



THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA
COLLEGE OF SOCIAL & BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES

Center for
Middle Eastern Studies

Title: Students Writing Poetry Inspired by the Work of Palestinian-American Poet
Naomi Shihab Nye

By Betsey Coleman

Purpose overview: Students read the poetry of Palestinian-American poet Naomi Shihab Nye from *19 Varieties of Gazelle* and other poems available on the internet. All of the poems are provided here. They discuss what is important to Nye as reflected in her poetry. Then they write their own “shadow poems” based on Nye’s models reflecting what is important to them. Models of student poems are included.

Grade Level 7-12.

Time: two weeks 5 45- 50 minute periods

This lesson plan fulfills the following Standards:

Students relate personal response or interpretation of the text with that seemingly intended by the author.

Students write in response to literature (e.g., suggests an interpretation; recognizes possible ambiguities, nuances, and complexities in a text; interprets passages of a novel in terms of their significance to the novel as a whole; focuses on the theme of a literary work; explains concepts found in literary works; examines literature from several critical perspectives; understands author's stylistic devices and effects created; analyzes use of imagery and language).

Students understand the effects of author's style and literary devices and techniques on the overall quality of a work

Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features .

Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities.

Students develop an understanding of and respect for diversity in language.

Resources:

Poems printed with the author's permission.

19 Varieties of Gazelle by Naomi Shihab Nye

Some Websites: <http://www.pbs.org/now/classroom/poet.html>

<http://www.poemhunter.com/naomi-shihab-nye/>

<http://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poet/naomi-shihab-nye>

Required Materials: Background to Shihab Nye, Shihab Nye poems Student Models

Lessons:

- 1) Shihab Nye Poems :“Words under Words“ and “ My Father and the Fig Tree”

Writing Assignment: If you were to create a portrait of a family member, what qualities, images and poetic devices would you use?

- 2) Shihab Nye Poems : “Daily Prayer,” “In My Boot,” “Observer “

Writing Assignment: What are some of the significant and not so significant items in your life?

- 3) Shihab Nye Poems : “Famous”

Writing Assignment: What would you or someone else want to be famous for?

4) Shihab Nye Poems: “Remembered”

Writing Assignment: What would you like to be remembered by?

5) Shihab Nye Poems :“Genetics”

Writing Assignment: What have you have inherited from your parents?

Provided at the end of the lessons:

A) Discussion questions for Shihab Nye’s poetry

B) Considerations for writers

C) Background for Naomi Shihab Nye

D) Closure quotation by Nye

Procedure or Teaching Strategy: Read Shihab Nye’s Poems. Use discussion questions to discover what is important to Shihab Nye as a Palestinian-American and as a person.

Read writing suggestions, student models, and considerations for writers.

Extension Activity: Collect responses to Shihab Nye’s poems and student poems in a print or digital book. Recommended: *Book Creator* Free App

Lesson # 1 Portrait of a Relative

If you were to create a portrait of a family member, what qualities, images and poetic devices would you use?

Shihab Nye poems: “Words under Words,” “ My Father and The Fig Tree” (Credit for this lesson plan goes partially to PBS link)

The Words Under the Words

BY NAOMI SHIHAB NYE

for Sitti Khadra, north of Jerusalem

My grandmother’s hands recognize grapes,
the damp shine of a goat’s new skin.
When I was sick they followed me,
I woke from the long fever to find them
covering my head like cool prayers.

My grandmother’s days are made of bread,
a round pat-pat and the slow baking.
She waits by the oven watching a strange car
circle the streets. Maybe it holds her son,
lost to America. More often, tourists,
who kneel and weep at mysterious shrines.
She knows how often mail arrives,
how rarely there is a letter.
When one comes, she announces it, a miracle,
listening to it read again and again
in the dim evening light.

My grandmother’s voice says nothing can surprise her.
Take her the shotgun wound and the crippled baby.
She knows the spaces we travel through,
the messages we cannot send—our voices are short
and would get lost on the journey.
Farewell to the husband’s coat,

the ones she has loved and nourished,
who fly from her like seeds into a deep sky.
They will plant themselves. We will all die.

My grandmother's eyes say Allah is everywhere, even in death.
When she talks of the orchard and the new olive press,
when she tells the stories of Joha and his foolish wisdoms,
He is her first thought, what she really thinks of is His name.
"Answer, if you hear the words under the words—
otherwise it is just a world with a lot of rough edges,
difficult to get through, and our pockets full of stones."

