

Name _____

Date _____

Walt Whitman - Answer Key

Use the text to answer each question below.

1. Though he received little **formal** schooling, Walt Whitman became one of the most prolific and influential American poets. First published in 1865, “O Captain! My Captain!” appears in *Drum-Taps*, Whitman’s poetry collection inspired by his experience **tending** to wounded soldiers during the Civil War. An admirer of Abraham Lincoln and his **democracy**, Whitman wrote this poem as an **elegy** for the assassinated president. **O Captain! My Captain!** 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-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 deck my Captain lies, Fallen cold and dead.

Which of these oppositional themes does this poem address?



A.

Victory and loss

Written in the wake of the Civil War, this poem reflects Whitman’s joy at the Union’s triumph as well as his sorrow at the assassination of president Abraham Lincoln. Phrases like “The ship has weather’d every rack, the prize we sought is won” demonstrate the central theme of victory, while phrases like “But I with mournful tread / Walk the deck my Captain lies/Fallen cold and dead” highlight the contrasting theme of loss.

B. Nature and technology

C. Love and hate

D. Order and chaos

2. Inspired by the **transcendentalist** movement, "I Hear America Singing" was first published in the 1860 edition of Whitman's poetry collection *Leaves of Grass*. In it, Whitman writes of a harmonious, idyllic United States in which the work of every individual is celebrated. Whitman went on to **revise** *Leaves of Grass* multiple times during his lifetime. **"I Hear America Singing"** 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—at night the party of young fellows, robust, friendly, Singing with open mouths their strong melodious songs.

Which of the following best describes the central idea of this poem?

- A. Music and singing are an important part of social life.
- B. Workers must join together to fight for their collective rights.
- C. Everybody has a unique purpose that contributes to a greater good.
- D. The Industrial Revolution dramatically changed the labor force.



C.

Everybody has a unique purpose that contributes to a greater good.

"I Hear America Singing" presents a picture of a harmonious, idyllic United States in which every individual's work helps society to thrive. Whitman describes the different roles that people occupy in the labor force, stating that each is "singing what belongs to him or her and to none else."

3. *Originally part of a longer poem titled “Whispers of Heavenly Death,” “A Noiseless Patient Spider” was reprinted as its own poem in Whitman’s 1871 collection, *Passage to India*.* **“A Noiseless Patient Spider”** A noiseless patient spider, I mark’d where on a little promontory it stood isolated, Mark’d how to explore the vacant vast surrounding, It launch’d forth filament, filament, filament out of itself, Ever unreeling them, ever tirelessly speeding them. And you O my soul where you stand, Surrounded, detached, in measureless oceans of space, Ceaselessly musing, venturing, throwing, seeking the spheres to connect them, Till the bridge you will need be form’d, till the ductile anchor hold, Till the gossamer thread you fling catch somewhere, O my soul.

In this poem, the spider is an extended metaphor for the soul. How does Whitman compare the two?

- A. Both explore the ocean.
- B. Both are wild animals that cannot be predicted or controlled.
- C. Both stand isolated and are self-sufficient.
- ✓ **D.** Both need to seek and form connections to find fulfillment.
- Lines like “It launch’d forth filament, filament, filament out of itself,” “Till the bridge you will need be form’d,” and “Till the gossamer thread you fling catch somewhere” support the extended metaphor that the spider and soul both seek connections.*