

Name:

Class:

# I Hear America Singing

By Walt Whitman From "Leaves Of Grass" Via Project Gutenberg • 1855

Walt Whitman is a famous American poet, often called the father of "free verse," who wrote during the time of urbanization in America. As you read, consider the images in the poem and the effect they have on the mood.

- [1] I hear America singing, the varied carols I hear, