

Ducks

By Naomi Shihab Nye

*We thought of ourselves as people of culture.
How long will it be till others see us that way again?*

Iraqi friend

In her first home each book had a light around it.
The voices of distant countries
floated in through open windows,
entering her soup and her mirror.
They slept with her in the same thick bed.

Someday she would go there.
Her voice, among all those voices.
In Iraq a book never had one owner – it had ten.
Lucky books, to be held often
and gently, by so many hands.
Later in American libraries she felt sad
for books no one ever checked out.

She lived in a country house beside a pond
and kept ducks, two male, one female.
She worried over the difficult relations of triangles.
One of the ducks often seemed depressed.
But not the same one.

During the war between her two countries
she watched the ducks more than usual.
She stayed quiet with the ducks.
Some days they huddled among reeds
or floated together

She could not call her family in Basra
which had grown farther away than ever
nor could they call her. For nearly a year

she would not know who was alive,
who was dead.

The ducks were building a nest.