

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Class: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Making a Fist**

By Naomi Shihab Nye  
1988

*Naomi Shihab Nye was born to an American mother and a Palestinian father in 1952. Though based in Texas, she has traveled the world and refers to herself as a “wandering poet.” In the following 1988 poem, a young child has an epiphany during one such travel. As you read, take notes on the way the poet develops the theme through alliteration and figurative language.*

- [1] For the first time, on the road north of Tampico,<sup>1</sup>  
I felt the life sliding out of me,  
a drum in the desert, harder and harder to hear.  
I was seven, I lay in the car
- [5] watching palm trees swirl a sickening pattern past  
the glass.  
My stomach was a melon split wide inside my  
skin.

“How do you know if you are going to die?”  
I begged my mother.  
We had been traveling for days.

- [10] With strange confidence she answered,  
“When you can no longer make a fist.”

Years later I smile to think of that journey,  
the borders we must cross separately,  
stamped with our unanswerable woes.

- [15] I who did not die, who am still living,  
still lying in the backseat behind all my questions,  
clenching and opening one small hand.



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1. Tampico is a city and port in the state of Tamaulipas, Mexico