



Famous

Naomi Shihab Nye

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FAMOUS is a short illustrated poem. Both text and illustrations have a charmingly ironic take on what it means to be "famous." At once simple and profound, it "opens minds and hearts." Ironically, it is this famous poet's most famous poem, with an established fan base! FROM THE POET: Over the years when I visited schools, students of all ages gathering in their libraries or auditoriums would often clamor to ask me, "Are you famous, Miss?" before I even began speaking about writing. The concept confounded me. Of course I could never say "Yes" and I realized that saying "No" might mean they would be less attentive, so I meditated on the oddity of the word and the concept itself and wrote this little poem that I could read whenever they asked. Sometimes they thought I was trying to trick them. Huh? Sometimes they laughed. But they always paid good attention afterwards, and I liked that the poem might bend their idea of what the word even means. Sometimes I started by saying "Everything is famous if you notice it. Sure, here's my answer." I think the poem has served me well. My biggest surprise has been, everyone always wants me to read this poem. I guess it is one of my three most often-requested poems. Teachers always mention it. Parents have told me they copy it on graduation cards for their high school seniors. I've seen it hand-printed on posters in many classrooms. Students participating in UIL public speaking competitions often recite it. It's been printed on more than one standardized test. I allow it to be printed because I like to imagine students can have friendly moments even while taking ominous tests. Book artist Lisa Desimini, whose work I cherish and delight in, honored me by wanting to illustrate this poem and create a visual experience for the poem as well. Lisa and I imagine Famous as a possible gift book for people of all ages. People who have been famous to us, whom we wish to encourage, who are at a crossroads, who are graduating, who are nervous about the future, who want to be more or other than they are...

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