

# Walt Whitman and The Worker



Lesson Plans for Grades 4-6

Walt Whitman House, NJ State Historic Site  
Camden, NJ

*This handbook was written by*

*Linda Hess  
Oaklyn School District  
Oaklyn, NJ*

## **PREFACE**

These lesson plans were developed for teachers to use in conjunction with a class visit to the Walt Whitman House in Camden, NJ. Of the five lesson plans included in this handbook, it is suggested that teachers complete the lesson on poetry and at least one other lesson before visiting the Whitman House.

Whitman is considered one of this country's greatest poets. Invigorating poetry with a fresh, original voice, Whitman amazed his contemporaries. Among them, Ralph Waldo Emerson described Whitman's 1855 *Leaves of Grass* as "the most extraordinary piece of wit and wisdom that America has yet contributed."

Whitman spent the last nineteen years of his life in Camden. In 1873, he moved in with his brother George on Stevens Street in Camden. By this time in his career, Whitman had an international reputation and attracted the attention of the days' most prominent literary figures. Among them, Charles Dickens and Oscar Wilde came to Camden to visit Walt Whitman.

In 1884 he purchased a house of his own. The house was the poet's last residence and the only house he ever owned. He lived there until his death in 1892. Whitman called this modest wooden row house his "shanty." The simplicity of the house and its furnishings are emblematic of the egalitarian spirit of Whitman's writings. The artifacts in the collection tell varied stories of the poet and his times and provide students with a visual and tangible link to Whitman and the past.

We hope this handbook will make Whitman's work more accessible to younger students and that the study of his life in Camden will enrich the study of local history. If you have suggestions or comments for future editions of teachers' handbooks, please contact the Walt Whitman House.

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Margaret O'Neil  
Curator, Walt Whitman House  
328 Mickle Blvd.  
Camden, NJ 08103-1126

(856) 964-5383  
e-mail address: [WhitmanHse@aol.com](mailto:WhitmanHse@aol.com)

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# **Walt Whitman and the Worker**

## **Purpose**

The purpose of this unit is to familiarize upper elementary grade students with Walt Whitman and his poetry. The subject of the unit is Walt Whitman's admiration for the working person.

## **Pre-Visit Course of Study**

In order to give students a foundation for understanding Walt Whitman and his poetry, it is recommended that the first three of the following five lessons be completed before a visit to the Walt Whitman House. These lessons will give students a general background to Whitman's life and times, and introduce them to his poetic style. Specifically, the initial lessons will guide students in a focus of several poems which describe American workers and the jobs they do. Lessons four and five will provide students with an opportunity to write free verse poems, both individually and as a class.

# CLASSROOM LESSON 1

## “What’s In a Name?”

### Synopsis

Everyone, especially a child, likes to think of him/herself as famous, at least famous enough to have a place or product named for him/her. In this lesson, students will explore the connection between certain people and the places or products bearing their names. This lesson lays the groundwork for the lesson on Walt Whitman and the bridge named for him.

### Skills

- small group discussion
- research skills
- analysis
- creative expression

### Materials

- list of famous people and objects/sites named for them (Resource #1)
- “What’s in a Name?” (Worksheet #1)
- research resources
- art paper
- crayons, paints or colored pencils

### Objectives

- To identify places and products named for specific people.
- To use research skills to learn the connection between person and place/product.
- To create a place/product to name after oneself.

### Background Information

Each of us has a name which is unique, whether in the name itself or the reason for the name. If we were to take the time, each of us could trace the personal history of our given or first name. Many of us would find that our first names originated from the Latin, Greek, Hebrew, or Teutonic languages. Others might find that our first names can be traced to family or national histories.

Our search for the meaning of our last name might be more difficult because surnames often undergo modification through succeeding generations. In Europe during the Middle Ages, last names were first used among the nobility to set themselves apart from the commoners, who were known by first names only. In the beginning, last names implied a relationship among family members; for example, Wilson became the last name of the

person who originally was known as 'son of Will.' Soon the middle class began to imitate this practice. By the 1200s, last names were commonly used by most people in Europe. Many names were rooted in people's occupations, for example; Miller, Skinner, Cooper, (a cooper is a barrel maker), or their names came from where they lived, such as Holloway (hollow is the word for a clearing in the woods where one or more houses might be built).

Some last names have become more famous than others. In fact, some names have taken on a meaning of their own and have become household words. The names no longer represent the founder or the maker, but the place or the product which they identify.

### **Procedure**

All children like to talk about themselves. Ask students to share, if they can, how their names were chosen by their family. Some will indicate being named for a family member, a friend, or perhaps an historical figure. Some may be named for a place significant to their families.

Bring to the students' attention that many places have been named for people. Solicit why a place or product might be named for someone. Responses might include that the items were named for the inventor, or in honor or memory of someone else.

Provide the names of several well-known places and products named for someone (see Resource #1). Ask students to share what they know of the place or product and the person for whom it is named. Lead the students in a discussion as to why that name choice may or may not be a good one.

Divide the class into small groups to complete research on a place/product and its namesake. Most information can be found in an encyclopedia. After the students have completed Worksheet #1, have them share their findings with the rest of the class.

