



***Bird* by Zetta Elliott, illustrated by Shadra Strickland**

Lee & Low Books, an imprint of LEE & LOW BOOKS, INC, 2008

ISBN: 9781620143483 (Paperback)

\*Age Range: 8–12 (Suggested by Publisher)

Grade Range: **TK** (Recommended by *School Library Journal*)

## BOOK SYNOPSIS

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In this gentle, award-winning picture book, an African American boy nicknamed Bird uses drawing as a creative outlet as he struggles to make sense of his grandfather's death and his brother's drug addiction.

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.

## REVIEWS AND PRAISE

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★ "Elliott's sensitivity for her subjects resonates with Strickland's distinctive mixed-media art. . . With unusual depth and raw conviction, Elliott's child-centered narrative excels in this debut." —[Kirkus Reviews](#), **starred review**

"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. . . 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." —[Booklist](#)

"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." —*School Library Journal*

"In a promising debut for both Elliott and Strickland, this picture book tells a poignant story about a boy whose loving family, friends and a gift for drawing help him navigate difficult emotions surrounding the deaths of his grandfather and drug-addicted brother. A complicated weaving of impressive watercolor, gouache, charcoal and ink drawings amplifies the metaphors and action of the poetic text as it combines black-and-white with color." —[Publishers Weekly](#)

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“Zetta Elliott’s tender, understated story of Bird and his older brother Marcus is illustrated with grace by newcomer Shadra Strickland. Capturing the tragic story with her own nuanced paintings and the pencil sketches of the young Bird, Strickland strikes the right chord between serious and joyful. . . This is a story that needs to be told, and telling it with illustrations makes it more accessible to younger readers.”

—[Bookpage](#)

## AWARDS AND ACCOLADES

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- ALA Coretta Scott King/John Steptoe Award for New Talent in Illustrations (American Library Association)
- ALSC Notable Children’s Book (American Library Association)
- Ezra Jack Keats Book Award Illustrator Winner (Ezra Jack Keats Foundation)
- *Kirkus Reviews* Best Books
- Cooperative Children’s Book Center (CCBC) Choices
- Bank Street College of Education Best Children’s Books of the Year
- West Virginia Children’s Choice Book Award (West Virginia Library Commission)

## MEDIA AND RESOURCES

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- [Teacher’s Guide](#)
- [Book Trailer](#)
- [DePauw University’s Book Module from Teaching Children Philosophy](#)
- [The Brown Bookshelf: Interview with Zetta Elliott](#)
- [TeachingBooks’ Meet-the-Illustrator with Shadra Strickland](#)

## AUTHOR STATEMENT

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“Yes, attempts to silence us and substitute their fictions for ours have been ongoing for centuries. I don’t see a change in creativity within our community; we have always transformed our experiences into art (“great suffering produces great art”). The only change, which I suspect is temporary, is that gatekeepers are now greenlighting more projects by Black creatives in order to avoid the appearance of bias. But have these institutions and corporations truly changed? No. So long as the gatekeepers remain the same, our truths will be forced through a White filter. They don’t create work for a broad audience—whatever corporate publishers acquire, they market mainly to White middle-class readers. Appointing Black women to a few prominent positions at various imprints doesn’t change the system. But, we persist...” — Zetta Elliott on [Cotton Quilts Edi](#)

## \*A NOTE ON AGE RANGES

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A publisher-suggested age range covers the gamut of readers that publishers envision using the book, whether for independent reading, family sharing, group study, or in other ways. Educators have the best sense of the appropriate age range for the diverse learners they work with and understand these ranges vary depending on a book’s intended use.

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