

EVERYTHING COMES NEXT

NAOMI SHIHAB NYE

EDUCATORS' GUIDE

BOOKTALK

Do you need help slowing down, taking a breath, and being a bit more mindful? The poetry of Naomi Shihab Nye will help you do just that. Reading poems from *Everything Comes Next* will remind you about what you love about home, why friends are so important, what loving fathers do for us, about the pain of war and the need for peace, and the basic necessity of kindness and hope. Whether you read them aloud with a friend, quietly by yourself, from beginning to end, or by random selection, you can experience “the holy land” of beautiful words, unexpected feelings, provocative questions, and powerful truths. You’ll build muscles of empathy, learn to look and listen closely, and may even be inspired to write about your own memories and moments.

BEFORE READING

Get acquainted with Naomi Shihab Nye, her life, and her work with this five-minute video excerpt from PBS *NewsHour*, “Poet Nye: ‘Telling a Story Helped Us Figure Out Who We Were.’” It’s an insightful glimpse into Nye’s family history, the influence of her father, her work with young people, the power of writing poetry, and even includes her reading of several poem excerpts. She’s friendly and welcoming and you may hear her voice in your head as you continue reading the poems in *Everything Comes Next*.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=6ySLbSAFm4A



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In the “Introduction,” Edward Hirsch notes that Naomi Shihab Nye believes “the one flag we all share is the beautiful flag of childhood.” What does that mean to you? What could a “flag of childhood” look like?
2. “Because of Libraries We Can Say These Things” (pp. 48-49) celebrates the power of libraries, books, and reading. What book or books have helped you feel that you will “not be alone” or have shaped your life?
3. One of Naomi Shihab Nye’s most well-known poems is “Famous” (pp. 52-53). It’s fitting, right? A poem about fame is famous! What does it mean to you to be “famous”? How does Nye’s poetic definition vary from some of the popular ideas about fame and celebrity?
4. Nye includes several “prose poems” in this anthology, including “Museum” (pp. 54-57) and “Gate A-4” (pp. 188-190). Prose poems look like narratives, without the usual line breaks of poems, but they have many poetic qualities like metaphors, symbolism, imagery, and heightened emotion. What are the poetic elements you notice in these prose poems?
5. Many poets give their poems titles that forecast the theme or subject of the poem. Naomi Shihab Nye does this with a number of her poems. But sometimes, the title of the poem also works organically as the first line of the poem and Nye uses this approach many times (e.g., p. 24, 135, 136, 140, 153, 174, 199). Why is this an interesting strategy? What is the difference in impact in each approach?
6. Nye features a teacher and classroom of students in the poem “The Young Poets of Winnipeg” (p. 140). She provides details about how the teacher encourages young writers. What strategies seem to support writing?
7. There are many poems that mention Naomi Shihab Nye’s family members and memories she has of their time together. What feelings does she express about her brother in her poem “Supple Cord” (p. 17-18) or about her father in “What Kind of Fool Am I?” (p. 97)?
8. The title of this book, *Everything Comes Next*, comes from the poem “Jerusalem” (pp. 106-108). Why do you think Nye chose this as the title for the whole book?
9. In three poems—“So Much Happiness” (pp. 118-119), “Window” (p. 202), and “Kindness” (pp. 222-223)—Nye gives us poem definitions of happiness, hope, and kindness. What surprising examples does the author use to describe these positive concepts?
10. The poems in this anthology are gathered into three sections with distinctive section titles: “The Holy Land of Childhood,” “The Holy Land That Isn’t,” and “People Are the Only Holy Land.” Why do you think the phrase “Holy Land” is used each time? What does that mean to you? How does the meaning change in each section of poems?





WRITING PROMPTS

Naomi Shihab Nye offers her own “Slim Thoughts” (pp. 225-228) about writing, urging us to write regularly, start small, “start anywhere,” ask questions, “write in nuggets,” think as we write, read a lot, and even “overwrite.” She promises that “writing will help you live your life” (p. 228). If you need an example of how unexpected poetry can be, reread “Valentine for Ernest Mann” (pp. 138-139) to see how a skunk’s eyes can be full of poetry. Here are some additional writing prompts grounded in poems from *Everything Comes Next*.

QUOTE ME. Naomi Shihab Nye creates several poems that begin with quotes from real people. These include: “Amir & Anna” (pp. 104-105), “Jerusalem” (pp. 106-108), and “Hummingbird” (pp. 161-162). The quotes may inspire the theme of the poem, but don’t dictate the wording exactly. Do you have a favorite quote? If so, use it to jump-start your own writing of a poem. If you need help, try flipping through a favorite book, asking your friends, family, or teacher, or searching online for quotes to inspire your writing.

