

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.

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'll 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 Abraham Lincoln Image.]**

Introduction

ASK Students

What do you remember about President Lincoln?

TELL Students

That is right! President Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation to end slavery. He was a great leader who ended slavery and led the United States through the Civil War.

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. The proclamation declared "that all persons held as slaves" within the rebellious states "are, and henceforward shall be free."

ASK Students

Did everyone support the decisions made by President Lincoln

TELL Students

Being a leader means making tough decisions that benefit everyone, even if they might upset some people. Good leaders, like President Lincoln, prioritize doing what is right for all, no matter the opinions of a few. Let's watch another episode of Star Spangled Adventures to explore a poem Walt Whitman wrote about President Lincoln.

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's 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

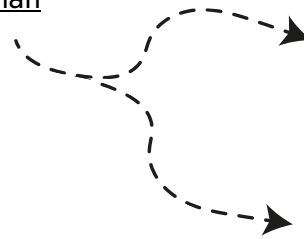
Have you ever felt happy and sad at the same time?

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's okay to feel that way.

WATCH

Learn More With Liberty: [The Life and Times of Walt Whitman](#)
Patriot of the Week: [Walt Whitman](#)





Sailing with Walt Whitman

Objective:

Introduce kindergarten students to Walt Whitman and his famous poem "O Captain! My Captain!" through an interactive and engaging activity.

Materials Needed:

- Large piece of blue fabric or paper (representing the ocean)
- Toy boat or paper boat cutouts
- Printouts of the first stanza of "O Captain! My Captain!" with simple illustrations
- Optional: Captain's hat or sailor's hat for the teacher or a student volunteer

Introduction:

Gather students in a circle and review Walt Whitman, explaining that he was a famous poet who wrote about many different things, including a special poem about a captain and his ship.

Setting Sail:

- Lay the large piece of blue fabric or paper on the floor, representing the ocean.
- Place the toy boat or paper boat cutouts on the "ocean."
- Invite students to take turns being the captain of the boat, pretending to sail across the ocean while reciting the first stanza of "O Captain! My Captain!"
- Encourage students to use their imagination and make sailing sounds like "swish" and "splash" as they move the boat across the "ocean."

Exploring the Poem:

- Hand out printouts of the first stanza of "O Captain! My Captain!" with simple illustrations.
- Read the stanza aloud to the students, emphasizing the rhyming words and the imagery of the ship and the captain.
- Encourage students to point to the illustrations as you read and ask them simple questions about what they see, such as "What color is the boat?" or "Where do you think the captain is going?"



Sailing with Walt Whitman

Captain's Hot Activity (optional):

- If available, put on a captain's hat or sailor's hat and invite a student to join you.
- Together, pretend to be captains of a ship and lead the class in a fun sailing adventure, using phrases from the poem like "O Captain! My Captain!" and "All aboard!"

Reflection:

- Gather students back in a circle and ask them to share one thing they learned about Walt Whitman or the poem "O Captain! My Captain!"
- Encourage students to express their thoughts and feelings about the activity, such as what they enjoyed most or what they found interesting.