My Father and the Figtree

For other fruits my father was indifferent. He'd point at the cherry tree and say, "See those? I wish they were figs." In the evenings he sat by my bed weaving folktales like vivid little scarves. They always involved a figtree. Even when it didn't fit, he'd stick it in. Once Joha was walking down the road and he saw a figtree. Or, he tied his camel to a figtree and went to sleep. Or, later when they caught and arrested him, his pockets were full of figs. At age six I ate a dried fig and shrugged. "That's not what I'm talking about!" he said. "I'm talking about a figtree straight from the earth—gift of Allah!—on a branch so heavy it touches the ground. I'm talking about picking the largest fattest sweetest fig in the world and putting it in my mouth." Here he'd stop and close his eyes.)

Years passed, we lived in many houses, none had figtrees. We had lima beans, zucchini, parsley, beets. "Plant one!" my mother said, but my father never did. He tended the garden half-heartedly, forgot to water, let the okra get too big. "What a dreamer he is. Look how many things he starts and doesn't finish." The last time he moved, I got a phone call. My father, in Arabic, chanting a song I'd never heard. "What's that?" I said. "Wait till you see!" He took me out back to the new yard. There, in the middle of Dallas, Texas, a tree with the largest, fattest, sweetest figs in the world. "It's a figtree song!" he said, plucking his fruits like ripe tokens, emblems, assurance of a world that was always his own.

Writing Suggestion:

Using Naomi Shihab Nye's poems as models, students write their own original poetry about a family member. Have them bring in a photograph and share photographs and family stories in small groups. Then have them "web" ideas about the person who will be the subject of the poem: physical appearance, clothing, setting, likes and dislikes, significant memories. Remind them that a poem will show, not tell, and that imagery is the key to this. A great way to do this is to find a photo and use it for a jumping off point. Credit to PBS Lesson from *NOW Poet Naomi Shihab Nye*

Student Model #1: "Noni" by Dani

A family cluttered around a splintered table,
Unaware of the click and flash that froze that moment forever.
The picture now fades, resting in a cheap frame, in the corner of a hospital room.

Birds wings echo through the humid air as she (looks) in the mirror,
Hair styled on top of her head,
Full moon pearls dance around her neck,
The golden waves frame the picture she has painted with eyeshadow and
mascara.
A child at heart, aspiring to please her parents.

It is 1960 as she glides through the house with perfect posture,
Her elegant appearance turning heads of those in pictures down the hall,
As a trail of light is left behind her.
Sounds of piano and violin full the air,
The ribbon of notes flooding through her brain.

A German prayer is said and all sit as stone with blank expressions.
She thinks of gardening, music, and family,
While a smile curls on her rose-stained lips.
Daisies from the garden, and her crystal eyes brighten the dimly lit room.
Surrounded by family, her dress is smooth like the pudding placed on the table.

Laughter fills the room, bouncing off the paneled walls,
Bidding farewell to the sun as the evening comes to an end.

Day is stolen by night faster than the rush of wind outside her window,
As birds turn to locusts,
Tables are exchanged with hospital rooms,
The dancing pearls come together to form tubes,
And piano and violin are replaced by the quiet hum of machines.

The celebration has ended, only remembered by those in attendance.
Years have gone by, and he has forgotten people and places.
Her memory slips away, but she turns towards that frame and smiles.

There she sits in 1960,
Daisies from the garden, hair on top of her head,
Perfect posture, and rose-stained lips,
As she waits to see her parents in a different place.

Student Model #2 “The Relished” by Linny

The Relished and The Relinquished

A photograph, aged but identifiable; a hesitant smile, feathered hair, tan skin, and hidden eyes. The setting is midday - somewhere in Europe. A pond stretches behind them, and the corner of a yellow chateau barely makes the picture.

A shirt, sleeves cut to 3/4, the color of an eggplant, but so faded it appears a soft navy. A shirt I recollect from my perch looking over your life, one from moving boxes and bed time.

This shirt in the picture is unscathed, but things have changed since then, haven't they?

Now, holes disturb the fabric. How *did* you get those holes?

Are they from the moths that raided your trunk in the Minnesota spring?

