

DISCOVER AMERICA

Teacher Guide



Whispers of Democracy: Immersing in Walt Whitman's Poetry

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Key Themes

- Hope and Resilience
- Leadership and Sacrifice
- Patriotism and National Identity

Core Values

- Community
- Faith
- Liberty
- Life



Learning Objectives

Students will be able to

- Define poetry.
- Identify one reason why Walt Whitman is an important figure in American history.
- Explain the meaning and explore the symbolism of "O Captain! My Captain!"

Key Terms

- 0 1 **commemorate:** to honor the memory of.
- 0 2 **poet:** someone who writes poetry.
- 0 3 **poetry:** a type of literature, or artistic writing, that attempts to stir a reader's imagination or emotions.
- 0 4 **mourn:** to feel or act very sad because of a death or great loss.
- 0 5 **stanza:** a section in a poem.
- 0 6 **tragedy:** an event that causes sadness or disaster

Introduction

TELL Students

Welcome, little patriots, to a magical journey through the land of poetry, where words dance! Today, we have a very special adventure planned with our friend Walt Whitman, a poet who loved to celebrate the beauty of America with his words. **[Reference Walt Whitman Image.]** A **poet** is someone who writes poetry. **Poetry** is a type of literature, or artistic writing, that attempts to stir a reader's imagination or emotions. Imagine that we are stepping into a time machine made of books. With a magical wave, we are whisked away to a time long ago.

ASK Students

What is poetry? What do we call someone who writes poetry?

TELL Students

Poetry is like music made with words, painting pictures in your mind and stirring feelings in your heart. Today, I am going to play some beautiful music and read a poem. While you listen, you'll close your eyes and think about how the music or poetry makes you feel. Does it make you feel happy, excited, or maybe even a little bit sad? Afterwards, you will use crayons to draw pictures of the feelings that the music or poetry inspired in you. You might draw pictures of smiling suns, twinkling stars, or even colorful rainbows bursting with happiness! And guess what? We will have a special sharing time where we will all get to show our drawings to each other and talk about the magical journey our imaginations took us on. [Please give each student a clipboard and a piece of construction paper. Please choose one patriotic song and one patriotic poem to read to the class. As you read and play the music, encourage students to draw how they feel.]

ASK Students

How did you feel when you listened to the song and the poem? How does your drawing show how you feel?

TELL Students

Sometimes poetry and music can help unite, or bring people together. Walt Whitman wrote one very important poem after a great tragedy. A **tragedy** is an event that causes sadness or disaster. This tragedy was the death of President Abraham Lincoln, the 16th President of the United States. **[Reference President Lincoln Image.]**

Introduction

ASK Students

What do you remember about President Lincoln?

TELL Students

That is right! President Abraham Lincoln was a remarkable leader who guided the United States through one of its most challenging periods, the Civil War. During his presidency, he made a courageous decision to end slavery by signing the Emancipation Proclamation. This important document declared that all enslaved people in the Confederate states were to be set free, marking a significant step towards ending slavery in America. Lincoln's leadership during the Civil War was crucial. He worked hard to keep the country united and to ensure that freedom and equality would be rights for all citizens. His dedication to justice and his sense of right and wrong helped shape the nation during a time of division and conflict.

ASK Students

What did the Emancipation Proclamation declare?

TELL Students

That is right! President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863, as the nation approached its third year of the Civil War. This groundbreaking proclamation declared "that all persons held as slaves" within the rebellious states "are, and henceforward shall be free." While this was a bold and important move, not everyone supported it. The Emancipation Proclamation was highly controversial at the time. Some people in the North did not like it because they thought President Lincoln was doing too much. Others said it only changed things in places where the government did not have much control.

ASK Students

Did everyone support the decisions made by President Lincoln?

TELL Students

Despite the mixed reactions, the Emancipation Proclamation marked a turning point in the Civil War. Over time, more people began to support the Emancipation Proclamation, and it helped lead to the end of slavery across the United States with the passing of the 13th Amendment.

Introduction

TELL Students (continued)

President Lincoln knew it was important to do the right thing, even though it was very difficult and not everyone agreed with him at first. His brave decision also allowed African American soldiers to join the Union Army, which brought more soldiers to help in the war and gave a new, important reason to keep fighting. Lincoln showed strong leadership by standing up for what he believed was right for the country's future.

ASK Students

What made President Lincoln a great leader?

