

# **Leaves of Grass Study Guide**

## **Leaves of Grass by Walt Whitman**

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# Sections 1-4

## Sections 1-4 Summary

"Inscriptions" is the first section in "Leaves of Grass," a collection of Walt Whitman's lifelong work. In this section, there are a number of poems with varying themes, although Whitman seems to focus on his ongoing relationship with the sea. The poet has a good rapport with the water and admires its mystery and beauty. The reader can surmise by the poetry that the author spent a great deal of time on the shores of bodies of water. Whitman sees large ships as being vessels that deserve reverence for their sheer size and capabilities in the waters.

Although Whitman was born more than 40 years after the signing of a Declaration of Independence, the poet often associates himself with the birth of the United States. Whitman shows a great deal of patriotism and frequently celebrates the country's democracy and what it means to be able to forge a new society. The poet also shows reverence for the Presidents of the United States and the branches of the military that made freedom from Britain possible.

One of the criticisms of Whitman's work is that it is full of overt sexual remarks. It is apparent that the Whitman has little, if any, preference over the gender of his sexual partners. In fact, the poet often says that there is beauty and desire in both men and women, that he takes each individual on character and finds beauty and divinity in the whole.

"Starting from Paumanok" is the second section in "Leaves of Grass." Paumanok is located on Long Island, on the outskirts of New York City. Paumanok is the place of Whitman's birth. Regardless of how many places the poet has traveled, Whitman holds a special fondness for Paumanok. There is something timeless about the land, sky and sea of this part of Long Island that thrills the poet. As a man who has seen much of the world, Whitman has experienced many things including great beauty and the thrill of nature and foreign lands. Once again, Whitman proclaims his reverence for the person as a whole regardless of sex or social standing because each person has something to offer.

Section three is "Song of Myself." "Song of Myself" was written when Whitman was 37 years old and in good health. The poet states that he is in love with nature and longs to be naked with it. Whitman wants others to observe and see the world for themselves and to make their own judgments. Whitman believes that it is to abase one's self to see the world through another's eyes, even if those eyes belong to the poet. The poem speaks of many things including the curiosity of children, lack of money, knowledge, creation, arguments, and a tribute to the nature of grass. Whitman speaks of a lover accepting him at face value and of lovemaking in the grass on a summer morning. The author claims that each touch is like the hand and Spirit of God.



There is a metaphysical hint in the poem as Whitman refers to himself as much more than the person that exists between life and death.

The author speaks of the activities of other people, the ones that may be taking place all at the same time. There is a contralto singing, children going home for Thanksgiving, deacons kneeling at an altar, a farmer at an outdoor market, a marksman getting into position, the president holding a meeting with his Cabinet, and three married matrons walking through a piazza arm in arm. There are many pages of these comparisons.

Section 4, "Children of Adam," is a series of poems relating to Creationism. The first poem takes place in the Garden of Eden. Whitman is speaking through the eyes of Adam as he witnesses the new world and the Garden of Eden for the very first time. There is a sense of awe in Adam as he observes the flora and fauna, the sky and the sea. Adam waits for Eve and eventually experiences the trials and tribulations of fatherhood. Adam, as the son of God, loves all equally, regardless of occupation or sex. Whitman proclaims that each body and soul contains a bevy of joy and beauty and that there is no shame in avowing the type of person the poet loves.

"As Adam Early in the Morning," Whitman relays what the first man may be thinking as he walks through Eden, completely refreshed after a full night of restorative sleep. While there is no obvious time line for the poem, the reader feels as if some time has gone by and Adam is older. Adam begins to see Eden as belonging to him and Eve, although the sense of wonder has not left. Adam addresses an unnamed person, most likely Eve, and professes the need to be touched with the palm of her hand and that she should not be afraid of his body.

## Sections 1-4 Analysis

Whitman has a very strong ability to observe. The descriptions throughout the poetry depict a man who is intent on taking in the surroundings as if he will never have the opportunity to capture the same view. The descriptions of people let the reader know that someone is watching and appreciating their talents and hard work.

There is an obvious love of nature throughout the works, from the appreciation of the childhood home and beauty of the sea in "Starting from Paumanok" to the admiration and sheer wonder shown in "Children of Adam."

Whitman repeats on many occasions and in many ways that love is not to be confined to the opposite sex. This can be seen as both agape and Eros as Whitman may see many as a brother or sister yet also want those same figures in his bed. There is much talk of making no explanation of one's choices. However, there is quite a lot of explanation about why the poet should not feel the need to explain himself or his actions, particularly when it comes to sex.

The view of the Garden of Eden is interesting in that Whitman sees it through the eyes of Adam. The details depict Eden as one might imagine, yet gives the feeling that the poet was there at the time of the discovery.



# Sections 5-17

## Sections 5-17 Summary

Whitman writes a lot about the experiences of his own body in regards to that of another person. The poet is fond of discussing how his body feels in conjunction with another and how his emotions and mental state are altered by the presence of someone with an intoxicating personality. The descriptions are not lewd but expressive, explaining the touch of a hand or lips upon his bare breast or the feel of a kiss placed lightly on his mouth.

Whitman often speaks of mortality. The poet does not seem to be afraid of mortality; rather sees it as a mysterious entity, one that does not seem to affect him any more than the average person. There is no visible fear, perhaps only a sense of mild curiosity. For Whitman, there is a continuum from birth through life unto death and beyond. The poet writes that there is uncertainty about what happens to the soul after death but that it is only a continuation of one's life and simply a transition period. The poet believes that the souls of lovers are the ones that welcome death the most.

The author writes about metaphysics and the dangers of being burned up by religion. It is easy to become completely engrossed in one faith or religion only to discover that there is much more to the world. Whitman chooses to explore as much of the world as possible, eager to learn about the lives and doctrines of others.

There are many schools of thought in metaphysics from Christ to the Greeks to the Germans and other scholars that teach definite and significant philosophies. While some of the finer points are vastly different, many base truths of these religions are the same, embracing good and evil as well as human conduct and worship. Whitman does not seem to subscribe to any one of these philosophies in particular.

The subject of love is a frequent topic throughout "Leaves of Grass." In this section, Whitman remarks that it is painful to love a man or a woman in great excess but that the rewards of doing so are worth the battle. The reader can glean from the work that Whitman is a lover who is both casual and obsessive. Relationships come easily but are not simple or uncomplicated.