Are they from the late nights out in the desert, caught on the thorns of cacti as you reveled in your youth and rolled about in your believed invincibility?

Or are they from the times when you realized you weren't indestructible and the once blurry world was forced into clarity?

Could they be worn from time, moments threading themselves together with the missing fabric? Or did they produce themselves promptly, as if on a tight schedule and already running late?

Were they snagged on the stray wires of fences, the thrill of the unknown rushing through you as you leapt into the abyss of the other side?

How did you get those holes in your shirt?

Were they made from wrestling a scrawny brother on the thick carpet of the living room to occupy the time in which passed so slowly as you waited, waited, waited?

Or were they made from the grip of a man older than you and the need to escape his grasps, panic taking hold of your tempered young mind?

Were these holes stretched by a little girl with wandering fingers, your heart for her too big to stop the innocent destruction?

How did you get those holes in your shirt?

Because I have been watching the wind rush in through these holes, observing how your skin doesn't quiver when the chill reaches out.

I have seen the way that this shirt never ends up in the trash bag in the garage.

And I think that these holes represent the mistakes that have poked a flippant finger into *my* life and upturned the years like a stack of papers in the wind.

And I hope they represent the memories too treasured to be discussed, the kinds that swell like an ocean in your chest.

And I wonder, are these holes the good times or the ones wished to be forgotten, the relished or the relinquished?

And maybe, just maybe, the holes are nameless, timeless creatures with no worth to you at all.

Lesson #2 List Poem

What are some of the significant and not so significant items in your life?

Shihab Nye poems: "Daily" "Prayer in My Boot" "Observer"

Daily

These shriveled seeds we plant,
corn kernel, dried bean,
poke into loosened soil,
cover over with measured fingertips
These T-shirts we fold into
perfect white squares
These tortillas we slice and fry to crisp strips
This rich egg scrambled in a gray clay bowl
This bed whose covers I straighten
smoothing edges till blue quilt fits brown blanket
and nothing hangs out
This envelope I address
so the name balances like a cloud
in the center of sky
This page I type and retype
This table I dust till the scarred wood shines
This bundle of clothes I wash and hang and wash again
like flags we share, a country so close
no one needs to name it
The days are nouns: touch them
The hands are churches that worship the world

"Prayer in My Boot"

For the wind no one expected

For the boy who does not know the answer

For the graceful handle I found in a field
attached to nothing
pray it is universally applicable

For our tracks which disappear
the moment we leave them

For the face peering through the cafe window
as we sip our soup

For cheerful American classrooms sparkling
with crisp colored alphabets
happy cat posters
the cage of the guinea pig
the dog with division flying out of his tail
and the classrooms of our cousins
on the other side of the earth
how solemn they are
how gray or green or plain
how there is nothing dangling
nothing striped or polka-dotted or cheery
no self-portraits or visions of cupids
and in these rooms the students raise their hands
and learn the stories of the world

For library books in alphabetical order
and family businesses that failed
and the house with the boarded windows
and the gap in the middle of a sentence
and the envelope we keep mailing ourselves

For every hopeful morning given and given
and every future rough edge
and every afternoon
turning over in its sleep

Observer

I watch how other things travel
to get an idea how I might move.
A cloud sweeps by silently,
gathering other clouds.

A doodlebug curls in his effort to get there.
A horse snorts before stepping forward.
A caterpillar inches across the kitchen floor.
When I carry him outside on a leaf,
I imagine someone doing that to me.
Would I scream?
In the heart of the day
nothing moves.
No one is going anywhere
or coming back.
The blue glass on the table
lets light pass through.
Something shines
but nothing moves.
I watch that too.

Student Model #1 “There Are” by Tati

There are ten, eleven, twelve
mosquito bites on both my legs,
and one, two, three patches
sewn to my favorite pair of shorts.
Five, six, seven songs make me cry on cue,
but only four, three, two people
are allowed to see.
In three, two, one days the moon will be full,
and I'll sing her lullabies for five, six, seven
hours, as she swings between two horizons.

We've all worn one, two, three rings of smoke
like crowns, but today I wear one, two three
scabs like kisses from the tree that let me fall.
I can see thirty-six stars from my bed,
but I can count the entirety of the cosmos
in the lines of my palms.
I am always walking on one earth,
and there are never enough synonyms for “beautiful”
to write about it.

