

Name _____

Date _____



Walt Whitman

Today we're going to talk about Walt Whitman...in just a minute.

Born on Long Island in 1819, Walt Whitman received little formal schooling growing up in Brooklyn. At age 12, he began working in the printing industry, where he discovered his love of literature. He would go on to become a teacher, a journalist, and a newspaper editor.

In 1855, Whitman published his first poetry collection, *Leaves of Grass*. Inspired by transcendentalism, Whitman's poems explored themes of nature, individuality, and democracy. Some also contained sexual references, which scandalized 19th-century readers. Still, Whitman continued to revise and expand the book, publishing eight more editions during his lifetime.

When the Civil War began, Whitman moved to Washington, DC, where he tended to wounded Union soldiers in military hospitals. The brutality of the conflict affected him profoundly, and in 1865, he released a poetry collection reflecting on his experiences, called *Drum-Taps*. Later editions of the book contained the most popular poem Whitman would publish during his lifetime: "O Captain! My Captain!," an elegy for the assassinated president Abraham Lincoln.

Whitman died in 1892, his work having been largely overlooked. Today, however, he's recognized as a defining literary figure, hailed by the Poetry Foundation as "America's world poet—a latter-day successor to Homer, Virgil, Dante, and Shakespeare."

What parallels do you see between Walt Whitman and these other poets?