Preface to “Leaves of Grass,” 1855—by Walt Whitman

Style—Free verse, long lines, catalogues, lists, anaphora, precise diction

**AMERICA does not repel the past,** or what the past has produced under its forms, or amid other politics, or the idea of castes, or the old religions—accepts the lesson with calmness—is not impatient because the slough still sticks to opinions and manners in literature, while the life which served its requirements has passed into the new life of the new forms—perceives that the corpse is slowly borne from the eating and sleeping rooms of the house—perceives that it waits a little while in the door—that it was fittest for its days—that its action has descended to the stalwart and well-shaped heir who approaches—and that he shall be fittest for his days.

Stanza 1: America is a) energy b) opportunity c) freedom d) strong e) strong

- America is a progressive nation that reflects on the past and learns lessons from it. America has never been static.
- It is an ever growing nation of people, ideas and beliefs that evolve as the nation evolves
- Old habits may die, but history is not soon forgotten.
- Pay attention to the free verse style and use of anaphora.
- How does the syntax (sentence structure) contribute to meaning—This is one extended cumulative sentence (The main idea is at the beginning.) The subject of the remaining clauses is an implied “AMERICA.” Whitman expects the reader to assume his beliefs because after all, everyone is connected.

The Americans of all nations at any time upon the earth, have probably the fullest poetical nature. The United States themselves are essentially the greatest poem. In the history of the earth hitherto, the largest and most stirring appear tame and orderly to their ampler largeness and stir. **Here at last** is something in the doings of man that corresponds with the broadcast doings of the day and night. Here **is action** untied from strings, necessarily blind to particulars and details, **magnificently moving in masses.** Here **is the hospitality** which for ever indicates heroes. Here the **performance,** disdaining the trivial, unapproach’d in the tremendous audacity of its crowds and groupings, and the push of its perspective, spreads with crampless and flowing breadth, and showers its prolific and splendid extravagance. One sees it must indeed own the riches of the summer and winter, and need never be bankrupt while corn grows from the ground, or the orchards drop apples, or the bays contain fish, or men beget children upon women.

Stanza 2: *Notice Whitman’s metaphor, comparing Americans as a poem.*

- Whitman focuses on the dignity, intensity, diversity, industrious nature, resourcefulness and democracy of America.
- Tone= celebratory, admiration and uplifting
- Though initially not received favorably, Whitman’s poetry later took on the spirit of a progressive America.

**Traditional Epic Poetry**—celebrated a hero who embodies the values of a nation.

**Epic theme**—All people of all times are connected by their shared experiences.
“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 trills;  
For you bouquets and ribbon'd wreaths--for you the shores a-crow  
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 deck my Captain lies,  
Fallen cold and dead.

I. Structure
   A. “O Captain! My Captain!” by Walt Whitman
   B. Give the type of poem (narrative, lyric, ballad, sonnet, etc.).
   C. State the number of stanzas and type of stanza (couplet, tercet, etc.).
   D. rhyme scheme

II. Paraphrase
   A. Describe the speaker
   B. Paraphrase the poem, line by line, stanza by stanza.

III. Devices: Identify the device and cite the line number.
   A. Identify figurative language (simile, metaphor, personification, allusion, hyperbole, etc.). [minimum two different devices] AND explain the significance of at least one device.
   B. Identify effective example of imagery (sight, sound, taste, touch, smell). [minimum two] AND explain the significance of at least one device.
   C. Identify sound devices (alliteration, assonance, consonance, onomatopoeia, rhyme, rhythm, etc.). [minimum two devices] AND explain the significance of at least one device.
   D. Identify and explain details of form (syntax, diction); explain your ideas with examples from the poem
   E. State the tone and mood and justify your ideas with specific diction/details.

IV. Theme/Conflict/Figurative Meaning: Explain the central idea, conflict, and/or life lesson of the poem. Refer to specific examples in the poem to support your ideas. Remember, theme is not a word but a statement about how the author feels about that word or concept.
I Hear America Singing—by Walt Whitman

I hear America singing, the varied carols I hear, Those of mechanics, each one singing his as it should be, blithe and strong, The carpenter singing his as he measures his plank or beam, The mason singing his as he makes ready for work, or leaves off work, The boatman singing what belongs to him in his boat, the deckhand singing on the steamboat deck, The shoemaker singing as he sits on his bench, the hatter singing as he stands, The wood-cutter's song, the ploughboy's on his way in the morning, or at noon intermission or at sundown, The delicious singing of the mother, or of the young wife at work, or of the girl sewing or washing, Each singing what belongs to him or her and to none else, The day what belongs to the day—night the party of young fellows, robust, friendly, Singing with open mouths their strong melodious songs.

I, Too, Sing America—by Langston Hughes (1902 – 1967)

I, too, sing America.

I am the darker brother.
They send me to eat in the kitchen

When company comes,
But I laugh,
And eat well,
And grow strong.

Tomorrow,
I’ll be at the table
When company comes.
Nobody’ll dare
Say to me,
“Eat in the kitchen,”
Then.

Besides,
They’ll see how beautiful I am
And be ashamed—

I, too, am America.

Prompt: How does Langston Hughes, an African American poet writing during the 1920’s – 1940’s, relate to Walt Whitman’s original poem?

ANSWER THIS QUESTION.

“Hughes, who claimed Paul Lawrence Dunbar, Carl Sandburg, and Walt Whitman as his primary influences, is particularly known for his insightful, colorful portrayals of black life in America from the twenties through the sixties.”

www.poets.org/poetsorg/poet/langston-hughes