### **Extended Activity**

Have each student create a place or product which is to be named after him/herself. Using crayons, paints, or colored pencils, have the children draw a picture of the place or product so named. Complete Worksheet #1 again (this time with the child-named product). If time allows, students can share their self-named products/places, or the sheets could be used for bulletin board display.



## **Resource #1**

### **“The Naming of Things”**

#### **Campbell, Joseph**

In 1860, Joseph Campbell made his living as a produce merchant in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. In 1869, Campbell joined Abraham Anderson in the food processing end of the business. Together they formed the Anderson and Campbell Canning Factory in Camden, New Jersey. In 1876, Campbell became the sole owner of the company. Several years later, family members joined the business, changing its name to Joseph Campbell Preserving Company.

In 1899, Campbell's company went from selling prepared fruits, sauces, and meats to primarily distributing condensed soups. The new process for condensing soups, which was developed by a family member and allowed for selling the soup at lower prices and wider distribution than their competitors, led to the major success of Campbell's company.

#### **Celsius, Anders**

Celsius was born in Sweden in 1701. He became a professor of mathematics and astronomy. It was in 1742 that he devised the thermometric scale, which is used today wherever the metric system is used. Celsius designated 100 as the freezing point of water and zero as the boiling point. Five years later the scientific community revised Celsius' scale to reflect it as we know it today.

#### **Daguerre, Louis Jacques Mande**

Daguerre, a French inventor and painter who lived from 1787 to 1851, developed the process of making permanent pictures. He first made daguerreotypes in 1839, using a polished silver copper plate and exposing it to iodine fumes. The daguerreotype was most often used to capture an individual's likeness, such as a portrait.

#### **Eiffel, Alexander Gustave**

Eiffel, a French structural engineer, is most famous for the design of the Eiffel Tower, which was constructed for the 1889 World's Fair held in Paris. He is also credited with designing a means for using compressed air for sinking caissons used in bridge building. Eiffel also designed the frame work for the Statue of Liberty.

#### **Ferris, G.W. Gale**

A mechanical engineer from Illinois, Ferris built the largest of all the ferris wheels. It was built in 1893 for the World's Columbian Exposition held in Chicago. Ferris' wheel

was 250 feet in diameter and had 36 cars, holding up to 60 people each. The ride was used until 1904.

### **Franklin, Benjamin**

Franklin was a man of many talents, who is best known for his experimentation with electricity. While living in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, he played an active role in politics as well as science. He is credited with inventing the Franklin glasses, which are bifocal lenses, and the Franklin stove, a more efficient source of heat.

The Franklin Institute, established in 1824, was named for the inventor. In 1956, the Delaware River Bridge, crossing from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, to Camden, New Jersey, was renamed the Benjamin Franklin Bridge in his honor.

### **Hershey, Milton**

Hershey, born in central Pennsylvania in 1857, found his first job as a printer's apprentice. Soon, however, he found himself learning the "candy trade." At age 19, Hershey opened his own candy shop in Philadelphia, but soon closed it due to his poor health. He then joined his father in selling caramels that were made from fresh milk. Peddling the candy from city to city, they were, unfortunately, not successful.

Hershey returned to the Philadelphia area where he met with some success in the sale of his caramels. This led to the creation of a candy bar made of chocolate and fresh milk. So successful was the sale of this milk chocolate bar that a factory was built in 1904 in Derry Church, Pennsylvania. A community of workers grew around the factory resulting in the town of Hershey.

### **Lincoln, Abraham**

Lincoln, our sixteenth president, guided the country through the Civil War and issued the Emancipation Proclamation, freeing the slaves. As a result of his leadership, many places bear his name. Those most familiar are the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts in New York City; the Lincoln Highway, which stretches from New York City to San Francisco; and the Lincoln Tunnel, which funnels traffic under the Hudson River from New Jersey into New York City.

### **Penn, William**

William Penn was a famous Quaker who founded the colony of Pennsylvania in 1681 to settle a debt unpaid by Charles II to Penn's father. It was in Penn's Woods (sylvania means woods; hence, 'Pennsylvania') that all Quakers and people of other faiths were guaranteed religious freedom. Penn lived from 1644 to 1718.

## **Oscar**

Oscar is the name of the statuette given at the Academy Awards each year for excellence in the area of motion pictures. It received its name in 1931 when Margaret Herrick, the Academy librarian, commented that the statuette reminded her of her Uncle Oscar. She was referring to Oscar Pierce, who lived in Texas at the time. It is said that a newspaper reporter who overheard her comment referred to it in his column, and the name has been used ever since.

## **Sandwich, Earl of**

While playing cards, the eighteenth-century British Earl, not wanting to stop his game to use his knife and fork, asked his servants to hand him his meat wedged between two slices of bread. From that expediency, the “sandwich” was born.

## **\*Stetson, John**

John B. Stetson was a manufacture of hats. An easterner by birth, he went out West in the 1800s in an effort to improve his frail health. It was there that he saw the need for a hat that would provide protection from the intense weather conditions of the great plains. He designed and produced, by hand, the high-crowned head covering that would come to be called the ten-gallon hat, the cowboy hat, or simply the Stetson. Returning to Philadelphia, he opened a one-room millinery to produce the “Boss of the Plains Hat.” Described as natural-colored with a four inch brim and a leather hat band, it sold for \$5.00.

