

# Nikki Giovanni -

## poet, writer, activist, and educator

**Nikki Giovanni is a world-renowned poet, writer, commentator, activist and educator. One of the most widely read American poets, she prides herself on being “a Black American, a daughter, a mother, a professor of English.” Her primary focus is on the individual and the power one has to make a difference in oneself and in the lives of others. She has spent a lot of her life fighting for civil rights and currently travels to speak out against hate crimes. She has received countless awards including being voted Woman of the Year by Mademoiselle, The Lady’s Home Journal and Ebony magazine. The author of some 30 books, she is currently a distinguished professor of English at Virginia Tech.**



**So what is it that drives you to write?**

Well I’m a storyteller and I get interested in what actually happens or what could have happened or the possibilities. So I’m always playing with stories, those that I know and those that I wonder about ... what would the alternative be or how can the story change.

**Is it hard to stay true to yourself as a writer once recognition and fame comes, once you become a “poet” in society’s eyes?**

“Writing  
is what  
I do  
to justify  
the air  
I breathe...”

I think you have to take everything with just a smidgen of salt. Everybody can love you and then you do something that makes them mad and everybody’s out to get you, so you have to try to stay balanced. You have to. And it is really very nice when people say they enjoy my work. I’m glad because I do to. And I think that my job is to continue to try to make sure I am not repeating myself and keep moving forward.

**One of my favorite poems of yours is Cotton Candy On A Rainy Day...**

Oh, thank you.

**Yes, I love it. And in it you say, “this decade will be known for its loneliness”. In a world filled with so many people and so many tools to communicate, why do you think we find ourselves more and more lonely?**

Well I think the nature of human beings is loneliness. We are a kennel species but we are also being forced to make our own way, in a way that other kennel species don’t. I say kennel, you know, like wolf packs. We have a lot in common with wolf packs. When you look at the hierarchy, and certainly with dogs, we are very close to dogs. And yet, we have to find our own way. So I think there is a fundamental loneliness to the experience of life. And I think that is one of the reasons that the Facebooks and Googles of this world have filled a void, because people do think that they are not so disconnected. But of course Facebook, as you know, is not actually a social network. It’s actually a political network,