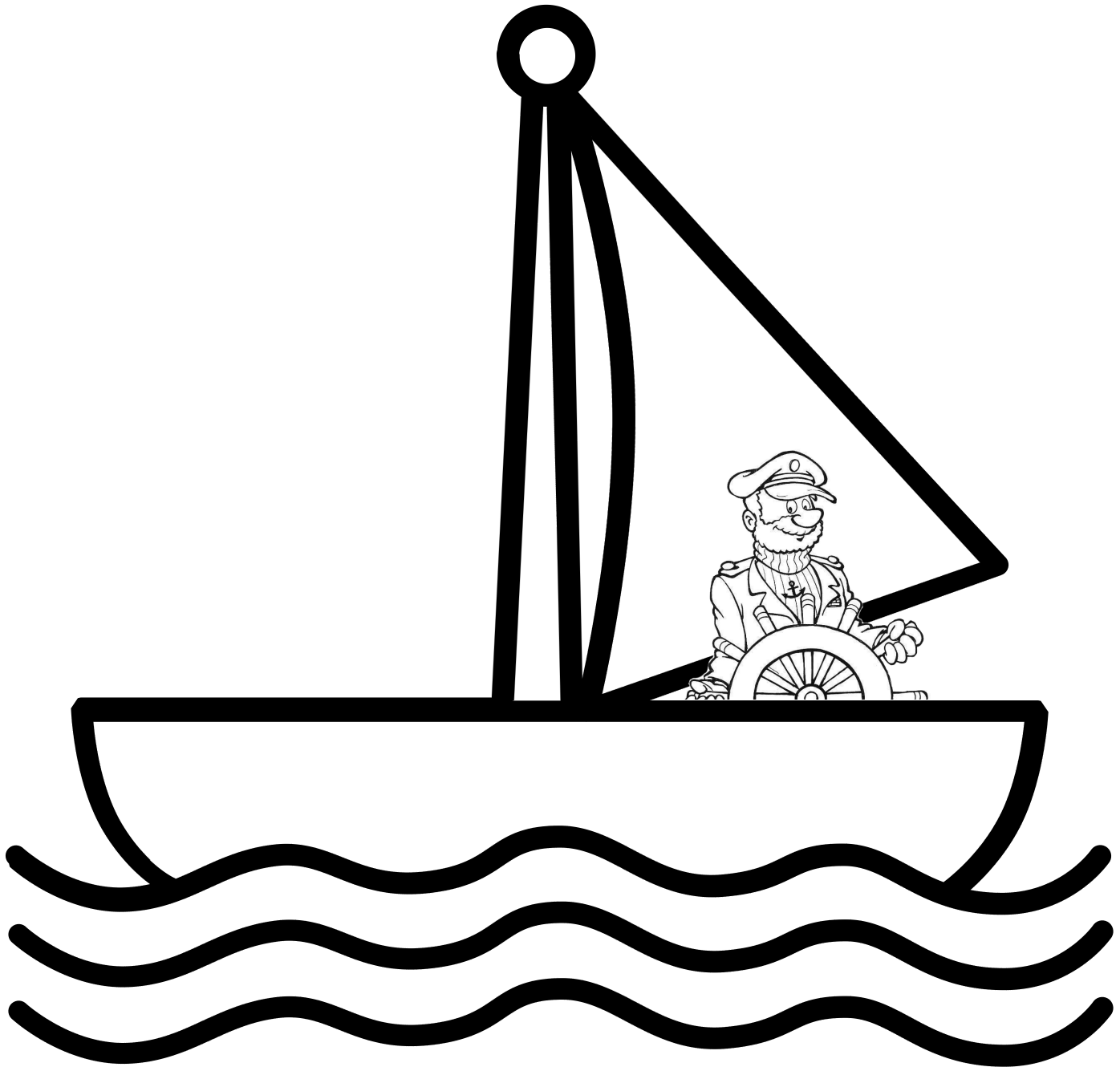
This interactive activity will not only introduce kindergarten students to Walt Whitman and his poem but also allow them to engage their imagination and creativity while learning about sailing and exploration.

Exploring "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!



Exploring "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.



SHIP



DIP



CAT



DONE



SUN



HAT



DEAD



READ



BED

Part 3: Reflection Questions

Instructions: Circle the image that shows how the poem made you feel.



