

Famous

A poem about what it means to matter

About the Poem

Learning Objective: Students will analyze the key literary elements in a poem.

Featured Skill: analyzing poetry

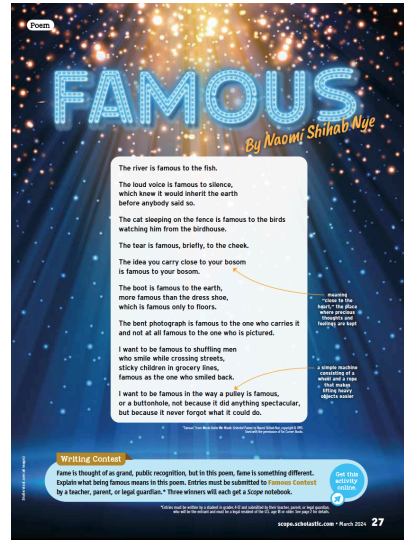
Essential Questions:

- What truly matters in life?
- How is success measured?
- What makes a person or thing valuable?

Standards:

The article and its suite of support materials support these Common Core anchor standards: R.1, R.2, R.4, W.4, W.5

For more standards information—including TEKS—go to Scope Online.



Your Teaching Support Package

Find your full suite of support materials at scope.scholastic.com.

Audio:

- Poem Read-Aloud
- Text-to-speech

Activities to print, project, or share digitally:

- Featured Skill: Poetry Analysis
- Choice Board

Connected readings from the Scope archives:

- "Can Fame and Fortune Make You Happy?"
- "Girl Can't Dance"
- "Should Andre Be a Social Media Star?"

Step-by-Step Lesson Plan

1. Prepare to Read (10 minutes)

Do Now: Poll and Discuss (10 minutes)

- Collect and project or hang a group of images that includes celebrities as well as the following: a river, a cat, a hiking boot, and a buttonhole. Poll students on whether they think each person or thing pictured is famous. Follow up the poll with a quick discussion—why did students answer the way they did?

2. Read and Discuss (30 minutes)

- As a class, listen to the **audio read-aloud** of the poem, which is located in the Resources tab in Teacher View and at the top of the story page in Student View.
- For a second read, invite students to read the poem silently to themselves. Then discuss the following questions as a class.

Featured Skill: Poetry Analysis (20 minutes)

The following questions can be shared in printable or interactive form.

1. Thinking about the relationship between a fish and the river in which it lives, what do you think poet Naomi Shihab Nye means in the first line of the poem when she writes, “The river is famous to the fish”? *A fish needs the river in which it lives to survive. Indeed, the river is the fish’s whole world. So when Nye writes that the river is famous to the fish, she means that the river is familiar, well-known, or important to the fish.*
2. In the second stanza, the poet refers to loud voices and silence.
 - A. What are some ideas, feelings, experiences, and/or kinds of people often associated with loud voices? How about with silence? *Possible answers: Loud voices are often associated with yelling, power, attention, excitement, or anger. People often use loud voices when they want something or when they feel strong emotions. Silence tends to be associated with deep thought or reflection, listening, seriousness, calm, or perhaps sadness.*
 - B. Which do you think usually gets more attention or has more power—loud voices or

silence? Students are likely to say that in general, loud voices get more attention and seem more powerful than silence.

C. What idea about loud voices and silence do you think the poet is expressing in the second stanza? What do you think her message might be? Students should interpret this line to mean that silence is ultimately more powerful than loud voices—that listening and thinking, perhaps, is more powerful than yelling or aggression. The poet seems to be suggesting that silence holds a certain kind of power and wisdom that is ultimately stronger than that of loud voices, even if it often seems otherwise. (Some students might recognize this stanza as a variation of a phrase from Matthew 5:5 in the Bible: “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth,” which has been interpreted in various ways, such as “those who forgo worldly power will be rewarded in heaven,” “those who are pushy do not succeed in the end,” and “those who are gentle and soft will ultimately be rewarded over those who are harsh and forceful.”)

3. **Now consider the third stanza. Why would a cat be “famous” to nearby birds?** The cat would be a threat to the birds, so the birds would pay close attention to the cat and the cat would be known to all the birds. Perhaps the birds would even communicate with one another about the cat, “talking” to one another about what the cat is up to.
4. **In the fourth stanza, Nye writes that the tear is famous “briefly” to the cheek. Why would the tear be famous only briefly?** The tear would be famous only briefly because tears either slide away or dry up very quickly after they are shed.
5. **Consider the fifth stanza. What does the poet mean when she describes an idea as “famous” to your bosom?** As the annotation explains, something that is “close to your bosom” is precious to you. The poet is describing an idea that occupies a lot of space in your heart or in your thoughts, something you know well because you’ve given it a lot of thought.
6. **Why would a boot be more famous to the earth than a dress shoe, as Nye writes in the sixth stanza?** A boot is something you wear to work, walk, or hike outdoors, so the earth—meaning the dirt or the ground—would be far more familiar with boots than with dress shoes, which are mostly worn indoors.
7. **Explain what you think the poet is saying in the seventh stanza. Why would a photograph be famous to the person who carries it but not to the person who is pictured?** The photograph would be important and meaningful to the person who carries it because it represents, for that person, the person pictured—almost surely someone the person carrying the photo cares deeply about. The person who carries the photo likely looks at it often and values it a great deal. But for the person pictured, the photograph means nothing. That person probably never thinks about the photograph at all.
8. **How are the last two stanzas of this poem different from the first seven? (Hint: Take a look at how the stanzas begin.)** The first seven stanzas all begin with “The ____ is famous to the ____.” The final two stanzas are different: They begin with “I want to be.” Only the final two

stanzas are written in first-person and express a desire rather than simply making observations.

9. In your own words, explain what the poet says in the second to last stanza. The poet says that she wants to stand out to or be known to strangers as the person who smiled back when they smiled at her.
10. In the last stanza, the poet says she wants to be famous in the way that a pulley or a buttonhole—that never forgets “what it could do”—is famous. What do you think the poet means? What kinds of things might she never want to forget she can do? Pulleys and buttonholes have simple and humble—but also extremely useful—functions. In saying that she wants to be like these objects, the poet is expressing the idea that she doesn’t need to do anything flashy—anything that would make her famous in the traditional sense of “widely known”—to feel useful or valuable. Perhaps she is getting at the idea that what is important in life are intimate shared moments and the genuine connections we form with others, and that these matter far more than any sort of more superficial public recognition we might receive. She may also be recommending that we take pride in whatever we do, even if we never become celebrities—even if, in fact, we are only ever “famous” to a very small audience. As to what kind of things she might be thinking of, answers will vary; perhaps she is saying she never wants to forget that she can be kind and helpful to others, and that she can do simple things like return people’s smiles, as she describes in the previous stanza.

3. Write About It (30 minutes)

- Have students respond to the prompt that appears with the poem:

Fame is thought of as grand, public recognition, but in this poem, fame is something different. Explain what being famous means in this poem.

- Alternatively, have students choose a task from the **Choice Board**, a menu of culminating tasks. (Our Choice Board options include the writing prompt from the magazine, differentiated versions of the writing prompt, and additional creative ways for students to demonstrate their understanding of a story or article.)

Connected stories from the Scope archives about fame:

- Debate: [“Can Fame and Fortune Make You Happy?”](#)
- Fiction: [“Girl Can’t Dance”](#)
- Debate: [“Should Andre Be a Social Media Star?”](#)