So Much Happiness

Naomi Shihab Nye, 1952

It is difficult to know what to do with so much happiness. With sadness there is something to rub against, a wound to tend with lotion and cloth. When the world falls in around you, you have pieces to pick up, something to hold in your hands, like ticket stubs or change.

But happiness floats.

It doesn't need you to hold it down.

It doesn't need anything.

Happiness lands on the roof of the next house, singing,

and disappears when it wants to.

You are happy either way.

Even the fact that you once lived in a peaceful tree house

and now live over a quarry of noise and dust

cannot make you unhappy.

Everything has a life of its own,

it too could wake up filled with possibilities

of coffee cake and ripe peaches,

and love even the floor which needs to be swept,

the soiled linens and scratched records . . .

Since there is no place large enough to contain so much happiness, you shrug, you raise your hands, and it flows out of you into everything you touch. You are not responsible. You take no credit, as the night sky takes no credit for the moon, but continues to hold it, and share it, and in that way, be known. Answer the following questions either here or on a separate sheet of paper.

- 1. Briefly summarise each stanza. What is the main point of each stanza?
- 2. What characteristics does "happiness" have in this poem? Does it change and if so, how?
- 3. What is the poet's definition of "sadness"? How does it compare to "happiness"?
- 4. What is the poet's message in "So Much Happiness"? How do you know?
- 5. Imagine you replaced all of the "you" words in the poem with "people". How might that change affect the way you, as a reader, understand the poem?