Marcus's need for "a fix" and his eventual death are both handled with subtlety: "Marcus never got better. After the funeral, Granddad went to bed." Bird's elderly friend, Uncle Son, keeps the young artist strong and tells him a story from slavery times of the people in chains who could fly when their spirits broke free. The spacious scenes of the boy beneath birds soaring high above the city streets echoes what Bird discovers: that art can inspire, comfort, and elevate. Pair this with Virginia Hamilton's *The People Could Fly* (1985). Grades 2-5. --Hazel Rochman

A wonderful book for the whole family. Shadra's illustrations are perfect for the story.

Beautifully illustrated and a loving sensitive story. Highly recommend.

Excellent story and illustrations.

A very moving story. It deals with difficult issues like drugs and death, so it may be too heavy for some readers. The issues are dealt with indirectly, so young readers would most likely be confused unless they have experienced similar family situations.

Seriously, I get so irritated by this that I almost rated this book lower, because it continues the stereotype that all black kids struggle against poverty, broken families and drug abuse. All the Coretta Scott King awards seem to go to books that fulfill this stereotype. If I hadn't happened to read "The Black Canary" and "The Hickory Chair" this week, I would be just about ready to give up. "The Black Canary" and "The Hickory Chair" Bird is a beautiful (words and illustrations), but in a typical middle class mixed-race elementary classroom, the black kids are already held up as miserable victims and experts on The Black Experience. They can't just be kids, they have to be Black Kids. This book does nothing to erase or ease that pigeon-holing of Black Kids into one-dimensional victims. Being Black is not a pathology, but we shouldn't expect the prestigious people at the Coretta Scott King awards to recognize that, I guess.

He loved to draw birds, but he wasn't called Bird because of that. Granddad told him that when he was a baby he would "cheep just like a baby bird in its nest, waiting to be fed" and so Bird seemed like a natural nickname. Bird's big brother Marcus was a really good artist and helped critique his work. Some of his big brother's best stuff ended up on walls near school, but Granddad frowned heavily on it and said it was nothing but "garbage graffiti." Art belonged in museums, not in the streets. Marcus was changing and art no longer had any meaning for him. He left school and firmly told Bird "It's not too late for you . . . " Something very scary and unusual was happening to his brother. Bird kept drawing because an eraser could always change the picture, but he couldn't change what was happening in his life. He peeked into Marcus's room one day and saw him sprawled out on his bed in the dark, holding his stomach and folding his other arm over his eyes. He was "shaking and sweating," begging Bird not to tell their Mama. Later on he was told not to let his beloved brother into the apartment after everything was destroyed or missing one Sunday morning. Marcus did come to see Bird and he peered at him, but did not remove the chain from the door. He accepted a bird book from his brother and rushed to give him his best drawing. His eraser was not going to change what was happening to Marcus. This was an amazing but, unfortunately, true to life story of many young people. If this book were a movie, I'd be going through a box of tissues. It was heartwarming and heartbreaking all in one. The artwork was a nice blend of Bird's work and his surroundings. It captured the emotions of the situation perfectly and could almost stand alone to tell this sad tale. This book won a New Voices Award Honor. This was a very sobering work, Zetta Elliot's first, but hopefully not her last. Stunning, stunning!

Mehkai goes by the name Bird, this is his journal. Each entry is a poem. A lot is going on in Bird's life. His grandfather recently passed. His older brother Marcus has become addicted to drugs. Bird's writings and drawings give him the opportunity to heal. Bird remembers the good times he shared with his grandfather. He writes about his brother's artistic talent. Through Bird's words you can feel how much he loves his family and looked up to his older brother. It's not all happy, there is some anger and sadness. I loved Elliott's writing, the simplicity made it that much better. As I continued to read Bird and his family became more real. Marcus is not painted as a villain. He's lost but still loves his younger brother. Strickland's illustrations enhance the story. The illustrations allow the reader to enjoy Bird's words that much more. Many families are affected by addiction. Elliott has written a book that will enable the youngest family members to talk about their feelings. Young readers will easily relate to Bird's words.

Both the illustration and the writing of this book stir the soul as a child grasps one of the more difficult issues of life, loss, and love. Many props for the reference to the late Charlie Parker, the devotion to artistic development and expression in an impressionable child, and the loving presence of the steadfast male figures.

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