\* An example of Whitman’s Stetson hat can be seen at the house.

N.B. This is just a sampling of names and their histories. The teacher may want to encourage students to learn about the use of local names, i.e. schools, streets, etc.

## WORKSHEET #1

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

### “What’s In a Name?”

1. Provide biographical information about \_\_\_\_\_.

You may want to include when and where this person was born and what this person did for a living.

2. Give a description of the product or the place named for the person above.

3. Why is the name given to this product/place a good choice?

## **CLASSROOM LESSON 2**

### **“The Walt Whitman Bridge”**

#### **Synopsis**

This lesson will introduce the students to a specific object and the man for whom it is named. It will focus on the historical aspect of the naming of the Walt Whitman Bridge and the life of Walt Whitman the poet.

#### **Skills**

- Listening
- Reading for information
- Interpreting a time line
- Reading a map

#### **Materials**

- Walt Whitman Bridge statistics (Resource #2)
- Whitman biographical information (Resource #3)
- Time line (Worksheet #2)
- Map (Worksheet #3)

#### **Objectives**

- To summarize the story of the naming of the Walt Whitman Bridge and the man for whom it was named.
- To use a time line to list the important events in Whitman’s life in chronological order.
- To use a map to trace the important places in Whitman’s life.

#### **Background Information**

A list of statistics concerning the Walt Whitman Bridge is found in Resource #2. More information concerning the works of the Delaware River Port Authority can be found on the Internet at [WWW.DRPA.org/](http://WWW.DRPA.org/).

It was the task of the newly formed Delaware River Port Authority to oversee the existing Delaware River Bridge, now known as the Ben Franklin Bridge, and to continue to supervise the design and construction of a new bridge, a few miles south of the Delaware River Bridge. The new bridge was well under way by 1954 and was expected to be completed by 1957.

In November of 1954 a committee was formed to select a name for the new bridge. Meanwhile, a letter was received suggesting that the Delaware River Bridge be renamed to honor the 250th birthday of Benjamin Franklin, which would be marked in 1956. The committee considering the request determined that the new bridge, too, should be named for an historic person. The name chosen, they felt, should “reflect equal prestige upon the two states, New Jersey and Pennsylvania.”

Several names were considered, including Betsy Ross, William Penn, and Woodrow Wilson. The name Walt Whitman was finally selected by the committee to commemorate his 19 years in Camden and the 100th anniversary of the publication of Whitman’s book of poetry, *Leaves of Grass*. On July 20, 1955, both bridges were officially named.

Later, in 1955 and 1956, several groups requested that the Port Authority’s Special Committee reconsider their name choice for the Walt Whitman Bridge. Some asked that it be called the Gloucester Bridge instead. Their requests were denied and the bridge was officially dedicated on May 15, 1957.

## **Procedure**

Refer students to Lesson 1 in which they investigated products and places named for their founders. Remind them of their findings.

Tell students that they will be learning about one more landmark and the person for whom it is named. If available, share with the students a photo of the bridge. Ask students to share what they know about the bridge. Refer to Resource #2 to give them some of the statistics associated with the bridge.

Share the story of the naming of the Walt Whitman Bridge by the Delaware River Port Authority Special Committee. You may want to show a copy of Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass*.

Provide each student with a copy of Resource #3, a brief biographical account of Whitman. This can be read together, in small groups, or individually. Ask questions to check for understanding.

Using the biographical information as a source, have students complete the time line on worksheet #2, which will reflect important events in Whitman’s life. Discuss with students some of the knowledge of national and international history and culture that can be gleaned from the Whitman biography.

## **Extended Activity**

Identify the important places associated with Whitman. Locate these places on the map. Discuss how long it might have taken Whitman to travel from one place to another using the transportation available at the time. Students may also want to trace the development of the United States during Whitman's lifetime, including technology, inventions, and holdings. Bring to the students' attention the proximity of Camden, New Jersey to their school.

## **Resource #2**

### **Walt Whitman Bridge Statistics and Information**

#### **Walt Whitman Bridge**

*Bridge Manager: Horace Nelson*

(856) 968-2299

(215) 218-3700

Owned by the Delaware River Port Authority. Construction began for the Walt Whitman Bridge August, 1953. Opened to traffic May 16, 1957. River/waterway crossing the Delaware River. Location: Gloucester NJ/Philadelphia PA. Width (out to out): 92 feet - 2 inches. Travel width (curb to curb): 79 feet. Number of lanes is 7. The bridge does not have railroad/transit tracks. Length (abutment to abutment): 11,981 feet. Maximum length of main span: 2,000 feet. Navigable channel width: 800 feet. Navigable channel depth: 40 feet. Navigable channel vertical clearance above mean high water: 150 feet. Highest point of structure above water: 374 feet.

Foundation type: caisson (main piers), and piles (approach piers). Made of A-7 & H.S. steel. Type of connection: weld (shop) and bolt (field). Roadway surface: asphalt. Type of paint: urethane alkyd. Structural steel weight: 57,674 tons.\*

*\*Information taken from the Delaware River Port Authority web site.*

## Resource #3

### Walt Whitman: Camden Honors Its Most Famous Citizen

Hearing the name Walt Whitman, many people, especially those in the area of Camden, New Jersey, and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, think of the bridge that crosses the Delaware River between Gloucester City, just south of Camden, New Jersey, and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. It is known as a bridge that takes drivers to Veteran's Stadium, the Philadelphia Airport, or South Street. The bridge's name is heard on traffic reports, but rarely is it questioned as to how the bridge got its name. The bridge is named after a famous American writer who lived in the 19th century. Walt Whitman is primarily known for his poetry, and the bridge is the only one in the United States named after a poet.

