**10th Form National Poetry Recitation Contest**

**Title of Poem**: Kindness

**Poet**: Naomi Shihab Nye

**Link**: https://m.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/kindness?mbd=1



**About the Poet**: Naomi Shihab Nye was born in 1952 in America to an American mother and Palestinian father. Growing up, she lived in America; in Ramallah, Palestine; and in Jerusalem, Israel. Her poems are often about her Arab- American heritage, and often address the tension between Arabs and Americans throughout the years. She also writes a lot about faith, religion, and finding generosity within yourself. She teaches poetry classes around the world, and is known for writing on the board at the beginning of class, “We are all living in a poem.”

**Kindness**

By Naomi Shihab Nye

Before you know what kindness really is

you must lose things,

feel the future dissolve in a moment

like salt in a weakened broth.

What you held in your hand,

what you counted and carefully saved,

all this must go so you know

how desolate the landscape can be

between the regions of kindness.

How you ride and ride

thinking the bus will never stop,

the passengers eating maize and chicken

will stare out the window forever.

Before you learn the tender gravity of kindness

you must travel where the Indian in a white poncho

lies dead by the side of the road.

You must see how this could be you,

how he too was someone

who journeyed through the night with plans

and the simple breath that kept him alive.

Before you know kindness as the deepest thing inside,

you must know sorrow as the other deepest thing.

You must wake up with sorrow.

You must speak to it till your voice

catches the thread of all sorrows

and you see the size of the cloth.

Then it is only kindness that makes sense anymore,

only kindness that ties your shoes

and sends you out into the day to gaze at bread,

only kindness that raises its head

from the crowd of the world to say

It is I you have been looking for,

and then goes with you everywhere

like a shadow or a friend.

**About the Poem**: This poem was written in five minutes, and is autobiographical. She and her husband were on their honeymoon in Columbia when they were robbed of everything they owned, including all of their money and passports. This was before the era of cellphones. Nye’s husband left to find help, and while Nye waited alone, a man walked up to her and stared at her with such loving eyes. He could not speak English and he did not have anything to give her, but the look in his eyes inspired her to write this poem. In it, she emphasizes the essentialness of kindness, and how bad things happen to make us realize that kindness is the only right way to live.

**Discussion Guide:**

According to the poet, why should someone be kind?

How is kindness like “gravity”?

Have you gone through periods of your life where you felt people were not being kind to you? How did it feel?

How are sorrow and kindness similar? How are they different?

What is the “size of the cloth”? What is the cloth made out of?

If kindness was a living thing and could speak, what would it say? What does “Kindness” say at the end of the poem?