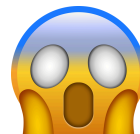
HAPPY



SAD



EXCITED



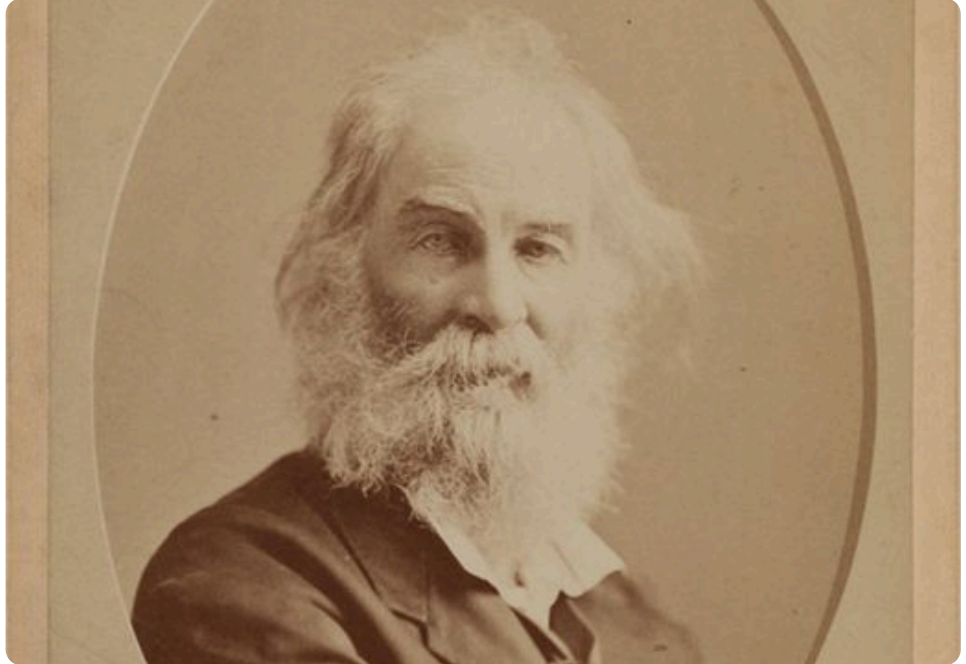
SCARED

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).)

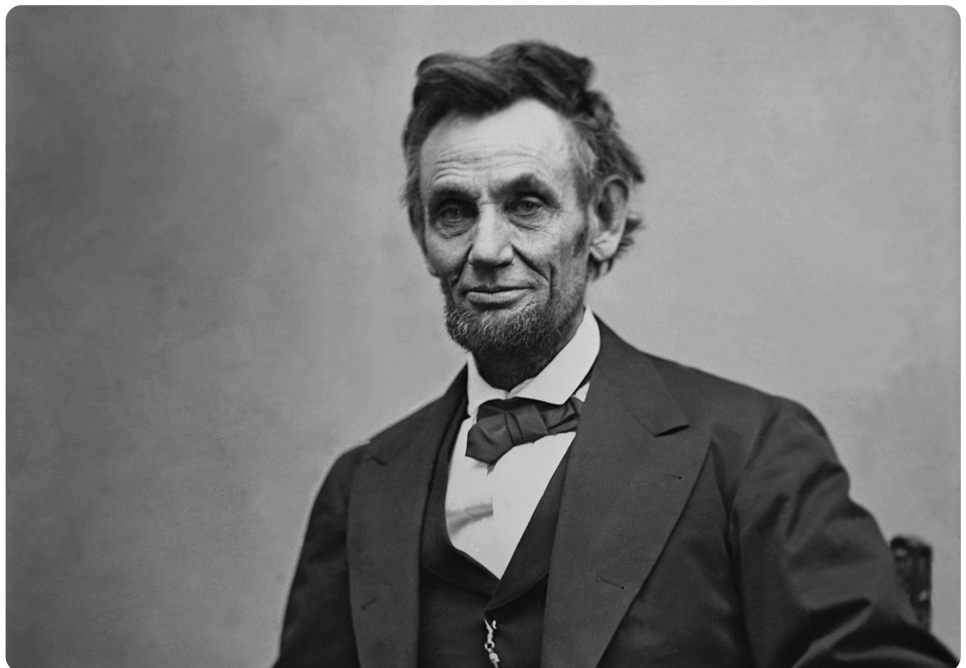
Images

Walt Whitman



Credit: Whitman Archive

Abraham Lincoln



Credit: Canva Pro.

Notes