

"oh captain my  
captain" by walt  
whitman



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

" O Captain! My Captain!" is a poem written by Walt Whitman in 1865. The poem is classified as an elegy because it is a mourning poem that was written in the memory of someone. The poem was written to honor Abraham Lincoln, the 16th president of the United States. Walt Whitman was born in 1819 and died in 1892, so he lived through the American Civil War. Being born close to the founding of the country, he knew people that were a part of the American Revolution.

Through this he experienced the unification and division of the United States. Walt Whitman was extremely patriotic and wrote many poems about the prominence of America. He also wrote poems about urging people to fight for what is right. The poem was known as one of the greatest poems written at the time of the Civil War. The main political and social issue during Whitman's time was slavery and the rights of African Americans. Whitman was self-described as the poet of America and, during the Civil War, the Union.

Whitman wanted to see the end of slavery; this was his hope for America. However, it broke his heart to see the nation fighting. He admired Abraham Lincoln immensely because of his political standpoint of universal equality as stated in the constitution.

The captain in the poem refers to Abraham Lincoln who is the captain of the ship; this represents the United States of America. The first line establishes a happy mood as it addresses the captain. The phrase " our fearful trip is done" is talking about the end of the Civil War. The next line references the ship, America, and how it has " weathered every rack", meaning America

has braved the tough storm of the Civil War, and " the prize we sought", the end of slavery, " is won". The following line expresses a mood of jubilation of the Union winning the war as it says " the people all exulting"; however, the next line swiftly shifts the mood when it talks of the grimness of the ship, and the darker side of the war. Many lost their lives in the American Civil War, and although the prize that was sought was won, the hearts still ache amidst the exultation of the people.

The repetition of heart in line five calls attention to the poet's vast grief and heartache because the Captain has bled and lies still, cold, and dead (lines six through eight). This is no doubt referencing the assassination of Abraham Lincoln and Whitman's sorrow for the death of his idol. In the second stanza the speaker again calls out to the Captain in a light-hearted manner and dictates to " rise up and hear the bells", to join in on the celebration of the end of the war. The next three lines tell the captain to " rise up" and join in on the revelries because it is for him. He is the reason for their merriment: " for you the flag is flung—for you the bugle trills; for you bouquets and ribbon'd wreaths—for you the shores a-crowding; for you they call, the swaying mass, their eager faces turning". Everyone is celebrating what Lincoln accomplished; this is not only the abolishment of slavery but also the formation of the Union and the coming together of people. Again the poet calls to the Captain as if he had never fallen. The poet does not wish to acknowledge the death of his beloved Captain, and he even asks if it is some dream (line 15) that the Captain has fallen " cold and dead".

The third stanza begins in a somber mood as the poet has finally accepted that the Captain is dead and gone. Here there is vivid and darker imagery

such as " his lips are pale and still" and the reader can picture the dead Captain lying there still and motionless with " no pulse nor will". In line 17, the poet calls out " My Captain," and in line 18, the poet refers to the Captain as " My father". This is referring to Lincoln as the father of the United States. Lines 19 and 20 are concluding statements that summarize the entire poem. The United States is " anchor'd safe and sound". It is safe now from war with " its voyage closed and done, from fearful trip, the victor ship, comes in with object won".

The country has accomplished its goal of the abolishment of slavery and the unification of people after a fearful war. In line 21, the examples of apostrophe, ordering " shores to exult," and " bells to ring" are again referring to how the nation is celebrating while " I with mournful tread, Walk the deck my Captain lies, Fallen cold and dead". Throughout the paper there is a distinct rhyme scheme, which is unusual for Whitman. The rhyme scheme in " O Captain! My Captain!" is AABCDEFE, GGHIJEKE, and LLMNOEPE for each stanza respectively. Two examples of alliteration are in line 10 " flag is flung", as well as in line 19 " safe and sound". Repetition occurs many times in this poem, for example " O Captain! My Captain", and " fallen cold and dead".