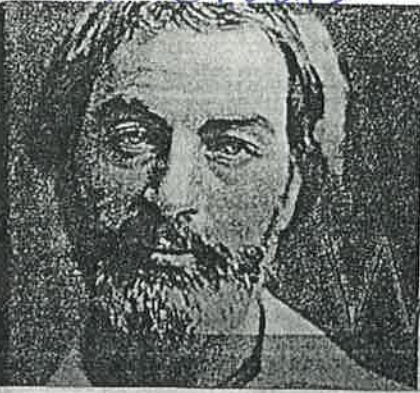


Day 1

Background *Less than a hundred years after the United States was founded, the new nation discovered its voice in a poet who spoke to all the world. His name was **Walt Whitman**, and he struck a note in literature that was as forthright, as original, and as deeply charged with democracy's energies as the land that produced him.*

11th Grade



Poems by
Walt Whitman

I Hear America Singing Walt Whitman

A Noiseless Patient Spider Walt Whitman

Walt Whitman (1819–1892) grew up in rural Long Island and crowded Brooklyn. He held a series of jobs including typesetter, printer, newspaper editor, school teacher, carpenter, and journalist. In the 1840s, Whitman published a number of poems and short stories—and even a fairly successful novel—but these were conventional efforts. Whitman was just waiting for the proper inspiration. Upon reading Ralph Waldo Emerson, he realized that he could celebrate all aspects of nature and humanity by using spiritual language. “I was simmering, simmering, simmering,” he once declared. “Emerson brought me to a boil.”

In the early 1850s, Whitman quit his job as a journalist and worked on a book of poems called *Leaves of Grass*. Many people were shocked by its controversial content and revolutionary form. Of the 800 copies printed, most were eventually thrown away. However, a few readers recognized the poet’s genius. In a letter to Whitman, Emerson called *Leaves of Grass* “the most extraordinary piece of wit and wisdom that America has yet contributed.”

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1. **READ** ▶ As you read lines 1–11, begin to collect and cite text evidence.
 - Underline the different kinds of workers the poem catalogs.
 - Circle the word that refers to the collective group of singers.
 - In the margin, note the type of people the speaker “hears.”

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,
5 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,
10 The day what belongs to the day—at night the party of young
fellows, robust, friendly,
Singing with open mouths their strong melodious songs.

2. **REREAD** ◀ Reread lines 10–11. What attitude does the speaker express toward the young men? Cite evidence from the text in your response.



SHORT RESPONSE

Cite Text Evidence What is the theme of this poem—what is the author revealing about America? Cite text evidence in your response.

1. **READ** ▶ As you read lines 1–10, begin to collect and cite text evidence.
 - Underline the two subjects the speaker observes.
 - Circle references to web-making.
 - In the margin, explain what surrounds the “noiseless patient spider” and “you O my soul.”

A Noiseless Patient Spider

A noiseless patient spider,
I mark'd where on a little promontory¹ it stood isolated,
Mark'd how to explore the vacant vast surrounding,
It launch'd forth filament, filament, filament, out of itself,
5 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 ductile² anchor
hold,
10 Till the gossamer³ thread you fling catch somewhere, O my soul.

¹ **promontory:** a ridge of land or rock jutting out over water or land.

² **ductile:** capable of being drawn or stretched out.

³ **gossamer:** extremely light or fine.

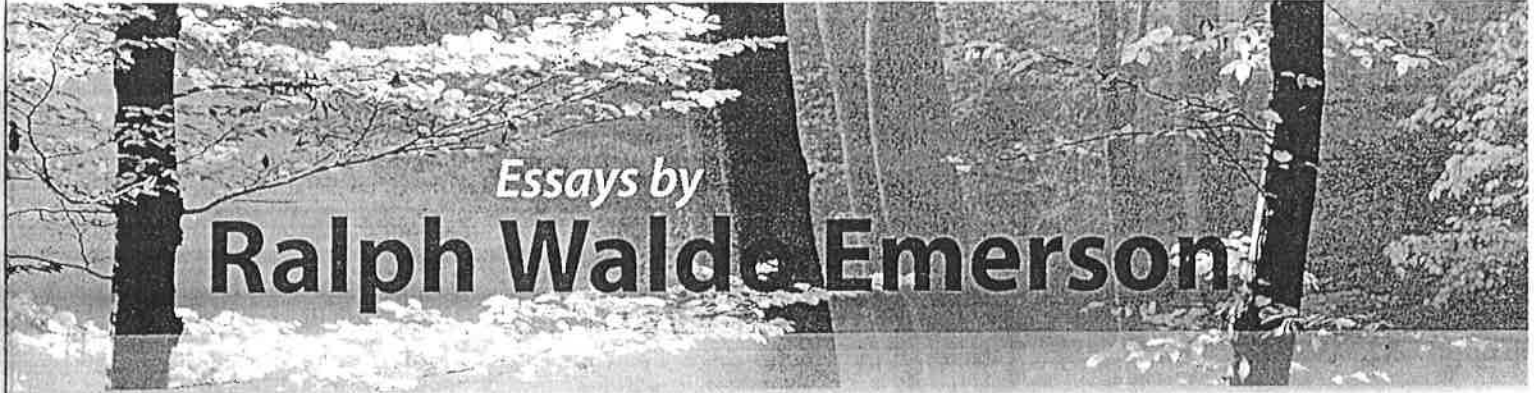
2. **REREAD AND DISCUSS** ◀ Reread lines 1–10. With a small group, discuss the use of parallelism in lines 5 and 8. What do these parallel elements suggest about the relationship between the spider and the speaker?

