

Name: _____ Date: _____

Analyzing Poetry

Below is "Valentine for Ernest Mann" by Naomi Shihab Nye. Read the poem a few times. Then answer the questions on the next two pages. This activity is meant to be completed in pairs, in groups, or as a class.

Valentine for Ernest Mann

by Naomi Shihab Nye

Go to
Scope Online
to hear this
poem read
aloud.

- 1 You can't order a poem like you order a taco.
Walk up to the counter, say, "I'll take two"
and expect it to be handed back to you
on a shiny plate.
- 5 Still, I like your spirit.
Anyone who says, "Here's my address,
write me a poem," deserves something in reply.
So I'll tell a secret instead:
poems hide. In the bottoms of our shoes,
10 they are sleeping. They are the shadows
drifting across our ceilings the moment
before we wake up. What we have to do
is live in a way that lets us find them.
- Once I knew a man who gave his wife
15 two skunks for a valentine.
He couldn't understand why she was crying.
"I thought they had such beautiful eyes."
And he was serious. He was a serious man
who lived in a serious way. Nothing was ugly
20 just because the world said so. He really
liked those skunks. So, he re-invented them
as valentines and they became beautiful.
At least, to him. And the poems that had been hiding
in the eyes of skunks for centuries
25 crawled out and curled up at his feet.
- Maybe if we re-invent whatever our lives give us
we find poems. Check your garage, the odd sock
in your drawer, the person you almost like, but not quite.
And let me know.

Directions: Work with your partner or group to answer the following questions. There are no right or wrong answers!

1 In line 5, the speaker says, "Still, I like your spirit." Who is she talking to? How do you know?

6 In your own words, summarize what the speaker describes in lines 14-22.

2 Who do you think the speaker of this poem is? Why?

7 In lines 19-20, the speaker says that to the man, "Nothing was ugly / just because the world said so." Explain what this means.

3 In line 8, the speaker says that rather than write a poem, she will "tell a secret instead." But *does* the speaker write a poem for the person who asked her to? Explain.

8 In line 21, the speaker says that the man "re-invented" the skunks as Valentines. What do you think she means?

4 In lines 9-12, the speaker lists two places where poems hide. List these places here:

5 What do these two places have in common?

9 Look at the verbs the speaker uses in lines 23-25 to describe the actions of poems. Why do you think the poet chose these particular verbs? Is she comparing the poems to something?

10 In lines 27-28, the speaker suggests that we might look for a poem in the garage, in an odd sock in the drawer, and in someone we don't quite like. What do these three things have in common with each other and with skunks?

11 In lines 26-28, the speaker says that we might "find poems" in the various people, places, and objects in our lives. What does she mean? Is she talking about actual poems or something else?

12 Go back to lines 12-13, where the speaker is talking about hidden poems. She says, "What we have to do / is live in a way that lets us find them." How do you think we can do this? That is, how can we live in a way that lets us find the "poems" hidden inside of things?

13 Now go *all* the way back—to the poem's title. Who do you think Ernest Mann is?

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Writing Planner

On page 32, the writing prompt asks you to write a poem or an essay that shows the beauty in something that the world usually does not look at as beautiful. This idea was inspired by the poem "Valentine for Ernest Mann," which describes a man who "re-invented" a pair of skunks as valentines. Use this activity to help you brainstorm and plan your poem or essay. You do not need to write in complete sentences on this activity.

Step 1: Brainstorm ideas for the subject of your poem or essay.

Start by brainstorming things that the world does not see as beautiful. The categories we provided below are to give you ideas, but you can write anything you think of, whether it fits into one of our categories or not.

Categories:

animals • plants • clothing • buildings • sounds • smells • people • weather • food

Step 2: Choose your subject.

Now look back at everything you brainstormed in Step 1. Choose something that seems particularly interesting to you. Maybe it's something you already see the beauty in, or maybe it's something you are interested in thinking about in terms of how it could be seen as beautiful. Circle your choice.

Step 3: Think about why your subject is not seen as beautiful.

Jot down ideas on why the world doesn't normally see the thing you chose as beautiful. Is there something in particular people don't like about it? What are some things people think or say about it?

Step 4: Think about the hidden beauty of your subject.

What is beautiful about your subject? Is there some particular part of it that you can see as beautiful, the way the man in the poem sees the skunk's eyes as beautiful? Or maybe there's something beautiful about what your subject is used for or what it represents. Jot down everything you think of; you can pick your best ideas later.

Step 5: Get ready to write your first draft.

Now that you've brainstormed ideas for what you will express, it's time to start drafting your poem or essay. Here are some questions you can ask yourself if you aren't sure where to start:

- Will I write in the first-person, second-person, or third-person point of view?
- How much—if anything—do I want to say about why this thing isn't usually seen as beautiful?
- Can I use a metaphor or a simile to express any of my ideas?

Note: *Scope* does not accept Google Docs. If you are e-mailing your entry, please send a .pdf or .doc file.

Valentine Contest

Naomi Shihab Nye writes that “Nothing was ugly just because the world said so.” Choose something not generally considered beautiful—like skunks. Write a poem or an essay that shows its beauty. Five winners will each get a \$25 Visa gift card.

Entries will be judged on:

- ⇒ creativity
- ⇒ clarity
- ⇒ strength of descriptive language

My name: _____

My home phone number: _____ My grade: _____

My teacher's name: _____ My teacher's e-mail: _____

School name: _____

School address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ ZIP: _____

School phone number: _____

My parent or legal guardian consents
to my participation in this contest.

Parent's or legal guardian's signature: _____

Include this form with your written entry and send both to: scopemag@scholastic.com
or mail them to: Valentine Contest, c/o *Scope*, P.O. Box 712, New York, NY 10013-0712

ENTRIES MUST BE RECEIVED BY February 15, 2019!