

# 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.
- Analyze and interpret the symbolism of the ship and the captain in the poem, understanding how these symbols relate to the United States and Abraham Lincoln during the Civil War.
- Recognize and describe the structure of the poem, noting its stanzaic form and rhyme scheme, and discuss how these elements contribute to the overall impact of the poem.

# 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 wing*

## 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, 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 a practical 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

What tragedy happened at Ford Theatre?

## **TELL** Students

Not everyone was pleased when the North won the Civil War. One unhappy person was John Wilkes Booth, an actor who supported the southern states, called the Confederacy. **[Reference John Wilkes Booth Image.]** Booth did not want the North to win, so he made a plan with some others to harm President Lincoln, Vice President Andrew Johnson, and Secretary of State William H. Seward. They first tried to kidnap President Lincoln but that plan didn't work.

## **ASK** Students

Who was John Wilkes Booth?

## **TELL** Students

On the night of April 14, 1865, President Lincoln was watching a play at Ford's Theatre, feeling happy and laughing with his wife, Mary Todd Lincoln, and two friends. They were all in a special seating area called a box. While the play was going on, Booth quietly went into Lincoln's box at 10:15 p.m. and used a small gun to shoot President Lincoln. After he was hurt, President Lincoln was moved to a boarding house across the street. Doctors came quickly, but they soon realized that President Lincoln would not survive. Sadly, President Lincoln died early the next morning at 7:22 a.m., surrounded by his wife and close ones.

## **ASK** Students

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

# Lesson

## TELL Students 🔑

Americans across the country mourned the death of a heroic leader who bravely guided the United States through the devastating 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 the president's life. To **commemorate** means to honor the memory of.

## ASK Students

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

## 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?

# Lesson

## 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;

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.

# Lesson

## **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.

## **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.

# Lesson

## TELL Students (continued)

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

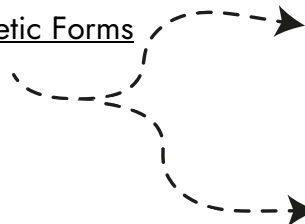
Have you ever felt happy and sad at the same time?

## 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.

## WATCH

Learn More With Liberty: [Exploring Poetic Forms](#)  
Patriot of the Week: [Walt Whitman](#)





# Poem Puzzle Party

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## Objective:

Engage third graders in learning about the structure, themes, and literary devices of a poem through a fun, hands-on puzzle activity.

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## Materials Needed:

- Large printouts of the short poem in the introduction cut into puzzle pieces (each line or stanza on a separate piece)
- Blank puzzle templates for students to write on
- Crayons or markers
- List of key vocabulary related to poetry (e.g., stanza, rhyme, metaphor)

## Preparation:

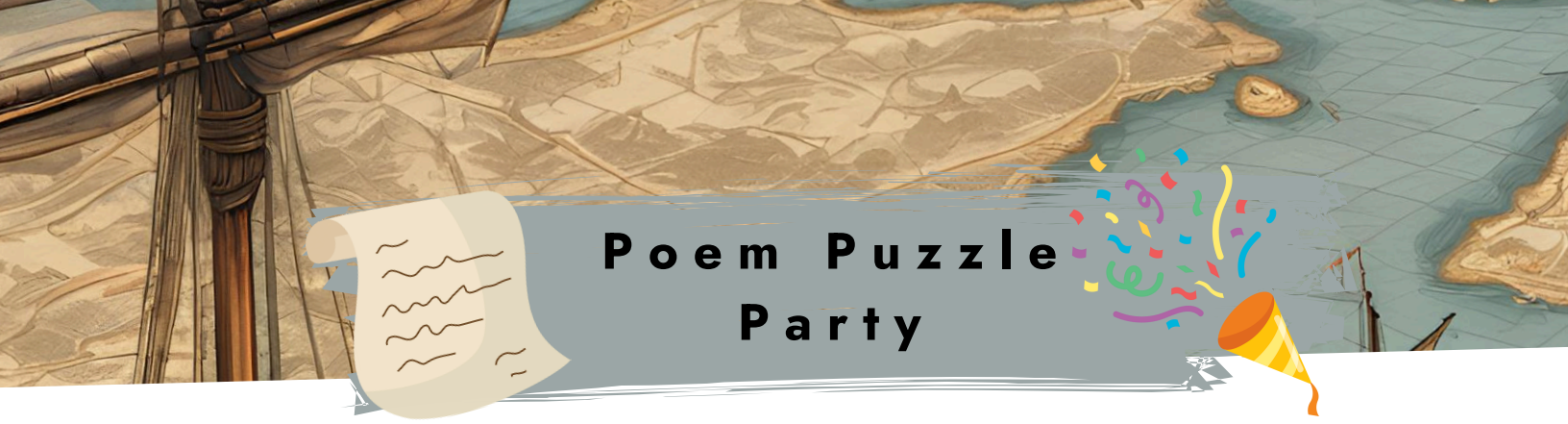
- Print the poem and carefully cut it into pieces like a puzzle. Each piece should have a line or a stanza on it.
- Prepare blank puzzle templates — these can be pre-cut puzzles where each piece has space for students to write.