"City of Orgies" speaks of life in Manhattan. In this short poem, Whitman pays homage to the city that he loves. Despite all the pageantry and wealth that exists in the city, Whitman finds much more to admire and desire. The poet likes New York for the spectacles in the streets, the processions and diversity of the people, magnificent stores, exquisite restaurants, and the elegant ships that grace the harbor. There are great numbers of educated people living in Manhattan and with those people the poet may hold intellectual conversations that stimulate and amuse. However, Whitman claims that none of these things are what truly holds his fascination for Manhattan; it is the fact that Whitman has the opportunity to have many lovers on a continual basis.



The present is another favorite topic of the poet's and the words often stress the importance of living in the now. The present is something that should be cherished and not taken for granted. If one ignores the present, it soon becomes the past, with missed opportunities and experiences.

The crux of the poem is that there is never anything beyond the here and now, including yesterday or tomorrow, common delusions of age or youth, or even the existence of heaven or hell. None of these things, in the past or the future, matter in the immediate moment.

As the title of the book suggests, Whitman has a great fondness for grass although it often seems to play a small role in nature. Many poems talk about Whitman lying in the grass examining its color and texture. Yet no one knows exactly what the grass is or what it represents. In this instance, Whitman claims that he knows no more than a child.

Whitman is fond of writing about himself, including observations, sights, sounds, and feelings. There is a fascination with the lives and activities of others, particularly those that happen all at the same time. There are many references to what people are doing all over the world at the same point in time. For example Whitman refers to a Yankee girl working in the factory, three married matrons walking arm in arm across a piazza, the Hebrew reading psalms, the shouts of Australians as they pursue horses, a farmer's wife as she sings, and babies in sleep and in play.

There is a great fondness for appreciating all people, regardless of social standing or outward appearance. Whitman seems rather fond of prostitutes, the homeless, and minor criminals. The poet feels that no one has the right to judge others and that everyone should be accepted at face value, without expectations. In God's eyes, all are divine and therefore no one should be sneered at or ignored.

In a somewhat humorous turn, the topic turns to animals. The poet believes that animals have it easy and that they do not seem to experience the same emotional turmoil as humans. The animals are not prone to whining, to dissatisfaction, or weeping late into the night for sins they have committed. In Whitman's eyes, animals should rejoice for not being demented.

"Children of Adam" is a work written through the eyes of the first man in creation. The words express the joy and wonder at viewing the earth and understanding the completeness of God's offerings to him and Eve in the form of the Garden of Eden.

As a work of art, the body deserves much admiration. Whitman says that all bodies are sacred, and the poet delights in observing people of any gender and appreciating their anatomy. When confronted with a beautiful woman's form, Whitman claims that he becomes speechless and a helpless vapor. The differences between loving a man and a woman are few. In the end it is all the same as far as divinity and love are concerned. The poet describes in delight and details each part of the anatomy of both the man and woman.



In times of loneliness and darkness it is common for Whitman to wish for one hour of complete madness and joy most often relating to a sexual experience. It seems that those hours are necessary for the writer to create and enjoy what otherwise might be a darker experience.

Upon Whitman's first trip into the city, there were astonishing and beautiful observations to be recorded about all that existed. The poem states that the city is full of such wonderful things that its image imprints itself on the brain. While in the city Whitman met a woman who loved him and was distraught when it was time to part. The woman begged Whitman to stay, and after the intense affair that is the only thing he remembers about the city.

In "Songs of the Open Road," Whitman sets out on a journey and wants for nothing more than the open road and all it has to offer. There are no other needs in the path before him and all is supplied in ample measure. Everything that is seen along the way seems as it should be, from the flagged walks of the city streets, the constellations in the sky, ferries and distant ships, the hearse, and the moving man. The poet proclaims that there is no good fortune, that he is good fortune and bodies. This is happiness.

People are not always as they seem to be on the surface. Whitman warns a lover that he is not what is perceived and explains so that there should be no disillusionment. Perhaps it is best for the two to part company, for if they stay together the poet will demand that there is exclusivity and devotion.

For one who professes to have no great individual importance, the poet is fond of explaining himself to others. There is a poem instructing "recorders" how to portray him in their work. The poet wishes to be seen as a lover, friend, one not afraid to share, and one who is the happiest when in nature in the presence of a lover.

Despair does not fall only on one person. Each human being suffers from dark patches, hatred, laziness, meanness, lust, vain, and deception. Still, the world goes on.

"A Song of Joys" shares with the reader the treasures in life for which everyone should be grateful. One should celebrate the place of one's birth, fields and streams, leaves and flowers, sunshine, rain, singing birds, and the work of fishermen. Each has a distinct place in the world and combine into what Whitman refers to as, "A swift and swelling ship full of rich words, full of joys."

The lessons of the New World are examined in "Song of the Exposition." Inhabitants of America wish to have their own identity, one that is limitless and free. There is a need to express a burning desire to establish and not to destroy but rather to accept. Yet the poet seeks the presence of the Muses from Greece and Ionia for the New World is a better place.

The elder world is not to be completely forgotten and shall not be completely severed from the lives in the New World. Still, the pioneers of the New World seek to create and erect structures that are grander and larger than anything that has gone before. There



are rehearsals to mark the upcoming existence of immeasurable wealth, limitless crops, and inexhaustible mines. This journey is spiritual.

The redwood tree is a magnificent entity that deserves its own tribute. Whitman visits the redwood forest in California and is amazed at the sheer size of the trees and the secrets that must be held within. The great trees have many stories of untold lives and exist quietly in the lofty forest partaking in the sun, wind, and rain.

There is a song of celebration for various occupations and the workers they employ. Every man, woman, child, brother, sister, lover and friend all share the same source of divinity regardless of occupation. Each person has something valuable to offer the universe, whether a scholar or laborer. Whitman is a great campaigner for equality in humanity, not necessarily looking down on the successful and important but acknowledging that everyone has a worthy role.

## Sections 5-17 Analysis

It is clear Whitman has a strong fascination for the human body, its parts and functions regardless of the gender of the owner. There are no inhibitions regarding this admiration. The poet cannot seem to say enough about each individual person's beauty and divinity and how these things should be appreciated for what they are and not be lost through judgment.

Although the poet proclaims not to subscribe to any one particular religion, there are many references to God in various forms. These may be seen in the divinity of each person as well as the numerous references to the miracle of creation and the splendor of nature. Whitman often marries the old with the new respecting what has come before in terms of philosophy and culture. Yet he sees the New World as an opportunity to create things that are bigger and better than anything that has ever gone before. There is a sense of hope and some arrogance regarding the establishment of the United States. This is not entirely unfounded.

It is uncharacteristic for Whitman to switch to a lighter topic such as the reference to the behavior and emotions of animals.

