

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 stanza.
- Identify Walt Whitman as the author of "O Captain! My Captain!" and explain the historical context in which it was written, particularly its connection to the American Civil War and President Abraham Lincoln.
- Explore the themes of leadership, loss, and mourning presented in the poem and discuss how these themes might relate to personal experiences or broader historical contexts.

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 **symbolism:** when one object or thing stands in the place of something else, such as an idea, another object, a person, or a place.
- 0 7 **tragedy:** an event that causes sadness or disaster

Introduction

TELL Students 📖

I am going to read something to you. Please listen carefully.

*In a little cozy nook,
With a big, bound storybook,
Lives a poet with a pen,
Crafting worlds again and again.*

*He scribbles in the light,
Sometimes late into the night,
Words that dance and leap and play,
Turning nighttimes into day.*

*In each line, he plants a seed,
Growing gardens from a bead,
With a rhyme, a verse, a song,
Where all wandering hearts belong.*

*So, next time you read a rhyme,
Think of poets and their time,
Spinning tales from simple things,
Giving dreams their silver wings.*

ASK Students

What is this poem about?

TELL Students 📷 🔑

That is right! This poem is about a poet! 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. 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.]**

Introduction

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 will 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'll 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, please 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 illustrate 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.]**

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.

Introduction

TELL Students (continued)

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 deep 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." However, while this was a bold and important move, not everyone supported it. The Emancipation Proclamation was highly controversial at the time. Some critics in the North argued that Lincoln had overstepped his presidential powers. Others doubted it would have an impact since it applied only to areas controlled by the Confederacy, where the U.S. government had limited control at the time.

ASK Students

Did everyone support the decisions made by President Lincoln?

TELL Students

Despite the mixed reactions, the Emancipation Proclamation marked a critical 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. 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.

Introduction

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 Abraham 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 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 grueling 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. For this special poem honoring Lincoln, he used a more traditional structure to convey his deep respect and sorrow.

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, we see the ship finally coming home after a long and tough journey filled with many challenges. Unfortunately, the captain, who led the ship through all these difficulties, did not survive. In the next part, the poem describes how everyone is gathered at the port, cheering and celebrating the ship's return and the captain's brave leadership. However, despite the joy and excitement, there is a deep sadness because the captain cannot hear the cheers—he is no longer there. It feels almost like a dream, where something very important is missing and everything feels strange and unreal. The speaker expresses a mix of happiness for the ship's safe return and deep sorrow over the loss of the captain, showing us how complex and confusing emotions can be.

ASK Students

What does the ship represent?

TELL Students ✍

That is right! The ship symbolizes the United States. **Symbolism** is when one object or thing stands in the place of something else, such as an idea, another object, a person, or a place. In the last part of the stanza, the poem captures the speaker's sadness because even though the ship has returned home safely, the captain won't be coming back. This mix of feelings—relief that the journey was successful, but sorrow over the captain's absence—reflects a complex emotion.

Lesson

ASK Students

Why is the speaker sad? What does sadness symbolize?

TELL Students

This scene in the poem is similar to a significant event in American history: the end of the Civil War. The country had overcome a long and difficult fight, and it was a time to heal and rebuild. However, President Abraham Lincoln, who had led the nation through this challenging period, passed away just as peace was beginning to settle. Like the captain in the poem, Lincoln did not get to see the peace he worked so hard for. This left the country with mixed emotions—glad that the conflict was over but heartbroken that their leader was gone.

ASK Students

In what way is the captain in the poem not seeing the ship come home safely like what happened to President Abraham Lincoln after the Civil War?

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.

Lesson

WATCH

Learn More With Liberty: [From Quill to Keyboard: How Poetry Tells History](#)
Patriot of the Week: [Walt Whitman](#)





Lincoln and Whitman Time Travel Adventure

Objective:

Engage second graders in exploring the connections between Walt Whitman, Abraham Lincoln, and the poem "O Captain! My Captain!" through an interactive time travel adventure.

Materials Needed:

- Costume items like hats and fake beards to represent Whitman and Lincoln
- Printed segments of "O Captain! My Captain!" with accompanying illustrations
- Facts about Lincoln's presidency and the Civil War, printed on cards
- A "time machine" made from a large box or designated area in the classroom
- A craft station for creating time travel journals

Fact Cards:

- Abraham Lincoln became the 16th President of the United States in 1861.
- Lincoln was known as "Honest Abe" because he always tried to do what was right.
- The Civil War started in 1861, the same year Lincoln became president.
- The Civil War was fought between the northern states (Union) and the southern states (Confederacy).
- Lincoln wanted to keep the United States together when some states wanted to leave.
- In 1863, President Lincoln gave a famous speech called the Gettysburg Address.
- The Gettysburg Address was only 272 words long, but it is one of the most famous speeches in American history.
- Lincoln wore a tall, black hat that he sometimes used to store important papers.
- During the Civil War, Lincoln often visited troops to encourage them.
- Lincoln had a big, fluffy cat named Tabby, and he loved animals.
- The Emancipation Proclamation was issued by Lincoln in 1863, and it declared that all enslaved people in Confederate states were free.
- Lincoln led the country during a very hard time, but he worked hard to make things better.
- Lincoln was the first president to have a beard while in office.
- Lincoln loved reading and often read stories to his children.
- The Thirteenth Amendment, which ended slavery in the United States, was passed in Congress while Lincoln was president. [Teachers: Although the 13th Amendment passed Congress on January 31, 1865, while Lincoln was president, it was not ratified until December 6, 1865, after his death.]
- Lincoln is remembered on Mount Rushmore along with three other presidents: George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and Theodore Roosevelt.



