

Whitman and American Identity: Found Poetry

Name: _____ Date: _____

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Students will analyze how Walt Whitman celebrates ordinary American workers in poetry and create their own found poem from a real interview.

MATERIALS NEEDED

- notebook paper
- pen or pencil
- a family member or friend to interview
- index card

HANDS-ON ACTIVITY

1. Read the excerpt below, adapted from Walt Whitman's 'I Hear America Singing' (1860): "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... Each singing what belongs to him or her and to none else."
2. Underline every specific worker or job Whitman names in the poem excerpt (e.g., mechanic, carpenter).
3. Interview a family member or friend for 5 minutes: ask what work or daily task they do, what they like about it, and one word that describes how it feels.
4. Using only words and phrases from your interview notes, arrange a 'found poem' of 8-12 lines that celebrates this person's work or task, in Whitman's style (listing specific actions and details).
5. On an index card, write a one-sentence title for your poem and the interviewee's name.

QUESTIONS

1. What is Whitman celebrating in 'I Hear America Singing'?
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2. What is a 'found poem,' and where did the words in your found poem come from?
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3. Who did you interview, and what specific detail from their answers made it into your poem?

4. How is your found poem similar to Whitman's poem in style or purpose?