TELL Students

Being a leader often means having to make difficult choices that are good for everyone, even if not everyone likes those choices at first. Good leaders, like President Lincoln, always think about what is best for the whole country and not just a few people. For example, President Lincoln made the tough decision to issue the Emancipation Proclamation, which helped end slavery. He knew it was the right thing to do to make the country better, even though some people didn't agree with him at the time. Let's watch another episode of Star Spangled Adventures to learn more. In this episode, we'll explore a special poem written by Walt Whitman about President Lincoln. Whitman admired Lincoln because he was a brave leader who made hard decisions for the good of all people. The poem shows how much Whitman respected Lincoln for his courage and leadership. As we watch, think about what makes a good leader and how President Lincoln's decisions still affect us today

WATCH

Star Spangled Adventures Cartoon [Ep. 29: Walt Whitman](#)



Lesson

TELL Students

On April 14, 1865, President Abraham Lincoln attended a play called "Our American Cousin" at Ford's Theater in Washington, D.C. Just five days earlier, Confederate General Robert E. Lee had surrendered, ending the Civil War. This brought hope for our nation's future, with former slaves gaining freedom and the Union staying together. However, that night brought tragedy once more with the death of President Lincoln

ASK Students

How do you think people felt when they learned that President Lincoln had passed away?

TELL Students ✍️

Americans across the country mourned the death of a heroic leader who bravely guided the United States through the Civil War. To **mourn** means to feel or act very sad because of a death or great loss. As the train carrying President Lincoln to his final resting place in Illinois made its nearly two-week journey north, tens of thousands of Americans stood beside the railroad tracks to pay their respects. This tragic event inspired the poet Walt Whitman to write numerous poems celebrating Lincoln's life, legacy, and impact on America.

ASK Students

How did Walt Whitman feel about President Lincoln?

TELL Students ✍️

That is right! Walt Whitman respected President Lincoln. He recognized the burden that Lincoln carried to save the Union. He knew that President Lincoln answered his call to lead America through the Civil War. After President Lincoln's death, Whitman felt a deep sense of loss and spent the summer writing various poems to commemorate Lincoln's life. To **commemorate** means to honor the memory of.

ASK Students

What did Walt Whitman do to commemorate President Lincoln's life?

Lesson

TELL Students

One of these poems, "O Captain! My Captain!" became one of Whitman's most famous works. It was published in the Saturday Press on November 4, 1865. "O Captain! My Captain!" is broken into three stanzas. A **stanza** is a section in a poem. In this poem, Whitman decided to use rhyming, which was different from his usual style.

ASK Students

How is "O Captain! My Captain!" different from Walt Whitman's other poems?

TELL Students

Let's read the poem and dive into what it means:

"O Captain! my Captain!," by Walt Whitman

O Captain! my Captain! our fearful trip is done,
 The ship has weather'd every rack, the prize we sought is won,
 The port is near, the bells I hear, the people all exulting,
 While follow eyes the steady keel, the vessel grim and daring,
 But O heart! heart! heart!
 O the bleeding drops of red,
 Where on the deck my Captain lies,
 Fallen cold and dead.

O Captain! my Captain! rise up and hear the bells;
 Rise up – for you the flag is flung— for you the bugle
 For you bouquets and ribbon'd wreaths— for you the shores a-crowding,
 For you they call, the swaying mass, their eager faces turning,
 Here, Captain! dear father!
 This arm beneath your head;
 It is some dream that on the deck
 You've fallen cold and dead.

My Captain does not answer, his lips are pale and still
 My father does not feel my arm, he has no pulse nor will,
 The ship is anchor'd safe and sound, its voyage closed and done,
 From fearful trip the victor ship comes in with object won;

Lesson

TELL Students (continued)

Exult, O shores, and ring O bells!
But I with mournful tread
Walk the spot my Captain lies
Fallen cold and dead.

This poem is like a special story about a ship and its captain. The captain represents someone very important, Abraham Lincoln, who helped our country during a hard time called the Civil War. The ship is like our country, which went through a lot of tough times but finally won.

ASK Students

Who does the captain represent?

TELL Students

In the first part of the poem, the ship is coming home after facing many challenges, but sadly, the captain did not make it. In the next part, the speaker talks about how everyone is happy and cheering for the captain, but the captain cannot hear them because he is gone. It is like a dream that the captain is not there anymore.

ASK Students

What does the ship represent?

TELL Students

That is right! The ship represents the United States. Then, in the last part of the stanza, the speaker feels sad because the captain is not coming back, even though the ship made it home safely. This is like when America won the Civil War, but Lincoln could not celebrate with everyone because he had passed away.

ASK Students

Why is the speaker sad?