Why is a bridge in South Jersey named for a great poet? The answer is because Walt Whitman lived in the area for the last 19 years of his life. From 1873 to 1892, Walt Whitman lived in the city of Camden. Living first with his brother George on Stevens Street, he bought his Mickle Street residence in 1884.

Walt Whitman was born on May 31, 1819, in Long Island, New York. At age four, he moved with his parents to Brooklyn, New York. He attended public school there for about six years but dropped out at age 11. In 1836 Whitman returned to Long Island where he was hired as a school teacher. From there, his career took him to New York City, where he wrote and edited several newspapers, including the *Star* and the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*. He continued in newspaper work in New York until interests led him to New Orleans in 1846. His stay in New Orleans was brief. After only several months of employment at a newspaper, the *Daily Crescent*, Whitman returned to Brooklyn.

Whitman is best known for his masterpiece, *Leaves of Grass*. First published in 1855 as a collection of 12 poems, the book was immediately praised by the prominent American literary figure Ralph Waldo Emerson with the words, "I greet you at the beginning of a great career." Many other critics, however, did not like the work because of its unusual poetic style. Whitman did not write in the traditional poetic forms of the day, but in free verse, a form of poetry having no rhyme or regular meter. In addition to being unique in style, Whitman's poetry was different from the work of his peers in subject matter. He wrote about common people, such as mechanics, shoemakers, boatmen, and carpenters. Some critics felt that such ordinary subjects were not suitable for poetry. However, it is precisely because of his commonplace subjects and his poetic style that he is still popular today. This championing of the common people led many to call Whitman the "poet of democracy."



From his first publication in 1855, Whitman worked on *Leaves of Grass* for his entire life. Over the years, he added poems to the text, revised existing poems, and published several new editions of the book. The most complete edition of *Leaves of Grass* was published in 1892, the year of Whitman's death, and is known as the "deathbed" edition.

In 1862 Whitman traveled to the Civil War front in Virginia, where his brother George had been wounded. From there, Whitman settled in Washington D.C., serving as a volunteer nurse in army hospitals. The great impact that the war had on Whitman's life is reflected in his poems, many written from first-hand experience, some written in quiet reflection in subsequent years in New Jersey. He remained in Washington for 10 years, earning a living as a government clerk. Then in 1873 Whitman suffered a stroke and was unable to work. He moved to Camden to live with his brother George and his family.

It was during the years Whitman spent in Camden that he realized his greatest popularity. Whitman had a following that grew steadily and included many prominent citizens. Among the famous people who came to visit Whitman in Camden was Oscar Wilde, the renowned Irish writer. He paid the "Good Gray Poet" two visits in 1882. Whitman's popularity continued to grow due to a series of lectures he delivered on the death of Abraham Lincoln, which he gave in Philadelphia, Boston, and New York. It was through these dramatic presentations that some people, perhaps not as familiar with his poetry, came to know Whitman.

When his brother George moved to a farm in Bordentown, New Jersey, Whitman bought his own house at 328 Mickle Street in 1884. Although George asked Walt to move in with them, Walt decided to stay in Camden because he liked the city. Camden, perhaps, reminded him of the Brooklyn of his youth, and he was pleased to be close to the ferry, which enabled him to visit Philadelphia often. In addition, Walt was close to the farm of friends, the Staffords, near Laurel Springs, New Jersey. For rest and relaxation, he frequently visited the farm and Timber Creek, which ran near the property.

When Walt Whitman lived in Camden, the city was a bustling industrial center of railroads, factories, and docks. Still, Camden was not viewed by many as an ideal place to live. Some of Whitman's friends encouraged him to leave the city, and even offered him a place to live. The poet, however, preferred to stay in Camden. The city gave him an opportunity to live and work among the people he celebrated in his poetry.

Whitman's house on Mickle Street is a simple, wooden row house that he called his "shanty." The two story, brown house sits among a row of brick homes. Whitman's bedroom was on the second floor, where, from his window, he liked to watch the activities in the street below and on the waterfront beyond. He sometimes passed the time with his dog Watch, outside on the street, where he had a view of the setting sun.

Suffering a second stroke, the poet was in ill health in the last few years of his life. He died on March 26, 1892 and is buried in Camden in Harleigh Cemetery. Laid to rest with Walt in an impressive tomb of his design are his parents and other family members.