IF YOU ASK ME. Nye likes to raise questions in her poetry, often ending a poem with question lines. You can find examples of this in several poems, including “Come with Me” (p. 11), “A Few Questions for Bashar Assad” (pp. 156-157), “Cross that Line” (pp. 175-176), “No One Thinks of Tegucigalpa” (pp. 179-180), “Problems with the Story” (pp. 184-185), and “On Doubt and Bad Reviews” (p. 193). Often, she strings together seemingly unrelated questions to make the reader stop and think. If you have an idea for a poem, try ending it with three or more questions. Or, alternatively, start with questions themselves and see if these can jump-start your writing process.

YOU ARE NOT HUMAN. For generations, poets have imagined what inanimate or non-human objects or animals or abstract ideas might say if they had a human voice or human characteristics. This is called personification and Nye employs this element in several poems, featuring a sifter in “Sifter” (pp. 26-27), squash in “The Mind of Squash” (pp. 38-39), and skin in “Two Countries” (pp. 113-114). Nye goes well beyond simply imagining a voice for these things; she uses them as metaphors to represent deeper meanings, too. Try creating your own poem using a common object or idea and giving it human attributes.

REPEAT YOURSELF. Naomi Shihab Nye incorporates repetition in several poems in this collection to emphasize key words and enhance the sound qualities of the poem. You can see and hear this with the word “if” in “Every day was your birthday” (pp. 98-99) and the word “peace” in “Double Peace” (pp. 102-103), for example. Try using a key word of your choice to build a poem, repeating it several times within the lines of your poem or beginning multiple lines with that word. If you need a nudge, here are some of the most frequently occurring words in writing in English:

FOR NOT YOU THIS BUT SAY FROM
WILL WOULD WHEN KNOW THINK



EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

KIDS SAY THE FUNNIEST THINGS

Everyone loves the fresh and adorable ways that toddlers and young children use language as they are growing up. Naomi Shihab Nye is very adept at incorporating the phrases and sentences of young children into her poems in ways that are clever, fresh, and meaningful. You can see examples of this in “Boy and Mom at the Nutcracker Ballet” (pp. 32-33), “One Boy Told Me” (pp. 59-62), “The Lost Parrot” (pp. 68-70), “Rain” (p. 158), and “Hummingbird” (pp. 161-162). If possible, interview children under the age of 5 in your family or neighborhood and see if you can incorporate some of their language into a poem of your own.

JUST THE FACTS

Naomi Shihab Nye even incorporates factual information within her poem writing. She can take details about donkeys working in mines, or the history of onions, a list of state mottos, or the biology of an armadillo and turn that into a poem—as in


“His Life” (p. 47), “The Traveling Onion” (pp. 66-67), “United” (pp. 121-122), and “Exotic Animals, Book for Children” (p. 173). This time, take each poem and work “backwards” to research more about the facts behind the poem.

LET’S GO TO THE MOVIES

Quite a few of Naomi Shihab Nye’s poems from *Everything Comes Next* have been read aloud (by her or by others) or interpreted artistically on video, and they are available online. For example, you can find a video interpretation of her poem “Famous” (pp. 52-53) at the Poetry Foundation here: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/video/142663/famous>

Collaborate with a friend or an art teacher or tech expert to create your own video interpretation of one of the poems in this book. Will you interpret the poem literally, line by line? Or will you try to convey the emotion or tone or story behind the poem? Will you use art, animation, or live action?

Messages from Everywhere



light up our backyard.
A bird that flew five thousand miles
is trilling six bright notes.
This bird flew over mountains and valleys
and tiny dolls and pencils
of children I will never see.
Because this bird is singing to me,
I belong to the wide wind,
the people far away who share
the air and the clouds.
Together we are looking up
into all we do not own
and we are listening.

from p. 13, *Everything Comes Next*



MEET THE POET: MORE ABOUT NAOMI SHIHAB NYE



YOUNG PEOPLE'S POET LAUREATE

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/learn/young-peoples-poet-laureate>

Naomi Shihab Nye is the Young People's Poet Laureate for 2019–2022, a role designed to “raise awareness that young people have a natural receptivity to poetry and are its most appreciative audience, especially when poems are written specifically for them.” The YPPL delivers lectures around the country, writes essays, shares poems, and selects monthly recommended “Book Picks.” Nye has published many collections of her own poetry (*Voices in the Air*, *Cast Away*, *A Maze Me: Poems for Girls*, *Honeybee*, *Come with Me: Poems for a Journey*, and *19 Varieties of Gazelle*), and she has gathered anthologies of poetry by writers around the world (*What Have You Lost?*, *This Same Sky: A Collection of Poems from Around the World*, *The Tree Is Older Than You Are: A Bilingual Gathering*

of Poems and Stories from Mexico with Paintings by Mexican Artists, *The Space Between Our Footsteps: Poems and Paintings from the Middle East*, *The Flag of Childhood: Poems from the Middle East*), and even compilations of poetry by young writers (*Salting the Ocean: 100 Poems by Young Poets*). She has also authored picture books, novels, short story collections, and essays and calls herself a “wandering poet.” She travels widely, working with children and young adults in schools around the world. Learn more about her work and her life in a recent podcast interview with Sarah Kanowski, “Kindness and Coincidence,” available here: <https://www.abc.net.au/radio/programs/conversations/naomi-shihab-nye/12183830>

It's a great honor to be the 2019–2022 Young People's Poet Laureate for the Poetry Foundation, which is based in Chicago. The first poem I ever wrote, at age six, was called “Chicago,” so it feels like a full circle, in a way.