Lesson

TELL Students

This poem, "O Captain! My Captain!" by Walt Whitman, helps us understand the emotions people experienced when President Lincoln died and after the Civil War ended. It is like a window into history, helping us understand how joy and sadness can exist side by side, just like they do in our own lives.

ASK Students

Have you ever felt happy and sad at the same time?

TELL Students

Think about a time when you accomplished something big, like winning a game or finishing a project. You might feel happy and proud, but maybe there is also sadness because someone you care about could not be there to celebrate with you. This is what happened in Whitman's poem. Even though the war was over and the Union had won, people were still sad because Lincoln, who was like a captain to them, had died. So, whenever you have mixed feelings about something, remember that it is okay to feel that way. Life is full of ups and downs, and it is natural to feel a range of emotions, just like the people in Whitman's poem did

WATCH

Learn More With Liberty: [Breaking Down "O Captain! My Captain!"](#)

Patriot of the Week: [Walt Whitman](#)



The background features a stylized treasure map with a grid of lines. On the left, a wooden sailing ship with three masts and yellow sails is shown. On the right, a blue anchor is depicted. The title 'Captain Whitman's Treasure Map' is centered in a dark grey banner.

Captain Whitman's Treasure Map

Objective:

Introduce first graders to Walt Whitman and his poem "O Captain! My Captain!" through a fun and interactive treasure hunt.

Materials Needed:

- Copies of "O Captain! My Captain!" simplified and broken into short, illustrated segments.
- Treasure map templates.
- Crayons or colored markers.
- Small "treasure" items (e.g., stickers, small toys, or treats).
- Envelopes or small boxes to hold the treasure segments.

Preparation:

- Before the activity, hide the segmented parts of the poem around the classroom or playground, each with a piece of the "treasure" (sticker, toy, or treat).
- Prepare a simple map where X marks the spots where the segments are hidden

Introduction:

- Begin by reviewing Walt Whitman as a famous poet who wrote about many important ideas, including a poem about a ship captain who was very brave and loved by his crew.
- Explain that today students will be going on a treasure hunt to find pieces of this poem, just like searching for hidden treasure

Reading the Map:

- Hand out the treasure maps to students and explain how to read them. Show the symbols that mark where the treasures are hidden.
- Divide the students into small groups, each with an adult helper to guide them.

Treasure Hunt:

- Allow groups to search for the hidden poem segments according to their maps. Each time a group finds a segment, they should read it together with their helper.
- Encourage students to think about what the words mean and how they might feel if they were the sailors on the ship.

The background features a stylized treasure map with a grid pattern. A wooden sailing ship with yellow sails and a red flag is on the left, and another similar ship is on the right. A blue anchor is positioned to the right of the title. The title 'Captain Whitman's Treasure Map' is centered in a dark grey banner.

Captain Whitman's Treasure Map

Assembling the Poem:

- Once all segments are found, gather students back together and work as a class to put the poem pieces in order.
- Discuss each segment briefly, relating it back to the bravery and leadership of the captain, similar to how President Lincoln led his country.

Reflection and Art:

- Give students time to draw a picture of the ship or the captain from the poem, using the segments they found as inspiration.
- As they draw, ask them to think about what kind of leader they would want to be.

Sharing:

- Allow students to share their drawings and what they learned about Walt Whitman and the captain with the class.

Conclusion:

- Wrap up by highlighting the qualities of good leadership shown in the poem and how poetry can help us remember and honor great people and their actions.