It has been four, five, six months since
I last cut my hair,
and I am learning to take four, five, six counts
with each breath.
I am spinning on the same axis as 7 billion people,
and I wonder how many of them laugh
as hard as I do,
when we fall down.
Where Home is

Student Model #2 “Our Flags” by Theresa

Our flags wave in the rhythm of syncopated heartbeats
searching for identity among voices clamoring to be heard,
where home is
a name and
a feeling and
an idea
but cannot be felt with fingertips or cheeks pressed against walls.

- (1) Somewhere, a child is looking at a stain on a wall that has been there
forever.
She puts her hand next to it
and wonders whether her hand will ever be bigger
than that stain. The light flickers,
- (2) electricity pumping into carousels with wide-eyed animals
bobbing and
children clinging tightly. Music echoes
- (3) on the streets, proclaiming a visit from the ice cream man-
- (4) somewhere, Pavlov’s dogs are salivating,
gobs of drool smacking on the ground
-one-two-*pause*-three-

- (5) a man opens an umbrella to cover himself from the rain,
- (6) and another watches the river awaken from his window, leaning forward
- (7) to press her cheek against frosted glass because
she knows winter *must* precede spring,
and she *must* welcome the gray cold. Subdued lights
- (8) highlight youth on the Critic's face when she asks the artist,
"What does it mean?" But neither of them know
- (9) why another young man is angry,
only that his fist leaves a mark in the wall with
jagged trails and crumbling paint
like eggshells coaxed off a hardboiled egg. He vibrates with life
- (10) she doesn't have anymore, and she knows it. She walks to the
bathroom, looks into the mirror
at wrinkles for every milestone in her life, and
wonders where all the time has gone
- (11) for a veteran still a drifting soldier with
mud-caked shoes, bleeding lips, and grasping warmed metal
underneath the unrelenting heat of
war and sun. And still, he goes on

trudging forward, and we walk wondering where home is,
hands outstretched grasping,

echoes of time
and more time sifting and plucking away grains of salt
from ancient stones on which we lie

Lesson #3 Famous For

Writing Assignment: What would you or someone else want to be famous for?

Shihab Nye poem: "Famous"

Famous

The river is famous to the fish.

The loud voice is famous to silence,
which knew it would inherit the earth
before anybody said so.

The cat sleeping on the fence is famous to the birds
watching him from the birdhouse.

The tear is famous, briefly, to the cheek.

The idea you carry close to your bosom
is famous to your bosom.

The boot is famous to the earth,
more famous than the dress shoe,
which is famous only to floors.

The bent photograph is famous to the one who carries it
and not at all famous to the one who is pictured.

I want to be famous to shuffling men
who smile while crossing streets,
sticky children in grocery lines,
famous as the one who smiled back.

I want to be famous in the way a pulley is famous,
or a buttonhole, not because it did anything spectacular,
but because it never forgot what it could do.

Student Model #1 "Grandma" by Joe

Famous for her wicked grin,

She laughed at death
Smiled at thunder

She had Backbone, that frail old woman
Frostbite bit her, she bit back

Then her heart stopped
and the smile faded from her face
the doctors gave up
she's done they said
I laughed
Grandma looked at me
And winked

Student Model #2 "Colder Weather" by Dani

The little boy wanted to be famous.
Famous for never giving up.
He dreamed of college and law school,
Picket fences and open spaces.

Now he stares at the dirt covered face
Staring back at him through the frosty window.
The world is less than he imagined it would be.

The little boy wanted to be remembered.
Remembered by the ones he loved.
He dreamed of anniversaries and birthdays,
Gardens and porch swings.

Forty years later,
The little boy has forgotten all of those dreams,
Now just a whisper in the wind to society.

But still his only wish is to be here.
The man we see sits in colder weather,
As the little boy prays for more time.

He wants to make a difference,
To those he is leaving behind,
Draw attention to his way of life,
Leave his mark on what has become his dream.

That was his greatest contribution,
The story he left behind

Lesson #4 Remembered for...

Writing Assignment: What you would like to be remembered by?

Shihab Nye poem: "Remembered for..."

He wanted to be remembered so he gave people things
they would remember him by. A large trunk, handmade of
ash and cedar. A tool box with initials shaped of scraps.
A tea kettle that would sing every morning,
antique glass jars to fill with crackers, noodles, beans.
A whole family of jams he made himself from the figs and berries
that purpled his land.