One of the most obvious conflicts in the work is Whitman's schizophrenic image of himself. While the poet continually refers to himself as being one among many, there are also many references to Whitman's talents and status. Although each person should be seen as a divine creation and equally worthy to anyone else, Whitman expresses himself in such a way that leads the reader to believe there are others seeking the poet's attention and advice. In this way, Whitman seems to silently proclaim that he knows more than others and tends to be quite pleased with this knowledge and the opportunity to share it.

There are many references to new worlds and new beginnings. Whitman always seems to be looking for the newest thing, the newest adventure, person, or experience.





# Sections 18-25

## Sections 18-25 Summary

Whitman begins "Birds of Passage" with a poem titled "Song of the Universal." In this poem, a muse beckons Whitman to sing a song that has never been sung before, one that is universal. The song should encompass everything on the earth from the soul to science. No matter how many advancements science has made, the soul shall always supersede it. There are many opposites in the world from the blessed and happy to the downtrodden and disease. There is laughter and tears, faith and doubt, happy as well as broken hearts.

There are many tributes to pioneers and their adventures while traversing untamed country from East Coast to West Coast. In "Pioneers! O Pioneers!" Whitman pays homage to the youthful pioneers who are expected to defend and forge ahead despite their young age. There will be danger which is caused by nature's overflowing rivers, gullies, and giant peaks.

A "Year of Meteors (1859-60)" speaks of a brooding year in which Whitman talks of an upcoming political campaign for the presidency. The meteor is used as a metaphor for the strange and transient nature of the events preceding an election.

There is a great deal written about democracy and how it compares to the ancient countries including Egypt and Greece, as well as the behaviors of the Celts and the Romans. The histories of these countries are examined including their wartime efforts. On a metaphysical level, Whitman proclaims that without exception, he respects the philosophies and theories belonging to the Chinese and the Hebrews.

Broadway is an iconic presence and offers a significant contribution to Manhattan. In "A Broadway Pageant," Whitman speaks of the city's residents turning out in droves and walking to one of the many illustrious theaters on Broadway. The procession and attention to the theater is also used as a metaphor for the social and political structures of foreign lands. Whitman proclaims that all are justified and that he will take up the chant.

"Sea-Drift" is a series of poems honoring the ocean. Whitman shows admiration for the moon over the sea and the birds that fly overhead. Whitman sees himself lying on the sand and confronting the waves. There is mention of Paumanok in the spring, when there are lilacs in the air and grass begins to grow. There are many sounds of the sea and the poet witnesses the lives of what he refers to as two-feathered guests from Alabama. There is a sad observation when one of the birds dies and the other does not know. There is a period of mourning and a frantic searching to find a mate who has disappeared.



The tides of the ocean are compared to life with the ebb and flow that controls it. The poet walks along the shores of Paumanok fascinated by the sights before him such as the chaff and straw, the shining rocks, as well as the sounds of breaking the waves. There are the dirges of wrecked women and men, the mysterious ocean waves, peals of ironic laughter, impalpable breezes, and items that wash up on the shore. No matter what happens, the ebb will always return and one must accept that changes will come.

There is a tribute to a young steersman as he stands on a ship's helm and pilots the vessel. The man rings an ocean bell to make the ship's presence known through the dense fog. Whitman hears the notice and commends the steersman on making the boat's position known. Poet stands and watches as the ship makes its way out to sea in joy and safety.

Most of Whitman's observations seem to take place during the day. In the poem "On the Beach at Night," Whitman speaks of a child and father standing on the shore watching a dark autumn sky. The clouds open and begin to weep and the poet wishes that the child will not be upset as the storm will soon subside. The theme continues with the poem "On the Beach at Night Alone." In this instance, Whitman watches as an old woman sways back and forth singing a song. There are bright stars in the sky and brought to the poet's mind is the thought of the existence of universes and the future. There is something that links everything together, from the suns, moons, known and unknown planets and spheres, all souls, vegetables, and animals. All of these things shall forever be encompassed in the vast similitude that binds them.

"By the Roadside" begins with a "Boston Ballad" written in 1854. The poem shows Whitman's unwavering patriotism while he waits for a presidential convoy to wend its way through the streets. Whitman loves the Stars and Stripes and hopes that the fifes will perform Yankee Doodle. The marching troops are an impressive sight.

Whitman addresses religion with "Gods," a work devoted to finding an ideal higher power. The poet seeks a lover divine and a perfect friend, one who is content and sturdy. The ideal man should be beautiful, loving, content, fair, and complete in body and spirit.

"The Dalliance of the Eagles," is the telling of a rare scene in the sky. The poet sees two eagles in amorous contact with interlocking claws and beating wings. The birds fall straight downward tumbling and twisting until the end. Eventually, the birds part and fly upward once again in their own diverse patterns with the male pursuing the female.

There are a number of poems devoted to the military and their actions in defending the United States, with pristine dress and fierce weapons. There is the sound of the drums, married with the enthusiasm of the crowds. Although there is much to admire about the military, Whitman says that the battles they have fought cannot inspire dainty verse.

There are several poems about fathers and children, of fathers often teaching the child about items seen in the sky and how to perceive what one sees..



Whitman warns of potential disappointment and disillusionment of America. For many years, the United States lived under a cloud of prosperity and hope, and yet the poet has determined that there will be a day when there will be cries of anguish and unkind fate.

There are many references to death, particularly as it pertains to soldiers. Whitman dreams of battle scenes, bloody corpses, and souls being released. There are somber memorials to fallen soldiers and commanders who have served their country well.

Whitman's most famous poem, "O Captain My Captain!" tells the tale of a long and arduous voyage that has finally come to an end. When one of the crew goes to find the captain of the ship, the man is found cold and dead. Although the sailors have many reasons to rejoice that the end of the journey has arrived, there is much sadness and mourning over the death of their revered leader.

Finally, Whitman addresses the topic of reversals. The poet suggests that those ones who stood behind should now move to the front and vice versa. Old propositions should be postponed while new ones are offered by bigots and fools. Man should seek pleasure in any place but himself; the woman should seek happiness in any place but herself.

## Sections 18-25 Analysis

Whitman tends to be repetitive in many of his poems, changing only slight scenes and points of view. As a writer, it almost seems as if the poet had many things to say on a particular subject, and though the topics are related, they would not fit together seamlessly into one piece of work. A good example of this is the comparison of the two poems "On the Beach at Night" and "On the Beach at Night Alone." Another example is the number of poems dedicated to either the child or the father. This is strange considering many of Whitman's poems tend to be long and varied in content, often meandering from one subject to the next. The poems seem to have been written around the same time, which would take away the possible explanation that the observation had revisited Whitman.