TIME LINE

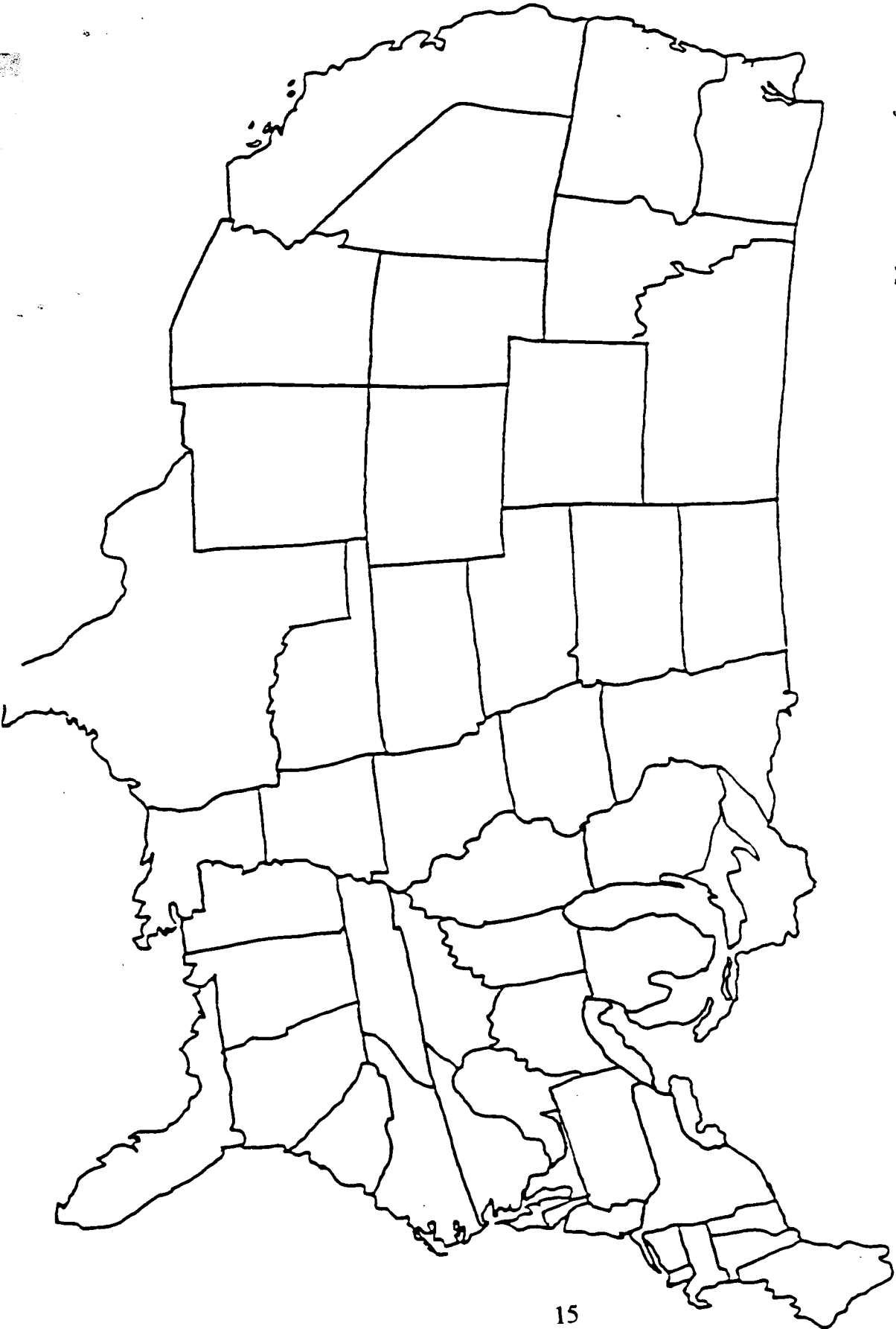
Walt Whitman 1819-1892

Washington Irving publishes <i>The Sketch Book</i> which includes "Rip Van Winkle" and "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow"	1820
Samuel F. B. Morse develops the Morse Code	1838
Discovery of gold in California	1848
Lincoln inaugurated as the 16th president. Outbreak of the Civil War	1861
End of the Civil War Assassination of Lincoln	1865
Roebing designs the Brooklyn Bridge	1869
Mark Twain publishes <i>The Adventures of Tom Sawyer</i>	1876
Statue of Liberty is unveiled	1886
Eiffel Tower is erected	1889

**Worksheet #3**

**Walt Whitman's Travels**

On the map below, trace Whitman's life travels from his birth to his death. Think about the things he may have seen along the way. With what type of "common people" might he have interacted?



## **CLASSROOM LESSON 3**

### **“What’s in Walt’s Poems?”**

#### **Synopsis**

Whitman was a man of the people. He admired people who worked with their hands and thought of himself as the poet of the common man and woman. This lesson will introduce students to the writing styles and themes of three of Whitman’s poems that recognize the work of the common person.

#### **Skills**

- Oral reading
- Analytical thinking
- Creative expression

#### **Materials**

- Three Whitman Poems (Resource #4)

#### **Objectives**

- To identify Whitman’s style of writing and its importance
- To become familiar with three of Whitman’s poems that celebrate the common worker
- To recite/read aloud a Whitman selection with clarity and understanding

#### **Background Information**

Whitman’s style of writing has led many to call him one of America’s greatest poets. He was said to have captured the democratic spirit of America in his works. Often writing about the values of the common people and their experiences, his subjects include that of a butcher boy, blacksmith, machinist, police officer, and deck hand. Despite the poet’s popularity, Whitman’s work was widely criticized for its lack of rhyme and regular meter. His free verse, as the poetic style is called, was a departure from the more traditional forms of his time. First published in 1855, Whitman’s major work, *Leaves of Grass*, included 12 free verse poems, using imagery of everyday life and very common diction, as well as the diction of foreign languages, the Bible, and science. He went on to publish five more editions, each containing new works, as well as poems from earlier editions which had been reworked. The last edition, published in 1892, is often referred to as the “deathbed edition.”