He gave these things unexpectedly. You went to see him
and came home loaded. You said "Thank you" till your lips
grew heavy with gratitude and swelled shut.
Walking with him across the acres of piney forest,
you noticed the way he talked to everything, a puddle, a stump,
the same way he talked to you.
"I declare you do look purty sittin' there in that field
reflectin' the light like some kind of mirror, you know what?"
As if objects could listen.
As if earth had a memory too.

At night we propped our feet by the fireplace
and laughed and showed photographs and the fire remembered
all the crackling music it knew. The night remembered
how to be dark and the forest remembered how to be mysterious
and in bed, the quilts remembered how to tuck up under our chins.
Sleeping in that house was like falling down a deep well,
rocking in a bucket all night long.

In the mornings we'd stagger away from an unforgettable breakfast
of biscuits—he'd lead us into the next room
ready to show us something or curl another story into our ear.
He scrawled the episodes out in elaborate longhand
and gave them to a farmer's wife to type.

Stories about a little boy and a grandfather,
chickens and prayer tents, butter beans and lightning.
He was the little boy.
Some days his brain could travel backwards easier than it could
sit in a chair, right there.

When we left he'd say "Don't forget me! You won't forget me now,
will you?" as if our remembering could lengthen his life.
I wanted to assure him, there will always be a cabin in our blood
only you live in. But the need of remembrance silenced me,
a ringing rising up out of the soil's centuries, the ones
who plowed this land, whose names we do not know.

Student Model #1 "Secondhand Light" by Liny

I want to be remembered for the way
I stir the pasta and let the steam rise to my cheeks,
for the explanations of big words and the way secondhand light fills me.
I want to be remembered not in the way that a book is to the eyes that read it
but to the mind that absorbs it.
I want to be remembered by those with downcast eyes and solemn faces,
as their ears are filled with words that are real and good.
Let me be remembered standing on a rock that resembles an alligator,
or maybe sprawled out on a comforter, a cat asleep on my chest.
I want to be remembered for making people feel beautiful,
for living behind the lens and within the paper.
May I be remembered as a mermaid to a fisherman,
and may I hide just beneath the surface?
That way I will only be noticed by the ones that bother to look close.
I want to be remembered for my messy handwriting
that used to be flawless.
And when people remember me, I want them to hear slow, soft music,
and feel grey velvet and white silk.
I want to be remembered for my loyalty to a select few
and an open heart to those who are not.
When people look back, I want them to see my imperfections and my mishaps, as
unconventional as they may be, as unattractive as they may be.
I want to be remembered for keeping the fairies alive,

for smiling when something is beautiful,
and when it's not, truly understanding why.
If I can be remembered for these things,
then I know I will not just have existed,
but I will have lived.

Student Model #2 "I Want to be remembered..." by Theresa

Among Historians,
I won't be remembered as individual
but as one nameless face next to a million strangers.

To them, all of my best moments:
the minutes before I die,
the seconds after I fall in love,
the day before I was born,
the instance I say "I'm sorry" and mean it-
and keep meaning it,
won't matter anymore.

To them, my worst moment-
the moment everybody has when they give up trying to grasp
an ideal,
trying to clutch integrity and love and hope with their
fingernails
digging in,
but their hands keep slipping away like
an afterthought,
(because those aren't meant to be *held* never mind by *one* person.)
when they admit to themselves
"I just don't care anymore"-
the history books won't say if
we realized caring was finite
and if we learned how to do it again.

When I die, I'll know I won't be remembered by anyone as an individual,
as the person who tried to laugh through tears

or fumble through first impressions,
trying to avoid ever having a last one.
I'll know once, I wanted people to remember me but failed to do the same to
other people,
and there will be a moment when I feel fragile.
But it won't matter.

Those memories are just moments,
nestled in between the treasured and the painful-
all teaching and all fleeting.
They don't need to be recorded because
of the universal knowledge those moments exist,
shared amongst each other with memories similar but ultimately
different.
We will die without remembering each other,
but we will die knowing we understood each other.

Lesson #5 Genetics

What did YOU inherit from Your Parents?

Shihab Nye poem: "Genetics"

From my father I inherited the ability
to stand in a field and stare.

