

INDEPENDENT READING

# The Flying Cat

by **Naomi Shihab Nye**



## BACKGROUND

**Naomi Shihab Nye** is an award-winning Palestinian-American poet, songwriter, and novelist. As a teenager, she lived in Jerusalem, Israel and San Antonio, Texas and brings insights from living in two cultures to her writing. Nye is considered a leading poet of the American Southwest. She focuses on scenes from everyday life as a source for many of her poems.

## SETTING A PURPOSE

*As you read, pay attention to how the poet conveys the contrast between the human and animal concerns.*

1 Never, in all your career of worrying, did you imagine  
what worries could occur concerning the flying cat.  
You are traveling to a distant city.  
The cat must travel in a small box with holes.

2 5 Will the baggage compartment be pressurized?  
Will a soldier's footlocker fall on the cat during take-off?  
Will the cat freeze?

3 10 You ask these questions one by one, in different voices  
over the phone. Sometimes you get an answer,  
sometimes a click.  
Now it's affecting everything you do.  
At dinner you feel nauseous, like you're swallowing

The owner of the cat  
is worried about the  
cat's trip on the plane.  
Will the cat be okay?  
Will it explode?



at twenty thousand feet.

In dreams you wave fish-heads, but the cat has grown propellers,

15 the cat is spinning out of sight!

4

Will he faint when the plane lands?

Is the baggage compartment soundproofed?

Will the cat go deaf?

“Ma’am, if the cabin weren’t pressurized, your cat would explode.”

20 And spoken in a droll impersonal tone, as if  
the explosion of cats were another statistic!

5

20 droll: amusingly odd.

Hugging the cat before departure, you realize again  
the private language of pain. He purrs. He trusts you.

He knows little of planets or satellites,

25 black holes in space or the weightless rise of fear.