SHORT RESPONSE

Cite Text Evidence What is the theme of the poem? What details communicate that theme? Cite text evidence in your response.

Day 2

Background As the acknowledged leader of the transcendentalists, Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882) was a towering figure in the 19th-century literary world. He helped shape a new, uniquely American body of literature and is often cited as one of the most significant writers in American history. "All life is an experiment," the radical thinker and writer once said. "The more experiments you make, the better."



- from Nature** Ralph Waldo Emerson
- from Self-Reliance** Ralph Waldo Emerson

Ralph Waldo Emerson was born in Boston, Massachusetts, in 1803. He attended Harvard and was ordained as a Unitarian minister in 1829. Just over a year later, his beloved wife, Ellen, died of tuberculosis. Ellen's death threw Emerson into a state of spiritual crisis. In 1832, after much consideration, Emerson resigned his post. He settled in Concord, Massachusetts, and devoted himself to the study of philosophy, religion, and literature.

In 1836 Emerson published *Nature*, in which he eloquently articulated his transcendental philosophy, an outgrowth of European romanticism. That same year, Emerson formed the Transcendental Club with a group of like-minded friends, including Henry David Thoreau and Margaret Fuller. *Nature*, with its emphasis on self-reliance and individuality, became the group's unofficial manifesto. He elaborated upon his ideas in essays and a series of popular lectures. By the 1840s, the Sage of Concord, as he was known, had become a major literary force whose influence is still evident in American culture today.



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1. **READ** ▶ As you read lines 1–20, begin to collect and cite evidence.

- Underline metaphorical phrases.
- Circle language that Emerson uses to describe the woods.
- In the margin, explain what event causes the author “perfect exhilaration” (lines 2–5).

from Nature

Nature is a setting that fits equally well a comic or a mourning piece. In good health, the air is a cordial of incredible virtue. Crossing a bare common, in snow puddles, at twilight, under a clouded sky, without having in my thoughts any occurrence of special good fortune, I have enjoyed a perfect exhilaration. I am glad to the brink of fear. In the woods too, a man casts off his years, as the snake his slough,¹ and at what period soever of life, is always a child. In the woods, is perpetual youth. Within these plantations of God, a **decorum** and sanctity reign, a perennial festival is dressed, and the guest sees not how he should tire of them in a thousand years. In the woods, we return to reason and faith. There I feel that nothing can befall me in life,—no disgrace, no calamity, (leaving me my eyes,) which nature cannot repair. Standing on the bare ground,—my head bathed by the blithe air, and uplifted into infinite space,—all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eye-ball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or particle of God. The name of the nearest friend sounds then foreign and accidental: to be brothers, to be acquaintances,—master or servant, is then a trifle and a disturbance. I am the lover of uncontained and immortal

decorum:

10

¹ slough: the cast-off skin of a snake.

2. **REREAD** ◀ Reread lines 5–15. How is a man “always a child” in the woods? Which sentence acts as a central idea and best supports this metaphor?

3. **READ** ▶ As you read lines 21–35, continue to cite textual evidence.

- Underline the topic sentence Emerson uses to introduce each paragraph.
- In the margin, explain what the “colors of the spirit” refers to (line 32).
- Circle examples of personification.

beauty. In the wilderness, I find something more dear and connate² than in streets or villages. In the tranquil landscape, and especially in the distant line
20 of the horizon, man beholds somewhat as beautiful as his own nature.

The greatest delight which the fields and woods minister, is the suggestion of an **occult** relation between man and the vegetable. I am not alone and unacknowledged. They nod to me, and I to them. The waving of the boughs in the storm, is new to me and old. It takes me by surprise, and yet is not unknown. Its effect is like that of a higher thought or a better emotion coming over me, when I deemed I was thinking justly or doing right.

occult:

Yet it is certain that the power to produce this delight, does not reside in nature, but in man, or in a harmony of both. It is necessary to use these pleasures with great temperance. For, nature is not always tricked³ in holiday
30 attire, but the same scene which yesterday breathed perfume and glittered as for the frolic of the nymphs, is overspread with melancholy today. Nature always wears the colors of the spirit. To a man laboring under calamity, the heat of his own fire hath sadness in it. Then, there is a kind of contempt of the landscape felt by him who has just lost by death a dear friend. The sky is less grand as it shuts down over less worth in the population.