Look, look at that gray dot by the fence.
It's his donkey. My father doesn't have
a deep interest in donkeys, more a figurative one.
To know it's out there nuzzling the ground.

That's how I feel about my life.
I like to skirt the edges. There it is in the field.
Feeding itself.

*

From my mother, an obsession about the stove
and correct spelling. The red stove, old as I am, must be
polished at all times. You don't know this about me.
I do it when you're not home.

The Magic Chef gleams in his tipped hat.
Oven shoots to 500 when you set it low.
Then fluctuates. Like a personality.

Thanks to my mother I now have an oven thermometer
but must open the oven door to check it.
Even when a cake's in there. Isn't that supposed to be
disaster for a cake?

My mother does crosswords, which I will never do.
But a word spelled wrongly anywhere
prickles my skin. Return to beginning
with pencil, black ink.
Cross you at the "a." Rearrange.
We had family discussions
about a preference for the British *grey*.

In the spelling bee I tripped on *reveille*,
a bugle call, a signal at dawn.
I have risen early
ever since.

Student Model #1 “Doll” by Allison

My mother gave me her skin
thrown across time
to cradle my bones.

She stitched into my cheek
the dimple that shows
when I smile just so.

My father stuffed in my vocal chords
which stutter, shake
and shiver.

He sewed a question mark
on my brain
and a heart on my sleeve.

They tacked onto my legs
lead heavy feet that
stumble and trip.

And fastened on hair
that will never stay parted
or brushed.

They ingrained in my soul
an unnerving love for strangers
and misfit toys.

In my eyes

he placed the stars,
and the mountains, and the clouds.

With a swipe of her brush
she painted a smile with
an ever present flicker.

But it was me who
ripped off the sleeves of my jacket
and demanded to be bit by the cold.

It was me who slipped out the stitches
just to see
what it would feel like to fall apart.

It was them who put me together
but it is me who can
separate the strings.

Student Model #2 “Gifts from My Parents” by Caitlin

My father gave me
The spattering of freckles across my nose and cheeks,
And the small mouth that the orthodontist always has to stretch open.

The small mouth that I love for likening me to all the Barrons
Even though it required seven painful trips to the dentist
To get fourteen teeth pulled out.

My mother gave me
The small bump in the middle of my nose,
And the long legs that don't always fit into jeans the right way.

Legs that helped me
Run the fastest mile in middle school
And score all of my soccer team's goals one season.

The ability to calmly reason through even the messiest situations
And think quickly under pressure
Came from my father.

This ability that comes in handy
In the court room during heated,
Fast paced mock trials.

The stubborn determination for everything to be just so
And the knack for organization
Came from my mother.

Determination to always follow through on my goals
And organization of everything from my room
To the many moving parts of my life.

All these gifts came from my parents,
But the person that amounts from them,
That comes from me.

Student Model #3 “Genetics” by Tati

Genetics

You have your grandmother’s eyes,
your mother’s will,
and your grandfather’s pride.

At fourteen you learned to take your coffee
black, so your father would never have to order
extra cream for you at the drive-thru,
late on Thursday nights.

Your hands remind you of your aunt’s

but no one has your hiccup-laugh and no one's
lip curves up like yours when you smile.
You wonder if anyone in your blood line
had a broken record for a diaphragm,
who could read to you for hours,
but would always trip over the word "that".
You read somewhere that nail-biting
is genetic, but you've never met a family member
without perfect fingers.

Yes, you know where your bone structure
came from, but what about your brain?
You want to know who else never remembers their dreams,
and if anyone else thinks in numbers,
counting letters, syllables, blades of grass, smiles.
Maybe you had a philosopher for a
great-great-grand father but now
your mother will not listen
when you tell her she and you are both gods,
and you are convinced sharing a shoe-size
is not enough.

You have your grandmother's golden hair,
and your mother's stare,
but your body is full of more questions
than a mirror can answer.

Questions for discussion of Shihab Nye's poems:

Nye is a Palestinian- American poet living in Texas. Do you find evidence of this in these poems?

How does Nye feel about members of her family? What words and phrases can you find in the poems that support your ideas? How does Nye use imagery to enhance your understanding of her feelings and ideas about her family? Which images in the poems are most vivid and effective? Why?

Nye's core message as a poet and as a human being is that all of humanity is worthy of respect, deserving of consideration, and in need of kindness. Find evidence in each of the poems to support this statement.