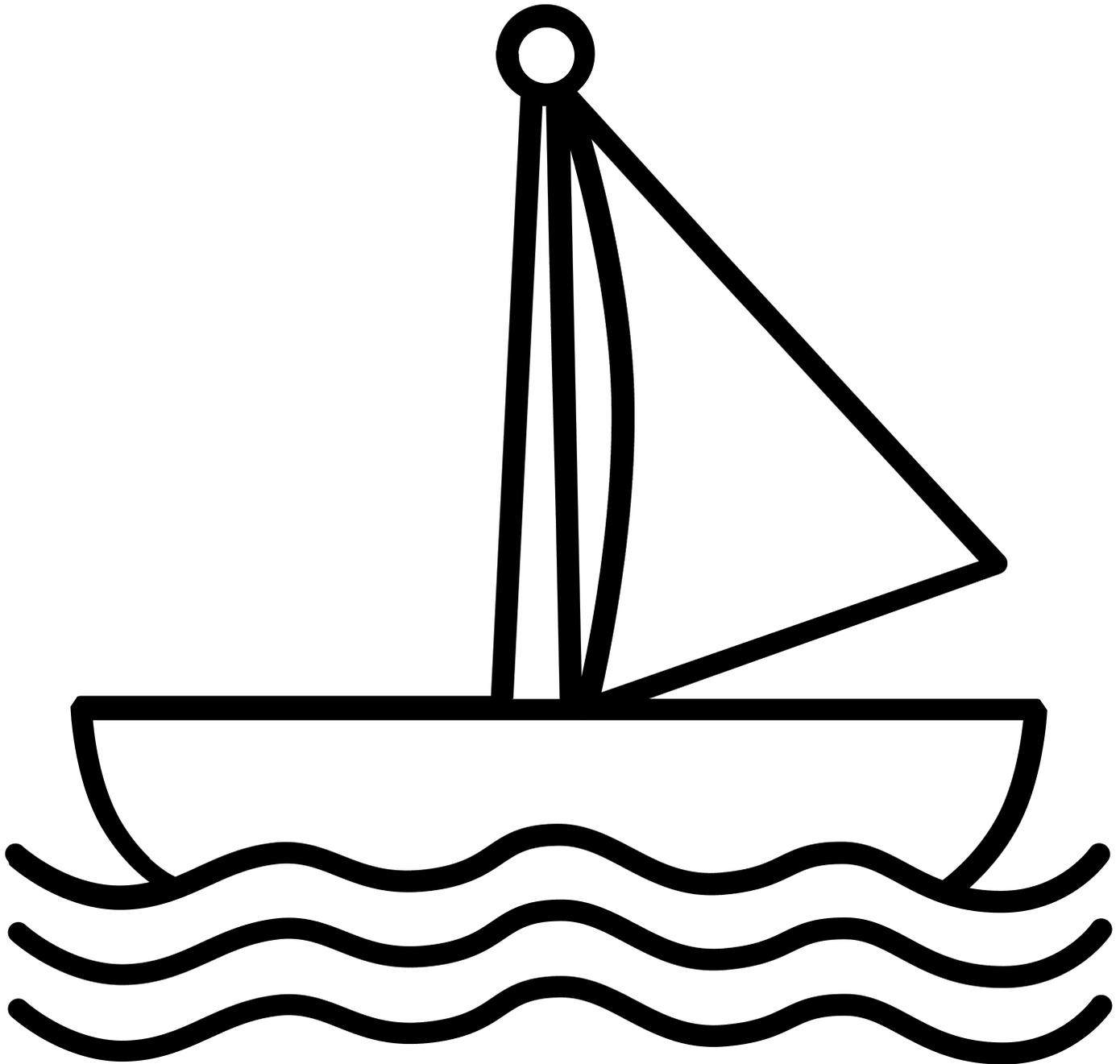
This activity not only makes learning about Walt Whitman engaging but also helps first graders understand the themes of leadership and bravery in an interactive and memorable way.

Discovering Walt Whitman's "O Captain! My Captain!"

NAME: _____ DATE _____

Part 1: Coloring Activity

Instructions: Below is a picture of a ship on the sea and a captain. Color the picture using your favorite colors!



Discovering Walt Whitman's "O Captain! My Captain!"

NAME: _____ DATE _____

Part 2: Circle the Rhyming Words

Instructions: Here are some words from our poem. Circle the words that sound the same at the end.



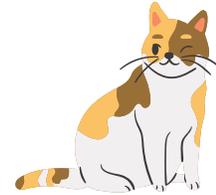
LIP



SHIP



DIP



CAT



HAT



SUN



BUN



DONE



RED



HEAD



LED



BED

Discovering Walt Whitman's "O Captain! My Captain!"

NAME: _____ DATE _____

Part 3: Circle the Rhyming Words

Instructions: Help complete these lines from the poem. Choose a word from the box to fill in the blanks.

WORD BOX: DEAD DONE SHIP CAPTAIN

"O _____! my _____! our fearful trip
is _____."

"Where on the deck my _____ lies, Fallen
cold and _____."

Part 4: Reflection Questions

Instructions: When you think about the captain and his ship, how does it make you feel? Draw a face to show your feelings.