Everything Comes Next contains so many poems which have sprung from my life working with students and poetry. I am grateful to Rafael López for his incredible art, which is better than my best dream could ever be.

—NAOMI SHIHAB NYE





ADDITIONAL RESOURCES/ FURTHER READING

POETRY BOOKS ABOUT WAR AND PEACE

Poets who write for adults have long tackled the topics of war and peace, but those difficult topics can be challenging for those who write for young people. Nye addresses the pain of war in several poems including, “It is not a game, it was never a game” (pp. 94-96), “Burlington, Vermont” (p. 152), and “You Are Your Own State Department” (pp. 167-170). These additional poetry books—both anthologies and novels in verse—also approach this difficult topic with great depth and sensitivity. What does the poetic perspective add to our understanding of war and conflict?

Applegate, Katherine. 2008. *Home of the Brave*. New York: Square Fish.

Burg, Ann E. 2009. *All the Broken Pieces*. New York: Scholastic.

Engle, Margarita. 2008. *The Surrender Tree: Poems of Cuba's Struggle for Freedom*. New York: Henry Holt.

Frost, Helen. 2009. *Crossing Stones*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux.

Greenfield, Eloise. 2006. *When the Horses Ride By: Children in the Times of War*. New York: Lee & Low Books.

Hines, Anna Grossnickle. 2011. *Peaceful Pieces: Poems and Quilts About Peace*. New York: Henry Holt.

Hopkins, Lee Bennett, ed. 2008. *America at War*. New York: McElderry.

Janezko, Paul B. 2011. *Requiem: Poems of the Terezin Ghetto*. Somerville, MA: Candlewick.

Johnston, Tony. 2008. *Voice from Afar: Poems of Peace*. New York: Holiday House.

Lai, Thanhha. 2011. *Inside Out and Back Again*. New York: HarperCollins.

Levy, Debbie. 2010. *The Year of Goodbyes: A True Story of Friendship, Family, and Farewells*. New York: Hyperion.

Lewis, J. Patrick. 2007. *The Brothers' War: Civil War Voices in Verse*. Washington, DC: National Geographic Children's Books.

LeZotte, Ann Clare. 2008. *T4: A Novel in Verse*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Myers, Walter Dean. 2011. *We Are America: A Tribute from the Heart*. Ill. by Christopher Myers. New York: HarperCollins.

Shange, Ntozake. 2012. *Freedom's a-Callin' Me*. Ill. by Rod Brown. New York: Amistad/Collins.

Volavkova, Hana, ed. 1993. *I Never Saw Another Butterfly: Children's Drawings and Poems from Terezin Concentration Camp 1942-1944*. New York: Schocken Books.

Walker, Alice. 2007. *Why War Is Never a Good Idea*. New York: HarperCollins.

MIDDLE EAST CHILDREN'S ALLIANCE (MECA)

www.mecaforpeace.org

MECA works to protect the rights and improve the lives of children in the Middle East through aid, empowerment, and education.

KINDERUSA www.kinderusa.org

KinderUSA's mission is to improve the lives of Palestinian children and other children in crisis through development and emergency relief.

SPEND SOME TIME WITH NAOMI SHIHAB NYE:

A special reading and Q&A for teenagers with Young People's Poet Laureate Naomi Shihab Nye

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/video/154613/reading-for-young-people-with-naomi-shihab-nye>

IN THE MIDDLE: WEBSITES ABOUT THE MIDDLE EAST

Online resources can help us understand the context for many of Nye's poems (especially in the section “The Holy Land That Isn't”). We can build our background about Palestine and Israel, the history of the conflict between them, and about the influence this has had on her father, her family, and her poetry.

TEACH MIDEAST <https://teachmideast.org>

TeachMideast provides tools and support to better inform students about the Middle East and Muslim world today.

PALESTINE TEACHING TRUNK

<https://palestinett.org>

This (physical or virtual) trunk contains lesson plans, maps, study guides, links to short films about Palestinian culture and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict.

Guide created by Dr. Sylvia Vardell, Professor in the School of Library and Information Studies at Texas Woman's University, co-editor of the *Poetry Friday Anthology* series, and keeper of the PoetryForChildren blog.