It is apparent by the work that the poet has spent a great deal of time thinking about the lives and careers of military soldiers. In addition to the descriptive appearance of the soldiers, Whitman often refers to their weaponry and battles. Many of these battles resulted in the bloody and gruesome deaths of the soldiers. This is another element which seems to hold a morbid fascination for the poet.

Whitman also has an apparent fondness for the sea. Perhaps this came from growing up on Paumanok, Long Island where he was constantly surrounded by water and various types of sea life. The poet takes great interest in boats and sailors and tends to view them with a type of mysterious reverence. There is something magical about directing a vessel on the open water, with its beautiful and dangerous surf and unpredictability. In "Captain! My Captain!" the author uses the metaphor of the captain



of the ship to express his feelings about the death of Abraham Lincoln. Just when it seemed that the voyage had been successful, the captain is found dead. This mirrors the ending of the Civil War in relation to John Wilkes Booth's assassination of the 16th president.

Throughout the sections there are a great many references to democracy and politics. The poet continues to compare the United States to other countries, this time including Canada. The fact that Whitman consistently misspells Canada, writing it as "Kanada" may be a way for the poet to downplay the country's importance as it is unlikely Whitman would not know how to spell its name.

Regardless of the other country, Whitman has a way of glorifying the United States and glossing over some of its faults.



# Sections 26-36

## Sections 26-36 Summary

These sections begin with a grouping of poems titled "Autumn Rivulets." Whitman speaks of the consequence of the summer rains and how they diverge onto the land and into the ocean to set out for new continents. This is followed by a poem in which the writer refers to autumn fields and harvest.

"There was a Child Went Forth" talks about a child who became the things he saw. This began with observations of the child seeing lilacs and morning glories and baby lambs. As the child grew, the scenes changed, incorporating school and friends, city and country. The parents also became part of the child by their love, discipline, and even silence. As an adult, all these children hurry down the streets, place goods in windows and ride on the ferries, each one comprised of the things in their lifetime environments.

There is a poignant description of old Ireland, comparing her to a fallen Queen who has gone from regency to tatters and sorrow.

The dawning of spring is the subject of "Warble for Lilac-Time." Whitman speaks of the signs of spring such as lilacs, bees, butterflies, and bluebirds. There is a musical call at the sunrise and once again at the sunset. Green sprouts through the melting snows of March letting one know that spring has arrived.

Once again, Whitman speaks of Christianity as he commiserates with Jesus. Whitman proclaims that he gives his spirit to Jesus, although the Christ is not mentioned by name. There are many people who mention Jesus by name and yet do not understand him; while Whitman does not speak the name and understands.

Whitman has some sort of fascination with felons and prostitutes. As a tribute, the poet has written "You Felons on Trial in Courts." The felons that are in the courtroom are observed by those around them as they sit and wait to face the judge with the wrists and ankles in shackles. Whitman questions why it is these people are in the court when lust and wickedness are also acceptable in his world. Why is it that the felons are being punished for committing the same crimes?

There are a series of poems that pertain to forms of education from questions posed to students to tests and judgment. Whitman also asks who may have learned the completeness of the lessons he has to teach.

"Passage to India" tells of the ancient country and how it is progressing into the future. Whitman appreciates its myths, primitive fables, temples, and modern science. The poem also speaks of the splendors of America, and mentions Asia and the Garden of Eden.



"Prayer of Columbus" speaks of an old man fascinated by the dark sea and the savage shore. Whitman claims that he is "too full of woe!" because he has been away for 12 long months and cannot eat or drink or sleep. Thoughts wander until Whitman tries to decide if he is dreaming or raving while the nerves keep getting worse.

Nightly visions allow Whitman to wander noiselessly and bend over other sleepers, wandering and confused. Others sleep as well, bodies on battlefields, married couples, each with one hand on the hip of the other, a child sleeping in its mother's arms. Even those that know unrequited love sleep, as do prisoners. The confusion turns to other images from beautiful swimmers to a courageous giant. Despite their identity, the sleepers are beautiful as they lie naked in dim light.

Once again there is a grouping of poems addressing mortality in "Whispers of Heavenly Death." Among these is "Darest Now Thou O Soul" in which Whitman asks the soul to follow into unknown territory without a map or guide.

Whitman speaks of grief stricken nights and of love lost. There are also references to phantoms - lovers who have returned in spirit from the dead. Although the topic seems to be somewhat confusing to Whitman, he claims to need no assurances, that he is completely open to what may come next.

The metaphor of death is used in reference to a plowman. As a plowman is plowing and the harvester is harvesting, Whitman compares the tillage to life and the harvest to death.

The United States are seen as children with equality in the eyes of their mother. If given the opportunity, Whitman would sow seeds of nationality and tell of how a perfect union is formed. The combination of justice and God can be blended together to make an immortal reality.

Faces are an endless source of inspiration for poetry. As the poet watches people walking down the street, the expressions on their faces convey more than their words ever could. There are faces of lawyers and judges, fishers and hunters, the yearning of an artist's face, the ugly face belonging to a beautiful soul, sacred faces of infants, the face of love, and the handsome face that is yet despised.

As with ships, locomotives hold a fascination for the poet. "To a Locomotive in Winter" speaks of the powerful machine moving through the snow with its "vapor-pennants tinged with delicate purple." The cars behind the locomotive trail obediently and with merriment.

The arrival and success of mediums in the United States is addressed. Mediums will be able to report nature, enjoy materialism, become orators, and create from their own experiences, while conveying gospel.

There is a great freedom in a clear midnight, when the soul is able to take flight, to be free from lessons learned, away from books, when the memory of the day is erased. It is in this time that the soul can emerge fully and ponder the themes that one loves best.



## Sections 26-36 Analysis

Whitman is fond of taking every day natural occurrences and transferring them into everyday poetry. This can be seen in "Autumn Rivulets" as Whitman describes the path of waters as they travel from place to place, feeding rivers and harvests.

"There was a Child Went Forth" is an interesting look at nurture versus nature. Whitman talks of the early experiences in childhood and how those experiences help to form the personality and behaviors of the child. As the child grows, the experiences change and other people, such as teachers, friends and even enemies, come into the picture and require the child to increase the scope of knowledge required to understand, accept, and compete. The parents play into the child's life from the beginning, yet at some time, the child begins to accept the lessons of the parents beyond the most basic. As an adult, the child continues to evolve through personal and professional experience; however, all of the influences of life are able to be seen.

The poet's commiseration with Jesus is interesting in that Whitman does not profess any one faith or religion. Whitman's parents were devout Quakers, yet the author chose to explore other paths, while undoubtedly being shaped, at least in part, by the influence of his parents. Regardless of all the studying Whitman has done, the poet says that while he does not openly worship Jesus as the Messiah, he knows and understands all. In essence, the poet needs not make public proclamations and is confounded by those who do and yet remain ignorant.