HAPPY



SAD



EXCITED



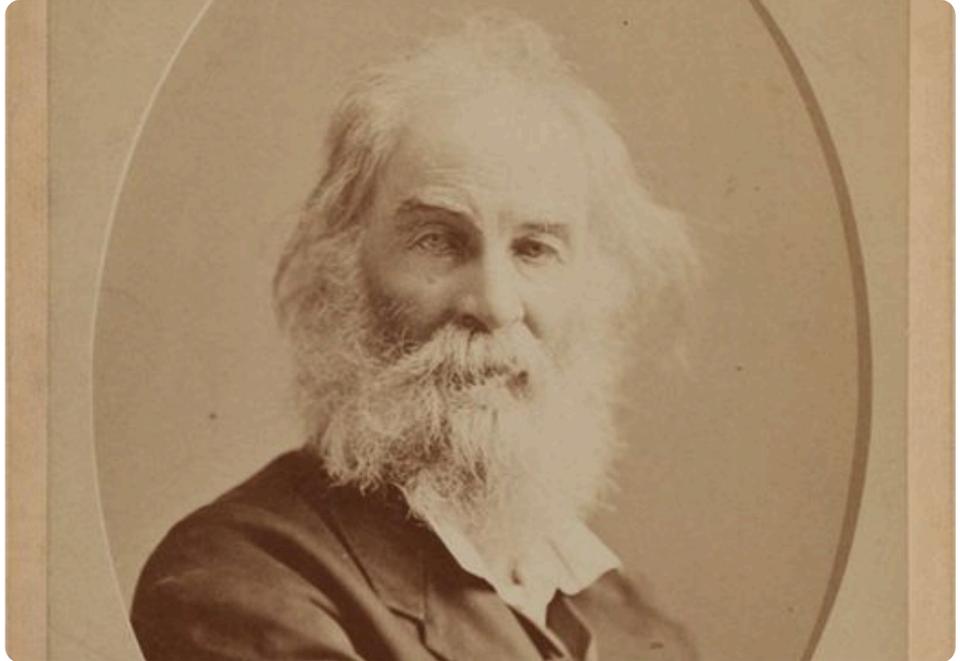
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Resources

- <https://www.history.com/topics/american-civil-war/abraham-lincoln-assassination>
- <https://www.loc.gov/item/today-in-history/february-09/>
- <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/whitmans-life/>
- <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/walt-whitman>
- <https://archive.nytimes.com/opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2015/05/04/how-whitman-remembered-lincoln/>
- [https://pressbooks.pub/poetrypoetics/chapter/o-captain-my-captain/#:~:text=“O%27Captain!,Taps%20\(1865%2D1866\).](https://pressbooks.pub/poetrypoetics/chapter/o-captain-my-captain/#:~:text=“O%27Captain!,Taps%20(1865%2D1866).)

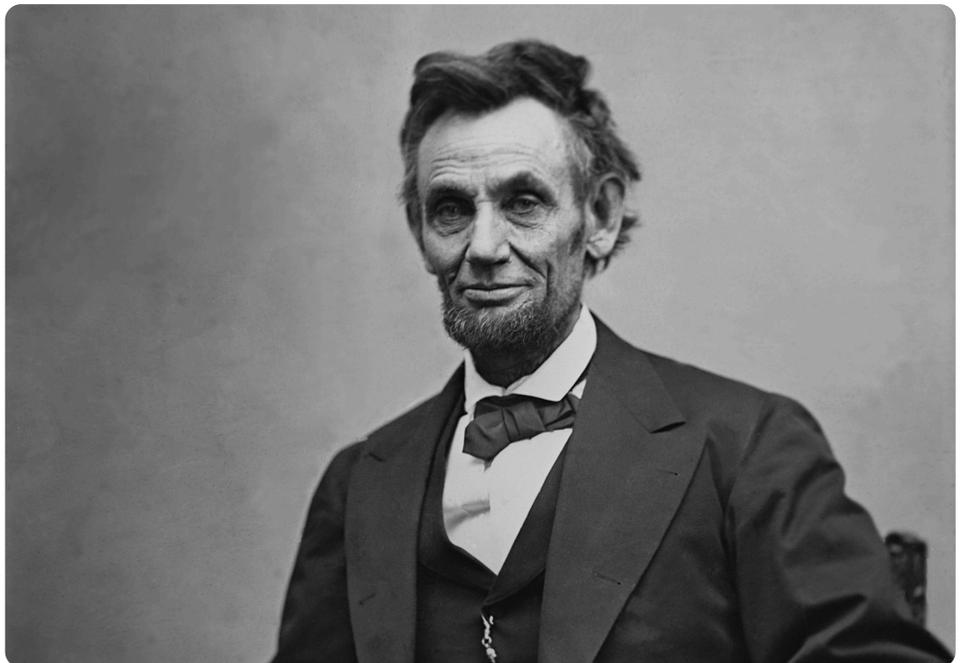
Images

Walt Whitman



Credit: Whitman Archive

Abraham Lincoln



Credit: Canva Pro.