## Introduction:

- Introduce the activity by explaining that poems are like puzzles made up of different parts that fit together to create a beautiful picture or tell a story.
- Introduce the vocabulary related to poems that they will need to know for this activity, such as "stanza," "rhyme," and "metaphor."

## Puzzle Assembly:

- Divide students into small groups and give each group a set of poem puzzle pieces.
- Challenge students to assemble the poem correctly by figuring out the order of the lines or stanzas.
- As they work, encourage students to discuss why they think the pieces go in a certain order, focusing on clues like rhyming words and the flow of ideas.



# Poem Puzzle Party

## **Create Your Own Poem Puzzle:**

- Hand out blank puzzle templates to each student and ask them to write their own short poem, using at least one of the poetic devices they have learned (e.g., rhyme, alliteration).
- Once they have written their poems, they should cut their paper into puzzle pieces.

## **Exchange and Solve:**

- Have students exchange their poem puzzles with another student or another group.
- Challenge them to piece together their classmate's poem, paying attention to the structure and literary devices used.

## **Exchange and Solve:**

- Bring the class back together and have a few volunteers share the poem they assembled and their thoughts about the process.
- Discuss what they learned about how poems are structured and how different elements like rhyme and rhythm help to enhance the meaning and enjoyment of poetry.

This interactive "Poem Puzzle Party" activity allows students to explore and understand the structure and creative aspects of poetry in a hands-on and engaging way. It also encourages them to think critically about how poems are constructed and to appreciate the artistry behind poetry writing.

# Multiple Choice Quiz

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

**Objective:** Assess and reinforce third graders' knowledge about Walt Whitman, Abraham Lincoln, and the poem "O Captain! My Captain!" through a series of multiple-choice questions.

**Instructions:** Read each question carefully and choose the correct answer from the options provided.

1. Who wrote the poem "O Captain! My Captain!"?
  - A) George Washington
  - B) Walt Whitman
  - C) Abraham Lincoln
  - D) Thomas Jefferson
2. What was Abraham Lincoln's role in American history?
  - A) He was a famous poet.
  - B) He was the 16th President of the United States.
  - C) He was a general in the Civil War.
  - D) He invented the telephone.
3. Why did Walt Whitman write "O Captain! My Captain!"?
  - A) To celebrate his birthday
  - B) As a tribute to Abraham Lincoln after his death
  - C) To tell a story about a ship
  - D) Because he loved the ocean
4. What event in history is linked to the poem "O Captain! My Captain!"?
  - A) The signing of the Declaration of Independence
  - B) The end of the Civil War
  - C) The first moon landing
  - D) The invention of the car
5. Which of these words describes Abraham Lincoln according to the poem?
  - A) Captain
  - B) Sailor
  - C) Soldier
  - D) Explorer



# Multiple Choice Quiz

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

6. What does the ship in the poem symbolize?
  - A) Adventure on the high seas
  - B) A famous pirate ship
  - C) The United States after the Civil War
  - D) A new type of airplane
  
7. How did people feel when Abraham Lincoln died?
  - A) Happy
  - B) Excited
  - C) Sad
  - D) Indifferent
  
8. What role did Abraham Lincoln have during the Civil War?
  - A) He was a poet.
  - B) He was a painter.
  - C) He was the President.
  - D) He was an advisor.
  
9. Which line from "O Captain! My Captain!" shows that the voyage was dangerous but successful?
  - A) "The ship has weathered every rack, the prize we sought is won;"
  - B) "Rise up and hear the bells;"
  - C) "For you bouquets and ribboned wreaths—for you the shores a-crowding;"
  - D) "But I, with mournful tread, Walk the deck my Captain lies,"
  
10. What is one way Walt Whitman contributed to American literature?
  - A) He wrote novels about the future.
  - B) He created the first American dictionary.
  - C) He wrote influential poems, including "O Captain! My Captain!"
  - D) He was the first American to win a Nobel Prize in Literature.