The felons seem to be an interesting lot in that they may be tried as much for circumstance as for crime.

Death and mortality continue to be strong themes. Whitman laments the loss of a loved one who returns in dreams. The lover's spirit remains although the earthly body has departed. Whitman seems saddened by the fact that the lover has gone away, though death is only the vehicle.

The metaphor with the plowman is interesting as Whitman compares tillage or sowing to life and harvesting or reaping as death. The concept of death does not seem morbid in this sense, it is simply that the harvest is being taken away to serve another purpose.

Although the United States may see themselves as being completely different from one another, even during the mid 1800s, Whitman compares them to siblings who are equally loved by their mother.

Faces are an endless source of fascination because they hold a lifetime's worth of knowledge, experiences, and secrets. In considering the diversity of the people Whitman meets, it makes sense that faces should intrigue the poet. One only needs to look into the face of a mother, businessman, soldier or sailor to see a world of differences.



"To a Locomotive in Winter" is a particularly vivid poem paying tribute to the lonely locomotive as it traverses its route through the snow. The imagery of a train plowing through the snow despite the cold and perhaps treacherous conditions creates a sense of longing in one who experiences wanderlust. Whitman calls the train's smoke "vapor-pennants tinged with delicate purple," which perfectly describes the trail of purplish colored smoke from the burning fuel, only enhanced by the white snow.

Mediums are an unusual topic. Although Whitman claims to have studied many cultures and religions, the admiration of mediums seems somewhat out of place. However, the poet believes that mediums will take a place in the New World, serving in new and untold positions.





# Sections 37-40

## Sections 37-40 Summary

"Songs of Parting" is a collection of poems which addresses various ends, such as an end-of-life, end of time, sunsets, and legacies. "As the Time Draws Nigh" talks about Whitman's own death, and how there is no way to know what lies ahead. There is some sense of sorrow and dread that is cast over the poet although he does not know what it means or the source from which it came. The time also has drawn nearer to depart to travel the United States, although no destination has been determined.

Whitman pays homage to the ashes of Civil War soldiers, both Yankee and Confederate, as their spirits rise from countless graves throughout Virginia and Tennessee. There is no longer the need for the sound of trumpets, spirited horses, or glistening sabers. No longer will drummers perform or will reveille be played at dawn. Whitman beseeches the spirits to stay with him always and bring memories and immortal love.

The poem titled "Thoughts" speaks of America's progression. The country has gone through a series of birthing pains and has come to illustrate many things including birth, muscular youth, a promise, the sure fulfillment, the absolute success, and despite of its people, illustrates evil as well as good. Meanwhile, there are many who still hold on to the initial and ideal concept of the United States. Whitman refers to America as "the continent of glories" of the triumph of freedom and of the democracies. The poet also pays homage to the existence of nature, the new states, and to cities.

Whitman states that due to his years of idleness, he has no legacy to leave with friends and loved ones. There are no houses, no property and no gold to be left behind. Whitman states that instead of these, his legacy is the bundle of songs he has written and gathered.

Where there may be death there is also life. This can be seen in "Joy Shipmate! Joy!", as the sailors finally leave behind the shore and venture out into the ocean.

"Sands at Seventy" speaks to Whitman's vast conglomeration of experiences, including people and places such as Manhattan, Paumanok, and Montauk. Regardless of where Whitman has traveled, these places seem to be the ones held nearest and dearest to his heart, particularly in his older years.

There is a tribute to the dandelion as it enters the world, far away from winter. It offers no façades, only innocence and trust.

The presidential election of 1884 is an important topic to Whitman, given his political bent. Whitman states that the most powerful scene in the Western world is not the Niagara, the limitless prairies, Colorado, Yosemite, Yellowstone, Huron, the Mississippi



River, or the individual states. It is that of the election process, the final balloting, moving from east to west, complete with conflict and paradox.

General Grant is immortalized as one of the lost actors on history's eternal stage. In death, Grant is able to join fellow victors such as Lincoln and Lee.

"Continuities" discusses a conversation the poet had with a German spiritualist. The poem states that nothing is ever completely lost, nor can it be. There is no birth or form, no life or visible things. The only things that are ample are time and space.

"True Conquerors" in Whitman's eyes are farmers, soldiers, sailors, travelers, and workmen. Each of those people has survived many things, including struggles and trials, and yet they have still emerged and carried on.

Whitman asks of the reader if the strongest lessons one has learned are the ones who have been taught by those who admire rather than those who reject. The poet contends that lessons are learned from all people, whether they greet you in friendship or contempt.

There is a lament to a dismantled ship that has gone from voyages around the world to end up in an unnamed lagoon where it sits rusting and alone.

"Shakespeare-Bacon's Cipher" is a short poem in which Whitman doubts that William Shakespeare was the true author of the many works accredited to him.

Osceola was a seminal warrior who surrendered to soldiers during the Florida war. The man was given over to the US troops and eventually died of a broken heart.

There is a telling of the great Johnstown, Pennsylvania flood that occurred in 1889. The flood was completely unexpected and arrived violently causing a great deal of death and destruction.

"Great are the Myths" is a work devoted to various myths in the world and how Whitman takes delight in them. The poet appreciates the tale of Adam and Eve, and the rise and fall of ancient nations, including their poets, sages, warriors, and priests.

While the expression of speech is important, there is also a value in silence. Whitman claims that there is no greater speech than English in that language is the most important science. Language has an abundance of color diversity, fullness, and form.

"Respondez" addresses how the desires of everyone should be addressed and how none should be evaded. There are pages worth of pleas in which Whitman claims that there should be a redistribution of the roles. Those who have been considered to be fools should be able to offer new propositions while the old ways are postponed. No one should be pointed to a specific destination as one's destination should be choice. Men and women should choose who they love, whether it be a man or woman. Whitman proclaims that nothing should be left of artists, lawyers, moralists and teachers, but their



ashes, and those who do not carry Whitman's poems should be assassinated. Society should also allow the slaves to become masters and masters to become slaves.

The poem "Says" is a series of verses detailing Whitman's thoughts on liberty, man, morality, and property. There is humor in the words, as is seen in lines 2 and 3, which state: "I say nourish a great intellect, a great brain; if I have said anything to the contrary, I hereby retract it."

The wisest people are ones to exhibit the most caution, and those who win are those who are willing to go the farthest. If the general maintains in himself a good army, then a good army he shall have. Whitman claims that one cannot be happy through others, just as one cannot conceive a baby through others.

