

"How Do I Know When a Poem is Finished?" by Naomi Shihab Nye

- 1) Read the poem aloud to yourself, taking in both the **point** that Nye is making **about the writing process** (we're going to play with this this week!) as well as what she **does to bring her poem to a close**.
- 2) Open and make a copy of this in the [Week 4 Poetry Workshop doc](#) to start your brainstorming and writing.
- 3) Brainstorming: Finish the sentence starter that Nye uses as her title: "How do you know when...?" Come up with **3-5 ideas** to finish this sentence as the subject for your own poem.
- 4) Choose **one** of your brainstorm topics to write your own poem, following Nye's progression of stanzas & ideas:

Stanza 1 →

When you...
...
the _____ is not finished

Stanza 4 →

Now it... ,
[adjective] and [adjective]
[One line sentence.]

Stanza 2 →

It is _____ing. _____ly.
[gives a feeling to the inanimate object]
For [time frame]

Stanza 5 →

When...
you might...

Stanza 3 →

Now it has...

Stanzas 6-7 →

You could keep...
for... But...
...So you might as well

_____.

- 5) In her poem, Naomi Nye strikes a chord in the last line that **resonates** with the reader. Why? She illustrates the point of her poem in the form that her ending takes. "So you might as well...leave it that way."

It's almost like Nye brings her poem to an unexpected, unfinished end. There's not the closure we expect, but that almost seems to reinforce her point--that we never seem to know how to end things.

We're going to try some similar techniques with our poetry. The most resonant endings don't necessarily wrap and tie ideas up neatly. Often, they

are striking not because they are the chord we expect, but rather because they seem like an off-beat note.

- 6) Try **three different endings** for your poem. Choose 3 strategies from the following list to try. Include your alternate endings in your draft.

7 Ways to End a Poem

- **Add onto** your poem with 1-2 lines.
- **Subtract** from your poem--take away the last line or stanza.
- End with an **image** or **illustration** of your point.
- End with an **unfinished thought**.
- End with a **one-line sentence**.
- End with **repetition** of significant or (seemingly) insignificant word/phrase.
- **Break up a last-line sentence** with only one or two words in the very last line.
- If your poem seems to follow an established pattern, **break that pattern**.