

**Naomi Shihab  
Nye**

# The Rider

## Before You Read

### Focus Question

What do you do when you feel lonely?

### Background

Naomi Shihab Nye is an award-winning poet who often bases her poems on her experiences. She has said that she values poetry because it "makes us slow down and listen carefully to the few things we have really heard, deep inside."

## Responding to the Reading

1. What does the boy in the poem do to escape loneliness? What does the speaker in the poem do?

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2. In what lines of the poem is loneliness personified, or given human traits? What does the personification add to the poem?

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3. To what is the escape from loneliness compared? In your opinion, is the comparison effective? Why or why not?

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4. **Making Connections** In *The Pigman*, how do John, Lorraine, and Mr. Pignati cope with their loneliness? In your opinion, are their ways of coping better or worse than those described in the poem? Explain.

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### Art Connection

Create a poetry poster for "The Rider." Copy the poem on a large piece of paper or posterboard, and make an illustration to accompany the poem. You might draw a picture or create a collage of magazine clippings. Bring your poster to class and share it with your classmates.

# The Rider

Naomi Shihab Nye, 1952

A boy told me  
if he roller-skated fast enough  
his loneliness couldn't catch up to him,  
the best reason I ever heard  
for trying to be a champion.  
What I wonder tonight  
pedaling hard down King William Street  
is if it translates to bicycles.  
A victory! To leave your loneliness  
panting behind you on some street corner  
while you float free into a cloud of sudden azaleas,  
pink petals that have never felt loneliness,  
no matter how slowly they fell.

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