"In Former Songs" is the closing poem in "Leaves of Grass." In these two stanzas, Whitman talks about the former songs he has sung, those that include pride, love, passion, and joy. Now the poet wishes to intertwine patriotism and death. To all of those things Whitman wishes freedom and to those things that elude the poet the most, he offers himself.

## Sections 37-40 Analysis

These last sections seem to focus most on departing, although there are other topics sprinkled throughout. Mortality is addressed frequently but is not the entire focus as there are other kinds of endings which are in the verses.

During these years, around the time Whitman turned 70, the poet's health began to fail. It is natural for a writer to turn inward at this point in life, often casting a maudlin shadow over what once was. The poems are not morbid, however. Whitman seems to be preparing to die, although he is still well enough to write. Once again, the poet tells others what should be considered his legacy. For the major part of his life, Whitman was a vagabond, a person who traveled at every chance to wherever the path might lead. This made for an intensely interesting person and book of poetry, yet prevented Whitman from spending any length of time in a steady career. Therefore, the poet doesn't leave behind many material goods, such as property, money, or possessions that might be given to loved ones. Instead, what Whitman has to offer are the bundle of songs he has spent the main part of his life creating and gathering into this collection in its various forms.

In the last section, a collection of rejected poems, Whitman shows a fair bit of humor. The concept that roles should be reversed is an interesting and amusing one, particularly when it comes to the reversal of felon and judge.

As a prepared ending to his life, Whitman has made comments on works previously written and the subjects he preferred such as love, sex, death, and human nature. There are no apologies for the things that were written, only explanation.



# Characters

## Walt Whitman appears in All

Walter Whitman (1819-1892) is considered to be one of the most famous American poets of his time. Born in Long Island, New York, Whitman was the second of nine children born to Quakers. The family was rather poor throughout Whitman's childhood, often leaving the poet to refer to his youth as unhappy and restless.

Whitman held many jobs before becoming known as a writer. Among the poet's careers were: journalist, government worker, teacher, printer, publisher, and volunteer nurse during the Civil War.

Whitman is best known for his poetry collection titled *Leaves of Grass*. First published anonymously in 1855 with the author's own money, the collection was comprised of twelve poems. Whitman continued to work on the project throughout the rest of his life, editing and expanding its contents. Many were incensed over Whitman's overt sexuality and controversial themes and the work was often dubbed as being obscene.

Whitman spent many years trying to find the appropriate poetic style to reflect his thoughts and ideals. Free verse eventually suited Whitman the most, although the verses often use a cadence similar to that used in the verses of the Bible.

The style of the work did not affect the public response as much as the subject matter. Although Whitman had a great number of admirers including Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and Bram Stoker, there were others who were incensed by Whitman's overt references to bisexuality. One critic vehemently stated that the work was trashy and obscene and even referred to Whitman as a "pretentious ass."

Regardless of Whitman's critics, he became a revered figure among poets such as Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac, who admired the author's openness and vagabond lifestyle. Whitman has often been referred to, erroneously, as the Father of Free Verse.

In 1892, shortly after preparing yet another edition of *Leaves of Grass*, Walt Whitman died of pleurisy in his Camden, New Jersey home.

## Abraham Lincoln appears in n American President, O Captain! My Captain!, Abraham Lincol

Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865) was the 16th president of the United States. Lincoln is one of the most recognizable presidents after George Washington for his illustrious history and activity in the Civil War.



Abraham Lincoln grew up in rural Kentucky in a one-room cabin. Although Lincoln only completed 18 months of formal schooling, he was an avid reader and largely self-taught in many areas including law. Eventually, Lincoln became a lawyer and entered into politics as a member of the Whig party.

In later years, Lincoln married Mary Todd, the daughter of an affluent Kentucky family. It is ironic that Lincoln will become one of the most outspoken leaders regarding the abolition of slaves in light of the fact that the Todd family owned many slaves at their home. Abraham Lincoln was elected to the presidency in 1860 as a Republican. Part of Lincoln's appeal was his moderate conservatism and views and the fact that he was an abolitionist. Throughout his four-year term, Lincoln worked tirelessly to negotiate peace between the North and the South. However his unwavering views on slavery would ultimately guarantee that there would be a civil war.

Lincoln was known as a great speaker, and two of his speeches remain at the forefront in American history. The speeches include the Gettysburg address, and the Emancipation Proclamation.

Abraham Lincoln and Mary Todd had four sons, only one of which lived to adulthood. Lincoln was known to have several medical afflictions, one of which was responsible for his unusual height and frailty. Lincoln also suffered from malaria and manic depression. The depression may explain Lincoln's mood swings and somewhat confusing behavior, as evidenced by Whitman in his work.

Lincoln's progress in the Civil War angered many Confederates. John Wilkes Booth, a political activist and well-known actor, was hired to kidnap Lincoln so that the President could be exchanged for imprisoned Confederate soldiers. Booth, however, became enraged with Lincoln and instead of kidnapping, decided to assassinate the President. Abraham Lincoln was shot and killed in Ford's Theater in Washington, DC in 1865.

## **Young Pioneers appears in Pioneers! O Pioneers!**

Groups of young pioneers who came from all over the United States to travel west and conquer the untamed land.

## **Two Veterans appears in Dirge for Two Veterans**

Whitman writes a tribute to two fallen veterans who are the subjects of a passing funeral procession in "Dirge for Two Veterans."



## **Christopher Columbus appears in A Thought of Columbus**

"A Thought of Columbus" is a tribute to the courage and experiences of Christopher Columbus.

## **Osceola appears in Osceola**

Osceola was a young Seminole warrior who fought in the Florida War in the mid-1800s. The man surrendered to the Marines and eventually died of a broken heart in prison.

## **Ship's Captain appears in O Captain! My Captain**

The ship's captain is the subject of "O Captain! My Captain!" which is probably Whitman's most famous poem. The Captain has managed to sail a treacherous voyage but dies before it ends only to be found by a member of the crew.

## **Adam appears in Children of Adam, Adam in the Early Morning**

Whitman makes reference to Adam in two separate poems. Whitman sees the new wondrous world through Adam's eyes, bringing to life God's desires.

## **Prostitutes appears in To a Common Prostitute**

Whitman has a fondness for all people, including prostitutes, to which the poet wrote several pieces. In "To a Common Prostitute" Whitman tells the woman that she will never be excluded from his life.

## **Felons appears in You Felons in Court on Trials**

"You Felons in Court on Trials" is Whitman's earnest look at the subjects in question. The men are locked in prison cells and await judgment yet Whitman wonders why it is not he who is with them for all he has done.