² connate: agreeable; able to be related to.

³ tricked: dressed.

4. **◀ REREAD AND DISCUSS** Reread lines 21–35. With a small group, discuss what Emerson is referring to when he alludes to the relationship between “man and the vegetable.”

SHORT RESPONSE

Cite Text Evidence Write an objective summary of the piece by restating the central ideas in your own words. Be sure that your objective summary is free from personal opinions and cite text evidence in your response.

1. **READ** ▶ As you read lines 1–24, begin to collect and cite evidence.

- Underline the topic sentence in each paragraph.
- In the margin, explain the central idea of lines 1–11.
- Circle the response of the “valued adviser.”

from *Self-Reliance*

There is a time in every man’s education when he arrives at the conviction that envy is ignorance; that imitation is suicide; that he must take himself for better for worse as his portion; that though the wide universe is full of good, no kernel of nourishing corn can come to him but through his toil bestowed on that plot of ground which is given to him to till. . . .

Trust thyself: every heart vibrates to that iron string. Accept the place the divine providence has found for you, the society of your contemporaries, the connection of events. Great men have always done so, and confided themselves childlike to the genius of their age, betraying their perception that the absolutely trustworthy was seated at their heart, working through their hands, predominating in all their being. . . .

nonconformist:

Whoso would be a man, must be a **nonconformist**. He who would gather immortal palms¹ must not be hindered by the name of goodness, but must explore if it be goodness. Nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of your own mind. Absolve you to yourself, and you shall have the suffrage² of the world. I remember an answer which when quite young I was prompted to make to a valued adviser who was wont to importune³ me with the dear old doctrines of the church. On my saying, “What have I to do with the sacredness of traditions, if I live wholly from within?” my friend suggested—“But these impulses may be from below, not from above.” I replied, “They do not seem to me to be such; but

¹ **immortal palms**: everlasting triumph and honor. In ancient times, people carried palm leaves as a symbol of victory, success, or joy.

² **suffrage**: approval, support.

³ **importune**: ask persistently.

2. **◀ REREAD** Reread lines 12–24 and restate the central idea.

if I am the Devil's child, I will live then from the Devil." No law can be sacred to me but that of my nature. Good and bad are but names very readily transferable to that or this; the only right is what is after my **constitution**; the only wrong what is against it

constitution:

What I must do is all that concerns me, not what the people think. This rule, equally arduous in actual and in intellectual life, may serve for the whole distinction between greatness and **meanness**. It is the harder because you will always find those who think they know what is your duty better than you know it. It is easy in the world to live after the world's opinion; it is easy in solitude to
30 live after our own; but the great man is he who in the midst of the crowd keeps with perfect sweetness the independence of solitude

meanness:

For nonconformity the world whips you with its displeasure. And therefore a man must know how to estimate a sour face. The by-standers look askance on him in the public street or in the friend's parlor. If this aversion had its origin in contempt and resistance like his own he might well go home with a sad countenance; but the sour faces of the multitude, like their sweet faces, have no deep cause, but are put on and off as the wind blows and a newspaper directs

The other terror that scares us from self-trust is our consistency; a
40 reverence for our past act or word because the eyes of others have no other data for computing our orbit than our past acts, and we are loth to disappoint them

A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds, adored by little statesmen and philosophers and divines. With consistency a great soul has simply nothing to do. He may as well concern himself with his shadow on the wall. Speak what you think now in hard words and tomorrow speak what

3. **READ** ▶ As you read lines 25–38, continue to collect and cite evidence.
 - Underline the topic sentence in each paragraph.
 - In the margin, explain common reactions to nonconformists.
4. **READ** ▶ Read lines 39–51. Underline text that explains why we are reluctant to trust ourselves.

tomorrow thinks in hard words again, though it contradict everything you said today.—“Ah, so you shall be sure to be misunderstood.”—Is it so bad then to be misunderstood? Pythagoras was misunderstood, and Socrates, and Jesus, and Luther, and Copernicus, and Galileo, and Newton,⁴ and every pure and wise spirit that ever took flesh. To be great is to be misunderstood.

50

⁴ Pythagoras was misunderstood, and Socrates, and Jesus, and Luther, and Copernicus, and Galileo, and Newton: great thinkers whose radical theories and viewpoints caused controversy.

5. **◀ REREAD** Reread lines 39–51. Which sentence best summarizes the central idea of this part of the essay?

SHORT RESPONSE

Cite Text Evidence Write an objective summary of the piece by restating the central ideas in your own words. Be sure that your objective summary is free from personal opinions. Cite text evidence.