Lincoln and Whitman Time Travel Adventure

Fact Cards (continued):

- He was very tall, about 6 feet 4 inches, making him one of the tallest U.S. presidents.
- Lincoln's face is on the penny and the five-dollar bill.

Preparation:

- Set up a "time machine" in a corner of the classroom, decorated to spark imagination.
- Prepare costume items and place them near the time machine.
- Scatter printed poem segments and fact cards around the classroom, simulating historical artifacts that need to be discovered.

Introduction:

- Briefly review Walt Whitman and Abraham Lincoln, emphasizing their importance during the Civil War era.
- Explain that students will be going on a time travel adventure to learn more about these historical figures and Whitman's poem.

Time Travel Preparation:

- Have students "dress up" as historians using the costume items.
- Give each student a "time travel journal" they can use to record important discoveries (these can be simple notebooks or papers stapled together).

Artifact Hunt:

- Instruct students to use their time machine to travel back to the Civil War era and search for the scattered poem segments and fact cards.
- Encourage them to work in teams to find and document their findings in their time travel journals.

Rebuilding History:

- Gather students and ask them to share their findings.
- Help them piece together the poem using the segments they found.
- Discuss the facts about Lincoln, highlighting his role in the Civil War and his connection to Whitman's poem.



Lincoln and Whitman Time Travel Adventure

Creative Reflection:

- Ask students to draw or write in their journals about a key moment they learned about, like Lincoln signing the Emancipation Proclamation or Whitman writing his poem.
- Provide guidance and ideas to help students think about the historical impact of these actions.
- Have a brief discussion about what they learned during their adventure.
- Encourage students to share their favorite part of the history they helped to "rebuild."

This interactive adventure not only makes learning about history and poetry fun but also deepens understanding of the significant roles both Whitman and Lincoln played during a pivotal time in American history. Displaying their journals or creating a classroom timeline with their findings can extend engagement and reinforce the concepts learned.

Word Scramble Worksheet

NAME: _____ DATE _____

Objective: Help second graders learn key terms related to Walt Whitman, Abraham Lincoln, and the poem "O Captain! My Captain!" through a fun word scramble and short answer questions.

Instructions: Unscramble the words below and write them correctly next to each scrambled word. Then, answer the questions at the bottom of the page.

1. TALW MINTHAW _____

2. MAABHAR NICLOLN _____

3. NCPATAI _____

4. IPHS _____

5. VICIL RAW _____

6. TEIMONMICAPA PIOACANMTRL _____

7. OETP _____

8. MDEFOER _____

9. LSAVE _____

10. ETYRGUSTB DSDAERS _____

Word Scramble Worksheet

NAME: _____ DATE _____

Short Answer Questions

1. Who wrote the poem "O Captain! My Captain!"?

2. What important document did Abraham Lincoln sign that helped end slavery?

Answer Key - Word Scramble Worksheet

Answers for Word Scramble

1. WALT WHITMAN
2. ABRAHAM LINCOLN
3. CAPTAIN
4. SHIP
5. CIVIL WAR
6. EMANCIPATION PROCLAMATION
7. POET
8. FREEDOM
9. SLAVE
10. GETTYSBURG ADDRESS

Answers for Short Answer Questions

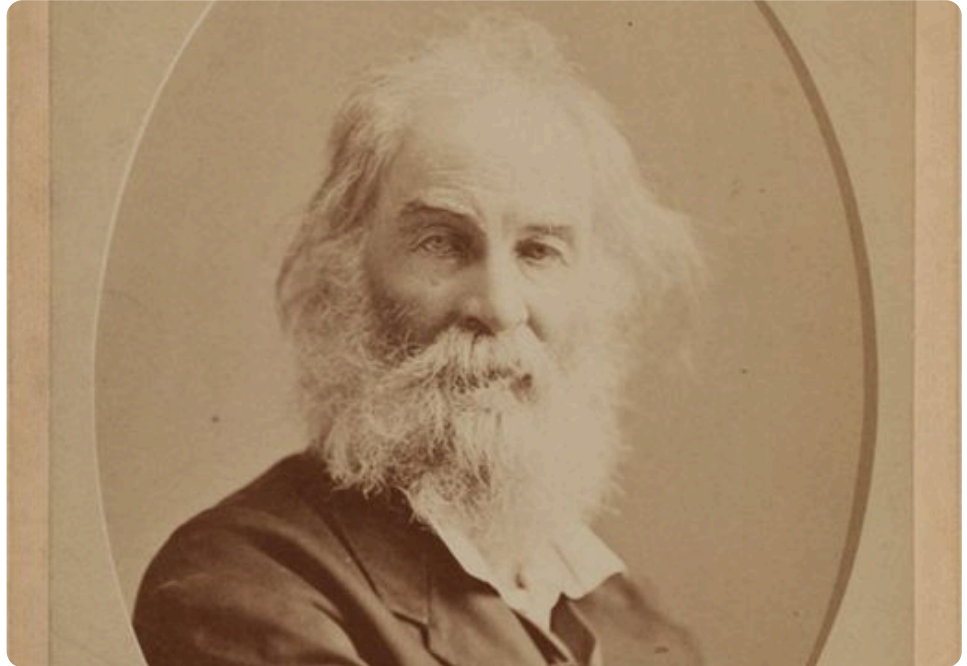
1. Walt Whitman
2. The Emancipation Proclamation

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.