# Objects/Places

## United States appears in Inscriptions, Calamus

The United States became officially independent of Britain in 1776. Although Walt Whitman was born more than four decades later, the poet often associated himself with the birth of a great country. Whitman displayed immense pride in the United States and showed a great deal of reverence for its presidents and military. Whitman was fond of comparing the United States to other countries, in particular those with ancient history, such as Ireland, India, and Spain.

As a vagabond, Whitman spent a great deal of time exploring the country and all it has to offer. Since a great deal of the country was still unsettled when Whitman was in his prime in the 1830s, there was a great deal of untamed wilderness and beauty, particularly throughout the Prairie States and the West Coast and Pacific Ocean. No matter where Whitman traveled, he found a great deal of beauty and intrigue in the land and its people. Pioneers fascinated Whitman and he admired their strength and fortitude, and particularly the character of the younger pioneers.

Whitman was born in Paumanok, New York, which is located on Long Island, on the outskirts of New York City. Whitman took great joy in Paumanok and the ocean. The Paumanok Trail is one of the places Whitman's liked to explore. The trail is 110 miles long, and finishes at Montauk Point. Whitman wrote about both of these areas, appreciating the nature of the sea.

Whitman moved into Manhattan, where he spent a great deal of time when he wasn't traveling. Whitman had a great fondness for Manhattan and Brooklyn. In the poet's later years, he moved to Camden New Jersey, and eventually stopped traveling due to ill health.

## Manhattan appears in City of Orgies, Crossing the Brooklyn Ferry

Manhattan is one of the five boroughs of New York City, New York. Known as The Big Apple, New York City is often referred to as one of the most exciting cities in the world. As the center of culture, Manhattan draws a great number of artistic and educated people who are interested in theater, music, arts, literature, finance, and politics. Many actors, writers, poets, musicians and entrepreneurs have flocked to Manhattan ever since the city's inception.

Whitman has a great deal to say about Manhattan even during the times he lived in other locales. Whitman was enthralled by the high level of activity in Manhattan and the fact that there were always activities regardless of the day or hour.





In "City of Orgies" Whitman pays homage to all the parts of the city that he loves. There are references made to the illustrious nature of the city and its wealth. There are many spectacles in the streets, processions and diversity of the people, buildings and houses, magnificent stores, and harbor ships. Whitman loved that there were many learned people living in Manhattan, with whom he could converse intelligently. However, Whitman claims that none of these things are what truly holds his fascination for Manhattan; it is the fact that Whitman had the opportunity to have many lovers on a continual basis.

In "Crossing the Brooklyn Ferry," Whitman tells of taking the ferry into Manhattan, where the flags of many nations flutter in the breeze. Whitman states that the city is only as large or as small as one would wish to make it.

## **Brooklyn appears in Crossing the Brooklyn Ferry.**

Whitman pays homage to one of the New York boroughs in which he lived as a young man through "Crossing the Brooklyn Ferry."

## **Boston appears in Songs by the Roadside: A Ballad to Boston**

Whitman wrote "Songs by the Roadside: A Ballad to Boston," as a tribute in which the poet refers to the spirits of fallen Yankees.

## **Western states appear in A Promise to California**

Whitman pays tribute to the western states, particularly Oregon and California, both places to which he promises to return.

## **Paumanok appears in Starting from Paumanok**

The New York location where Whitman was born. Paumanok is on Long Island and at one end of the Paumanok Trail, a 110-mile stretch that finishes at Montauk Point, another of Whitman's subjects.

## **Montauk appears in Starting from Paumanok**

Montauk is another location on Long Island, New York. Montauk Point is at the other end of the Paumanok Trail, a favorite place for Whitman.





## **The Prairie States appears in The Prairie States**

"The Prairie States" is a poem written as a tribute to the unsettled areas of the Midwest traversed by pioneers.

## **Spain appears in Spain 1873-1874**

"Spain 1873-1874" is a poem celebrating the freedom of the ancient country after military dispute.

## **India appears in Passage to India**

"Passage to India" is Whitman's tale of the wonders of an ancient country in the midst of re-inventing itself.

## **Ireland appears in Old Ireland**

"Old Ireland" is a lament about a sorrowful queen who does not realize that a new country is being born.



# Themes

## Sex

It is clear through the work that Whitman was a great fan of sexual relationships with a wide number and variety of people. Oftentimes, the works talk about people met and loved, casually or otherwise. While Whitman seems to have been more or less a free spirit and had no inhibitions about sex, there are also hints that the serious relationships in Whitman's life could be complicated. There is a sense of urgency and demand in relation to another person. This can be seen when Whitman tells a lover to flee because he has no idea about the poet's true nature. When the lover objects, Whitman says that he should go since the relationship is such that it would demand exclusivity and complete devotion.

Ever since the first publication of "Leaves of Grass," critics and students have raised many questions about Whitman's sexuality. The work leaves no unclear messages. Whitman talks quite frequently of having both male and female lovers. To the poet, each person is divine with a sacred body and soul. Love apparently transcends gender for Whitman, and there are no hidden clues that would illustrate otherwise.

There is no mention of one particular lover that remained in Whitman's life. There is a mention of a woman he met on the first trip to Manhattan, the men he claimed to love at various points in his life, and the appreciation of the bodies of beautiful women.

## Patriotism

It is obvious Whitman has a great fondness for the purpose and glory related to the military. Many poems were written during and after the Civil War. Although Whitman never professes partisan political views, it is clear that the poet's patriotism focuses on the soldiers themselves. There is a great amount of pride and reverence for the soldiers and after battles are won and many of the heroes fallen, Whitman promises that their lives, memories and contributions will never be forgotten.

As a traveler, Whitman took the opportunity to journey from east to west much like the pioneers. The poet admired the strength and steadfastness of the pioneers as they trudged over hill and dale to get to the final destination. While Whitman had a great fondness for the east, there were many things about the west that intrigued him. All put together, the states made up a country that in Whitman's mind comprised a "continent of glories."

Even the complaints regarding the chaos of politics weren't as important to Whitman as was his love of the United States.

Whitman wrote most of his work in the latter part of the 19th century. During that time, much of the country's focus was still on forming a great nation and how the people could



gather together to create a strong bond around independence, courage, and hope. There are sections devoted to Abraham Lincoln, who Whitman seemed to admire. One particularly interesting entry is perhaps Whitman's most famous work, "O Captain! My Captain!"

## Nature

There are many sections in "Leaves of Grass" that are devoted to nature. Whitman has a great fascination for the sea and the shore. The birds and stars overhead never cease to amaze the poet, as each can be seen as both beautiful and mysterious. Many poems are written in reference to the place of Whitman's birth, Paumanok, Long Island, New York. Even the skyline of Manhattan offers some nature to Whitman.