Nye places special emphasis on the nuances of the "ordinary." Where do you see this in her poetry?

Who is the speaker of the poem?

What is the setting?

What is the occasion?

Can you find a fulcrum/ turning point?

What is the poet's purpose?

Choose three images you like and explain why.

Does the poet use effective poetic devices? Why? How?

Considerations for writers:

Brainstorming is critical to the success of your poems. Brainstorm one page of dense writing with lots of concrete detail for each poem.

Use of poetic devices: figurative language and sound devices (not end rhyme) such as repetition, alliteration, consonance, assonance, internal rhyme, details

Use a structure similar to one of the models or create your own but think about structure!

Who is the narrator/speaker?

What is the narrator/speaker's relationship to the subject of the poem?

What tone will you use- angry, rueful, objective (just says what happens), warm?

How will you begin the poem? (Will you be speaking to an audience? Will you be in a setting ?)

What meaning will your title have?

How will you use sensory detail?

Will your last line have impact, a twist?

How will you use setting? Multiple settings?

How will you handle time?

Will speaker/narrator be in poem?

Will the subject matter of your poem be emotionally intense?

Will you use direct address?

Will you use dialogue?

Will you use questions?

Will you use historical/social background?

Will your poem say a lot about you or nothing about you?

What point of view will you use?

How will you use similes, metaphors, personification, alliteration, and sound devices, repetition?

What language /style will you use? Will you create a persona?

What tense /tenses will you use and why? present, past, mixture

C) **Backgrounder for Teachers: Academy of American Poets**

Naomi Shihab Nye was born on March 12, 1952, in St. Louis, Missouri, to a Palestinian father and an American mother. During her high school years, she lived in Ramallah in Palestine, the Old City in Jerusalem, and San Antonio, Texas, where she later received her BA in English and world religions from Trinity University.

Nye is the author of numerous books of poems, including *Transfer* (BOA Editions, 2011); *You and Yours* (BOA Editions, 2005), which received the Isabella Gardner Poetry Award; *19 Varieties of Gazelle: Poems of the Middle East* (Greenwillow Books, 2002), a collection of new and selected poems about the Middle East; *Fuel* (BOA Editions, 1998); *Red Suitcase* (BOA Editions, 1994); and *Hugging the Jukebox* (Far Corner Books, 1982).

She is also the author of several books of poetry and fiction for children, including *Habibi* (Simon Pulse, 1997), for which she received the Jane Addams Children's Book award in 1998.

Nye gives voice to her experience as an Arab-American through poems about heritage and peace that overflow with a humanitarian spirit. About her work, the poet William Stafford has said, "her poems combine transcendent liveliness and sparkle along with warmth and human insight. She is a champion of the literature of encouragement and heart. Reading her work enhances life."

Her poems and short stories have appeared in various journals and reviews throughout North America, Europe, and the Middle and Far East. She has traveled to the Middle East and Asia for the United States Information Agency three times, promoting international goodwill through the arts.

Nye's honors include awards from the International Poetry Forum and the Texas Institute of Letters, the Carity Randall Prize, and four Pushcart Prizes. She has been a Lannan Fellow, a Guggenheim Fellow, and a Witter Bynner Fellow. In 1988, she received The Academy of American Poets' Lavan Award, selected by W. S. Merwin.

She was elected a Chancellor of the Academy of American Poets in 2009. She currently lives in San Antonio, Texas.

Closure:

Read the following statement by Naomi Shihab Nye to the class: To me the world of poetry is a house with thousands of glittering windows. Our words and images, land to land, era to era, shed light on one another. Our words dissolve the shadows we imagine fall between. "One night I dreamt of spring," writes Syrian poet Muhammad al-Maghut, "and when I awoke/flowers covered my pillow." Isn't this where empathy begins? Other countries stop seeming quite so "foreign," or inanimate, or strange, when we listen to the intimate voices of their citizens. I can never understand it when teachers claim they are "uncomfortable" with poetry -- as if poetry demands they be anything other than responsive, curious human beings. If poetry comes out of the deepest places in the human soul and experience, shouldn't it be as important to learn about one another's poetry, country to country, as one another's weather or gross national products? It seems critical to me. It's another way to study geography! [Source: "Lights in the Window" from The ALAN Review.]