Wanting to be viewed as a member of the working class, Whitman chose to be published under an informal name. He further identified with the common man by dressing as a member of the working class. Some photographs and daguerreotypes of Whitman can be found on the Internet at <http://jefferson.village.Virginia.EDU/whitman/photos/>. Commenting on his contemporary's style of dress, the New England writer Bronson Alcott said of Whitman that "he wore a slouch hat for house and street alike."

### **Procedure**

Read aloud "I Hear America Singing." Ask students to listen for the many types of workers that Whitman addresses and the language he uses to describe their work. List student responses on the board.

Tell students of Walt Whitman's interest in the common man and ask them if they think he has expressed that interest in his writings.

Ask students to share how the poem makes them feel. Have them describe the mood that the poem conveys and how explain Whitman conveys that mood.

Provide each student with a copy of the poem. Reread the poem aloud together, or ask for a volunteer.

Divide the class into two groups. Supply each member of the group with a copy of one of the two poems, "Oxtamer" or "Sparkles from the Wheel." Have students read the poems silently and then aloud in their group. After discussing what the poem is about, ask them to compare and contrast the poem that they have read with "I Hear America Singing."

Read "I Hear America Singing" as a group or as a choral reading.

## Resource #4

### Three Poems for Study

#### Sparkles from the Wheel

WHERE the city's ceaseless crowd moves on the livelong day,  
Withdrawn I join a group of children watching, I pause aside with them.

By the curb toward the edge of the flagging,  
A knife-grinder works at his wheel sharpening a great knife,  
Bending over he carefully holds it to the stone, by foot and knee,  
With measur'd tread he turns rapidly, as he presses with light but firm hand,  
Forth issue then in copious golden jets,  
Sparkles from the wheel.

The scene and all its belongings, how they seize and affect me,  
The sad sharp-chinn'd old man with worn clothes and broad shoulder-band of leather,  
Myself effusing and fluid, a phantom curiously floating, now here absorb'd and arrested,  
The group, (an unminded point set in a vast surrounding,)  
The attentive, quiet children, the loud, proud, restive base of the streets,  
The low hoarse purr of the whirling stone, the light-press'd blade,  
Diffusing, dropping, sideways-darting, in tiny showers of gold,  
Sparkles from the wheel.

Flagging- *the pavement*  
Copious- *plentiful*  
Effusive- *overflowing*

Restive- *restless*  
Diffusing- *spreading out*

## The Ox-Tamer

IN a far-away northern country in the placid pastoral region,  
Lives my farmer friend, the theme of my recitative, a famous tamer of oxen,  
There they bring him the three-year-olds and the four-year-olds to break them,  
He will take the wildest steer in the world and break him and tame him,  
He will go fearless without any whip where the young bullock chafes up and down the  
yard,  
The bullock's head tosses restless high in the air with raging eyes,  
Yet see you! how soon his rage subsides--how soon this tamer tames him;  
See you! on the farms hereabout a hundred oxen young and old, and he is the man who  
has tamed them,  
They all know him, all are affectionate to him;  
See you! some are such beautiful animals, so lofty looking;  
Some are buff-color'd, some mottled, one has a white line running along his back, some  
are brindled,  
Some have wide flaring horns (a good sign)--see you! the bright hides,  
See, the two with stars on their foreheads--see, the round bodies and broad backs,  
How strait and square they stand on their legs--what fine sagacious eyes!  
How they watch their tamer--they wish him near them--how they turn to look after him!  
What yearning expression! how uneasy they are when he moves away from them;  
Now I marvel what it can be he appears to them, (books, politics, poems, depart--all else  
departs,)  
I confess I envy only his fascination--my silent, illiterate friend,  
Whom a hundred oxen love there in his life on farms,  
In the northern country far, in the placid pastoral region.

Placid--*quiet, tranquil*  
Pastoral--*rural*  
Break--*to tame or train*  
Chafes--*moves restlessly*

Mottled--*spotted*  
Brindled--*streaked*  
Sagacious--*wise*



## 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.

*Blithe--happy, carefree*

*Melodious--musical*

## **CLASSROOM LESSON 4**

### **“Whitman’s America Builds a Bridge”**

#### **Synopsis**

It takes many workers to build a bridge. Who are the people who built the bridge named for Walt Whitman? How might he have described those workers in poetic form? In this lesson students will learn of the many occupations involved in bridge building. With that information, students will be challenged to write a poem using Whitman’s style of free verse.

#### **Skills**

- Research
- Creative writing

#### **Materials**

- Three Poems for Study (Resource #4)
- Glossary of Bridge Building Terms (Resource #5)
- Research sources

#### **Objectives**

- To identify those skilled workers who help build bridges
- To list descriptive words associated with each job identified
- To write a poem celebrating the many jobs involved in constructing a bridge, imitating Whitman’s style of free verse.