The redwood forest in California was an astonishing sight to the poet. The trees are gargantuan in every imaginable way and carry with them a sense of distinct personality. Whitman admires their strength and ability to rise so high into the sky where they can experience the sun and the wind.

The Prairie States are also a favorite topic. In the mid 1800s, much of the Midwest was not yet settled to the degree of the eastern United States. Whitman loved the sprawling prairies, mountains, rivers and streams, and endless sky. Being out in nature cleared Whitman's mind and allowed him to visualize and think.

# Style

## Point of View

There is more than one point of view used throughout "Leaves of Grass." Much of the work is in first person as Whitman is prone to saying what he sees, hears and feels in an obvious way. There is a tremendous amount of referral to self through this point of view, which may or may not add to the poet's work.

The first person point of view is valuable, particularly in poetry. Because poetry tends to be emotion based, using the first person allows the reader to capture the sense of emotion through the words, thereby making the work more subjective and personal. With the discussions of love and lust, as well as the feel of being one with nature, the first person is a good choice.

There are sections that use the third person point of view, often used to capture external events. This can be seen in poems such as "O Captain! My Captain!" in which Whitman operates as a bystander or even one who had been informed of the story by another source. While the third person often removes the ability to create emotion and sentiment, it gives a clearer overall view of the subject.

While there is no hard and fast rule about which point of view must be used in the writing of poetry, there are definitely places for both the first and third point of views. Which view to use is up to the poet and should be decided upon by the subject matter, whether or not the material is best served by subjectivity or objectivity.

## Setting

There are various settings used in "Leaves of Grass." The work was written over a period of many years, constantly being revised and updated. The original manuscript was very short, with only twelve poems, depicting a limited number of settings. As Whitman grew older and had the opportunity to travel, the settings became numerous and varied.

As a self-proclaimed vagabond, Whitman spent many years traversing various parts of the United States. At that time, a great deal of the country was still uninhabited and so there was a great deal of untamed wilderness and beauty, particularly throughout the Prairie States and toward the West Coast and Pacific Ocean. Whitman wrote works about each of these, detailing their beauty and uniqueness. Although Whitman admired all the places he traveled, none seemed to take root as firmly as New York.

Whitman was born in Paumanok, Long Island, New York. Paumanok is located on the Atlantic Ocean, a source of great joy for the poet. Whitman took great joy in Paumanok and the ocean. The Paumanok Trail is one of the places Whitman liked to explore. The



trail is 110 miles long and finishes at Montauk Point. Whitman wrote about both of these areas, appreciating the nature of the sea.

Although Whitman loved the country and nature as a whole, the poet was also very fond of Manhattan and Brooklyn.

## Language and Meaning

The language and meaning in "Leaves of Grass" is fairly standard for the time frame in which it was written, the mid to late 19th century. Whitman has taken some liberties with the use of descriptive adjectives, some of which may seem somewhat obscure to the reader. As with the language of the time, there are many abbreviations and contractions which may seem awkward in a more modern age. There are also some alternate spellings, most notably Whitman's spelling of Canada as Kanada.

In the poetry that uses the first person point of view, the emotions attached to the language tend to be intense. Whitman is either filled with wonder or disdain, love or deep sorrow. As with many poets, Whitman tends to lean toward superlatives when he speaks. For example, America is the greatest and noblest country on the planet, the sadness of a lost love is darker than the darkest night, or the simple appreciation of beauty becomes breathtaking and awesome.

Overall, Whitman shows that he has a very strong voice, what many might see as borderline arrogance.

## Structure

"Leaves of Grass" is a book of poetry separated into 40 sections. The shortest section is one page in length; the longest section is 52 pages. The average length of the sections is 11 pages.

There are no strict rules as to the placement of the poems. While many are grouped into sections, there is no single theme or time period that connects the poems. The original collection of poems, the anonymously published "Leaves of Grass" contained only 12 poems. Whitman continued to work on the collection, adding to it and amending it throughout the balance of his life. The final version has a total of 436 poems.

As with the variety of poems in each section the tone and perspective changes. Whitman is prone to superlatives regarding every topic but particularly in regards to nature. Rarely is there a poem that is not either reverent or joyful.

The structure would be much improved if the poems were categorized by theme or date. Although many poems have a similar tone and subject matter, it would be beneficial to the reader to get a full view of each subject before having to switch to another topic.

The addition of Whitman's rejected poems is somewhat confusing, since it does not say anywhere in the text why the works were rejected or by whom.



## Quotes

"I dote on myself, there is that lot of me and so luscious, each moment and whatever happens thrills me with joy."

Page 46

"I do not despise you priests, all time, the world over; my faith is the greatest of faiths and the least of faiths."

Page 67

"The efflux of the soul is happiness."

Page 127

"I too have bubbled up, floated at the measureless float, and then wash'd on your shores."

Page 216

"I sit and look out upon the sorrows of the world, and upon all oppression and shame."

Page 230

"Mind not the timid mind, not the weeper or prayer; mind not the old man beseeching the young man."

Page 38

"Long, long, I muse, then on my way to go wandering."

Page 258

"O Captain! My Captain! Our fearful trip is done; The ship has weathered every rack, the prize we sought is won."

Page 282

"When Liberty goes out of a place, it is not the first to go nor the second or third to go. It waits for all the rest to go, it is the last."

Page 310

"Lusts and wickedness are acceptable to me; I walk with delinquents with passionate love."

Page 322



"Be composed - be at ease with me - I am Walt Whitman, liberal and lusty as Nature."  
Page 323

"Have we not darkened and dazed ourselves with books long enough?"  
Page 349

"Have you learned lessons only from those who admired you, and were tender with you,  
and stood aside for you?"  
Page 438

"Let the heart of the young man still exile himself from the heart of the old man! And let  
the heart of the old man be exiled from that of the young man!"  
Page 471

"I say, discuss all and expose all - I am for every topic openly."  
Page 482



## Topics for Discussion

Do you think "Leaves of Grass" is expressive or obscene due to its overt sexual nature?

Which subject do you think was more important to Whitman - observation of nature or patriotism?

How do you think Whitman's uncensored relationships affected his work?

Do you think Whitman's lifelong series of edits improved or detracted from "Leaves of Grass"?

How might Whitman react to the current state of U.S. politics?

Do you think the faith of Whitman's parents had any profound effect on his work? Explain.

If Whitman were alive today, what might be the main focus of his work? Discuss.

Did the inclusion of Whitman's rejected poems add to or detract from the work?

Whitman was considered to be a vagabond. Which setting do you think was more inspiring to the poet, the city or the country?