

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?