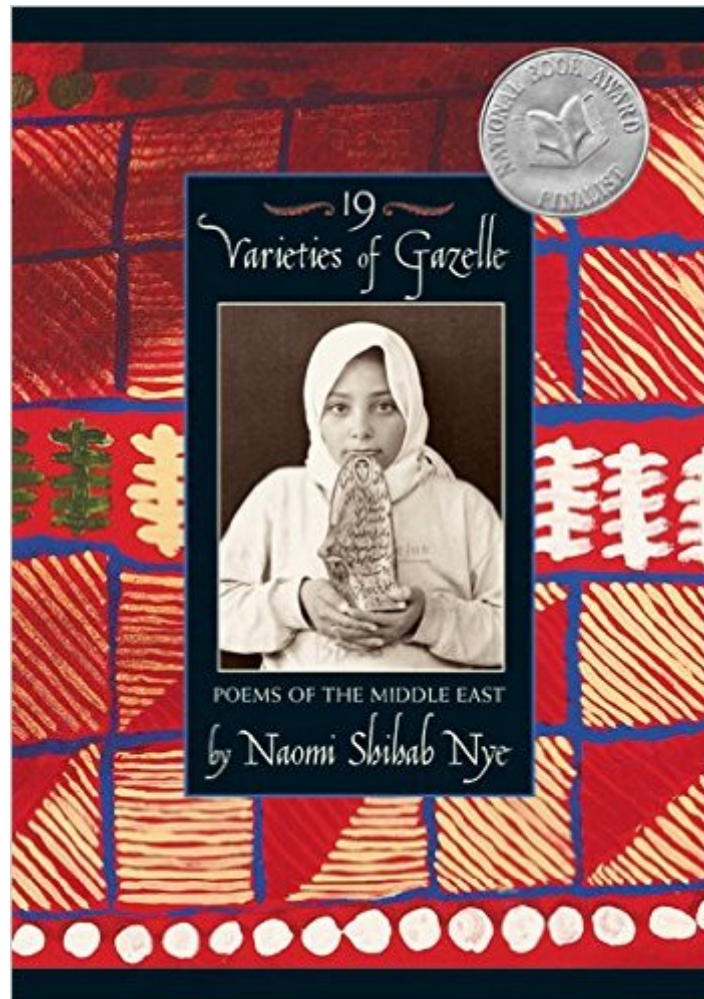


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# 19 Varieties Of Gazelle: Poems Of The Middle East



## Synopsis

"Tell me how to live so many lives at once ..."Fowzi, who beats everyone at dominoes; Ibtisam, who wanted to be a doctor; Abu Mahmoud, who knows every eggplant and peach in his West Bank garden; mysterious Uncle Mohammed, who moved to the mountain; a girl in a red sweater dangling a book bag; children in velvet dresses who haunt the candy bowl at the party; Baba Kamalyari, age 71; Mr. Dajani and his swans; Sitti Khadra, who never lost her peace inside. Maybe they have something to tell us. Naomi Shihab Nye has been writing about being Arab-American, about Jerusalem, about the West Bank, about family all her life. These new and collected poems of the Middle East -- sixty in all -- appear together here for the first time.

## Book Information

Paperback: 142 pages

Publisher: Greenwillow Books; Reprint edition (March 15, 2005)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0060504048

ISBN-13: 978-0060504045

Product Dimensions: 5 x 0.4 x 7.1 inches

Shipping Weight: 4.8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.9 out of 5 stars Â Â See all reviews Â (17 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #38,965 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #4 in Â Books > Teens > Literature & Fiction > Poetry #22 in Â Books > Teens > Literature & Fiction > Social & Family Issues > Prejudice & Racism #12191 in Â Books > Reference

## Customer Reviews

This collection is a perfect example of the ability of a gifted poet to communicate difficult truths simply. Each piece is a work of art and sings in the voices of immigrants and immigrants' children and with the rhythms of life in the Middle East. This is a fantastic book in its own right and a great introduction to the talent and skill of Naomi Shihab Nye.

this book was recommended to me by a friend, so i wasn't sure what to expect. i am really glad to have bought it, the poems are like little stories someone tells you on the porch while it's getting dark. very vivid, i felt as if i knew these people...fathers, mothers, grandmothers, schoolchildren, old arab men selling crafts...

In her introduction to "19 Varieties of Gazelle: Poems of the Middle East," Naomi Shihab Nye writes that after the September 11 attacks, "a huge shadow had been cast across the lives of so many innocent people and an ancient culture's pride." (Nye, xv) As an American born girl with a Middle Eastern father, Nye can write from behind that shadow, shedding light on the tormented hearts of Arab-Americans trying to come to terms with September 11th. When Americans think of the Middle East, we often think only of the hatred and violence of terrorism. It is important, therefore, to read poetry by writers like Nye, who help us to remember that there is love, generosity and beauty to be found there too. Her poems have a beautiful simplicity and loving honesty that can speak to both children and adults. I especially connected to the poems Nye wrote about the members of her family, such as "For Mohammed on the Mountain" and "My Grandmother in the Stars". The poem about her uncle inspired me to write about family members I hardly know or have never met. Reading Naomi Shihab Nye's poetry reminded me of the great wealth we all have of places and people who are especially deep in our hearts--a richness unique to our own experience that can be a wonderful source of writing material. Nye is a shining example of a writer who uses her gift to promote a message of peace and understanding in a world stained with fear, hate and close-mindedness.

Nye is one of the best voices of the middle east for young readers. Her poetry and picture books are all evocative, raising issues of family, identity and tolerance. Her work is a rich resource for any teacher who hopes to offer students empathy and insight for the middle east.

I enjoyed the poems in this small collection. The images are strong and the emotion authentic. It is a brief, but powerful, look at the personal joys and sorrows of the people who are often in the news but are rarely seen up close.

"We need poetry for nourishment and for noticing, for the way language and imagery reach comfortable into experience, holding and connecting it more successfully than any news channel we could name," she writes in her Introduction. In these poems you walk with her through Palestinian streets, meet shepherds who raise their arms in prayer under the olive trees, saying "Hear us! We have pain on earth! / We have so much pain there is no place to store it!" and at night "ate heartily, flat bread / and white cheese, / and were happy in spite of the pain, / because there was also happiness." It is difficult for me to pick out poems in this wonderful book that are favorites, because so many of them are. These are painful, beautiful, poignant, wonderful poems that ask profound questions. In "Passing the Refugee Camp" soldiers smash a woman's sink and tub and

tiles, and whip a father "in front of his sons ages 2 and 4. Seeing soldiers enjoying sweet oranges, "throwing back their heads so the juice runs down their throats, she wonders how they can "know what sweetness lives within / How can they know this and forget so many other things?" She asks other profound questions, too. When a brother and sister are playing with toys and their room explodes, she asks: "In what language / is this holy?" When a young man is shot while helping someone stand, she says: If this is holy, / could we have some new religions please?" Deeply profound and uncomfortable questions, and so very important. This is a book I will cherish for a very long time. I put it up there with the best.

"Tell me how to live so many lives at once. . ."Fowzi, who beats everyone at dominoes; Ibtisam, who wanted to be a doctor; Abu

Hopkins said that poetry is an out shaping of the interiority of human experience. This is certainly true here. There are realities that are at the heart of human experience that cannot be captured in prose. The heart of much of the experience of Palestinian people can be found in these poems. For those who want to understand beyond the linear logic of prose and the bias of news, this book is a good place to start.

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