#### **Background Information**

It takes many professionals and craftsmen to construct a bridge. From conception to completion, many skills are put to work. Resource #5 will provide a list of some of the jobs involved, as well as a glossary of those jobs.

#### **Procedure**

Reread the Whitman poems that are provided in Lesson 3. Remind students of Whitman’s use of free verse and colorful language in describing the workers.

Tell students that as a class they will write a poem about the many workers and the work they did to complete the bridge named for Walt Whitman. The poem will imitate Whitman’s use of free verse.

Make a list of the types of jobs and workers that are needed to build a bridge. Ask students to define each worker's responsibilities. Resource #5 may be of help. Extend the list by brainstorming a series of words (verbs and adjectives) which might be used to describe each job.

As a class, write a poem describing the workers of the Walt Whitman Bridge and the work that they did. Be sure to point out that it might be necessary to come back at a later time to make changes in the poem until they are satisfied. Remind them that Whitman did this often.

## **Resource #5**

### **Glossary of Bridge Building Terms**

**Architect-** designs and advises in the construction of bridges and other structures

**Bricklayer-** lays bricks

**Cable worker-** works with wire rope, called cable, used in suspension bridges

**Crane operator-** operates a machine for raising, shifting, and lowering weights by means of a projected swinging arm or with a hoisting apparatus supported by an overhead track

**Diver-** examines the floor of the body of water to be spanned by the bridge

**Driller-** uses an instrument with an edged or pointed end for making holes in a hard substance by revolving or by a succession of blows

**Earth mover-** uses a machine for excavating, pushing, or transporting large quantities of earth with a bulldozer

**Electrician-** installs and maintains the lights and signals of a bridge

**Engineer-** designs and directs the construction of complex structures

**Geologist-** a scientist who studies the land on either side of the bridge, as well as the floor of the body of water spanned by the bridge

**Geohydrologist-** a scientist who works with the source and mode of occurrence of underground water

**Hydrographer-** studies the flow and depth of lakes, rivers, and oceans

**Longshoreman-** loads and unloads ships near a bridge site

**Mason-** lays bricks and stones

**Steelworker-** works with steel in constructing the supports and towers of a bridge

# CLASSROOM LESSON 5

## “Workers and Whitman”

### Synopsis

Children are often asked what they would like to be when they grow up. In this lesson, students will have an opportunity to explore the job market. They will use their research skills to create a poetic celebration of their findings.

### Skills

- use of newspaper index
- research skills
- creative writing
- word processing

### Materials

- classified section of newspaper
- research resources
- word processor (optional)

### Objectives

- To use the classified section of the newspaper to choose a job that the student would like to learn more about
- To research the responsibilities involved with the chosen job
- To write a poem in free verse describing the job

### Procedure

In this lesson, students will work independently. Students will have an opportunity to review the classified section of the newspaper and select a job that sounds interesting to them.

Using research resources, have students determine the responsibilities of the job they have chosen. Be sure that they include descriptive words in their note taking.

When the students' research has been completed, challenge them to prepare a presentation describing the job responsibilities for their classmates. The project can be extended further by having students then use their notes to write a poem in free verse.

N.B. Be certain that the students understand the abbreviations used in the ad.

## Visit to the Walt Whitman House

While visiting the Whitman House, students will be reminded of the poet's championing of the common working person and the democratic, egalitarian spirit of his poetry. They will be asked to observe the poet's home and, from these observations, make conjectures about his lifestyle, wealth, and status. Among the objects on view in the house, students will see a daguerreotype of Whitman and his Stetson hat--reminders of their lesson on the naming of things.

The occasion for Whitman's initial sojourn to Camden in 1873 was to visit his ailing mother, who was living with Walt's brother George. George Whitman was a pipe inspector at a time when industries that involved plumbing and laying gas lines through the city of Camden were new. As students view the bathroom of the house (Walt installed a bathroom with a copper tub) and see the reproduction outhouse in the yard, they can put into historical perspective such advances in living conditions at the time.

When Whitman lived at 328 Mickle Street in the 1880s and 1890s, the Camden-Amboy rail line and the ferry station linking Camden and Philadelphia were within walking distance. Ask students to imagine Whitman strolling these streets, talking with neighbors, or making his way to farther destinations. In front of the house, students will see a marble stepping stone with the initials *W.W.*, placed at the curb when Whitman was given a gift of a horse and buggy. Students may be reminded of their lesson on the Walt Whitman Bridge in a discussion of transportation and travel.

### Post-Visit Activities

#### Discussion

After returning to the classroom, give students the opportunity to discuss what they observed during their visit to the Walt Whitman House. You may want them to complete one or all of the following activities.

#### Web Site Exploration

Have students visit the web site which provides photographs of Whitman throughout his lifetime. (He was among the most often photographed people of his time.) Have students discuss his style of dress. Ask them what they can surmise about Whitman's personality based on the pictures. The web site address is:

<http://jefferson.village.Virginia.edu/whitman/photos/>

## **Research**

Students may want to research what Camden was like in the late 19th century and perhaps make some comparisons to their own communities. One resource for such research in the Camden County Historical Society, located at Park Blvd. and Euclid Ave., Camden, NJ. Telephone: (856) 964-3333.