# Answer Key - Multiple Choice Quiz

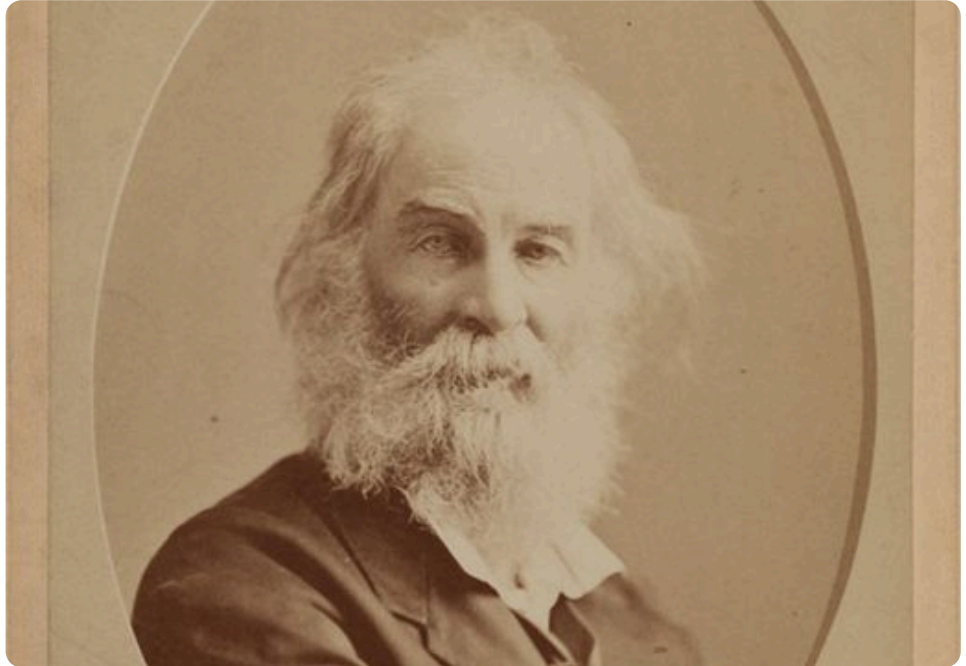
1. Who wrote the poem "O Captain! My Captain!"?  
B) Walt Whitman
2. What was Abraham Lincoln's role in American history?  
B) He was the 16th President of the United States.
3. Why did Walt Whitman write "O Captain! My Captain!"?  
B) As a tribute to Abraham Lincoln after his death
4. What event in history is linked to the poem "O Captain! My Captain!"?  
B) The end of the Civil War
5. Which of these words describes Abraham Lincoln according to the poem?  
A) Captain
6. What does the ship in the poem symbolize?  
C) The United States after the Civil War
7. How did people feel when Abraham Lincoln died?  
C) Sad
8. What role did Abraham Lincoln have during the Civil War?  
C) He was the President.
9. Which line from "O Captain! My Captain!" shows that the voyage was dangerous but successful?  
A) "The ship has weathered every rack, the prize we sought is won;"
10. What is one way Walt Whitman contributed to American literature?  
C) He wrote influential poems, including "O Captain! My Captain!"

# 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).)

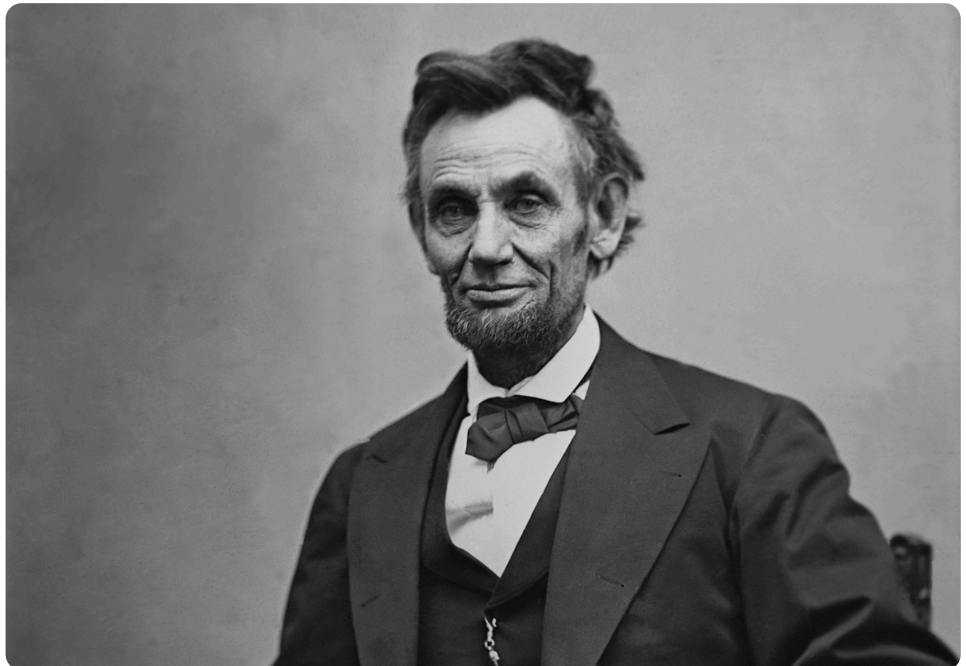
# Images

**Walt Whitman**



Credit: Whitman Archive

**Abraham Lincoln**



Credit: Canva Pro.

# Images

**John Wilkes  
Booth**



Credit: Wikipedia