## **Oral Presentation**

As an oral presentation, students could act the role of the curator of the Walt Whitman House. Have individual students select one room of the house that impressed him/her. After recalling what was on display in the room (they could brainstorm in groups), the “curator” can welcome “visitors” to the house and give a “tour.”

## **Poetry Writing**

Consider the many employees in the school community and the variety of jobs they do. Working cooperatively, write a poem in the catalog style of “I Hear America Singing,” celebrating the different kinds of work and workers. The final product could be shared on a special day in the context of a party to which the school employees might be invited.

## **Publishing**

As a class, form a company that will “publish” a book of poetry (student written) in the style of *Leaves of Grass*. Have one group design a cover and/or illustrations for the book. Another group can develop an advertising strategy for “selling” the book.

## Walt Whitman Chronology

- 1819 Walter Whitman born (May 31) at West Hills, Huntington Township, New York. Walter was the second child of eight children born to Walter Whitman and Louisa Van Velsor, both descendants of early settlers on Long Island.
- 1823 Walter Whitman senior moves his family to Brooklyn where he works as a house builder.
- 1825 The Marquis de Lafayette visits Brooklyn. Walt Whitman recounts the memory of seeing and being embraced by Lafayette during a public gathering. Walt attends public school until about 1830.
- 1831-36 Works as office boy, printer's apprentice, then printer.
- 1836-38 Teaches at several schools on Long Island.
- 1838-39 Founds and publishes weekly newspaper, *Long Islander*, in Huntington, Long Island; writes for *Long Island Democrat*; writes poetry and literary prose.
- 1840-41 Campaigns for Martin Van Buren. Teaches school on Long Island again.
- 1841 Moves to New York City where he works in printing office of *New World*; writes for *Democratic Review*.
- 1842-45 Works for *Aurora*, *Evening Tattler*, and other papers in New York City. Publishes a "temperance novel," *Franklin Evans* (Nov. 1842).
- 1846-48 Becomes editor of *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*; February, 1848, goes to New Orleans to work on the *Crescent*; in May, returns to Brooklyn by way of the Mississippi, the Great Lakes, and the Hudson.
- 1848-49 Founds and edits the *Brooklyn Freeman*, a "Free-Soil" newspaper.
- 1849-54 Runs job-printing office, bookstore, and house building business. Works as



freelance journalist. Publishes several poems.

- 1855 Publishes first edition of *Leaves of Grass* (795 copies) first week of July. Father dies July 11. Ralph Waldo Emerson sends letter of praise (July 21) for *Leaves of Grass*.
- 1856 Publishes second edition of *Leaves of Grass*. Book expanded from twelve poems to thirty-three poems. Henry David Thoreau and Bronson Alcott visit him in Brooklyn. Writes "*The Eighteenth Presidency*."
- 1857-59 Writes for the *Brooklyn Times*.
- 1860 Goes to Boston to oversee publishing of third edition of *Leaves of Grass*.
- 1861 Civil War breaks out; George Whitman enlists in Union Army.
- 1862 George is wounded at Battle of Fredericksburg, Virginia. Walt goes to war front to find his brother.
- 1863-64 Settles in Washington, D.C., where he volunteers in the military hospitals and supports himself by part-time clerical work in the Army Paymaster's Office.
- 1865 Begins clerkship at Department of Interior; fired from clerkship by Secretary James Harlan, supposedly because of *Leaves of Grass*; transferred to clerkship in Attorney General's office. Writes "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd" (summer) in response to the assassination of Lincoln. Publishes *Drum-Taps and Sequel*.
- 1866 William Douglas O'Connor publishes *The Good Grey Poet*, defending Whitman.
- 1867 Publishes "Democracy" and the fourth edition of *Leaves of Grass*.
- 1868 William Michael Rossetti publishes *Poems of Walt Whitman* in London.
- 1870 Prints fifth edition of *Leaves of Grass*, *Democratic Vistas*, and *Passage to India*, all dated 1871.
- 1873 Suffers stroke and is partially paralyzed; mother dies; moves to Camden,

New Jersey, to live with George and Louisa Whitman.

- 1874 Leaves government clerkship. Publishes "Song of the Redwood Tree" and "Prayer of Columbus."
- 1876 Publishes "Centennial" edition of *Leaves of Grass* (a reprint of 1871 edition) and *Two Rivulets* to coincide with the nation's centennial.
- 1879 Gives first Lincoln lecture in New York (April); travels west (September) as far as Colorado.
- 1880 Travels in Canada.
- 1881 Oscar Wilde visits Whitman in Camden (January).
- 1884 Moves to 328 Mickle Street, Camden, (March) which he calls "a little old shanty of my own."
- 1885 Walt receives gift of horse and buggy from friends and supporters.
- 1886 Sits for portrait by Thomas Eakins.
- 1888 Suffers another paralytic stroke (June). Publishes *November Boughs* and *Complete Poems and Prose*.
- 1890 Delivers "Death of Abraham Lincoln" lecture for the last time (April) in Philadelphia. Begins planning construction of his tomb.
- 1891 Publishes *Good-Bye my Fancy* and "deathbed" edition of *Leaves of Grass* ("supercedes them all by far").
- 1892 Dies (March 26) at Mickle Street; buried (March 30) in Harleigh Cemetery, Camden, New Jersey.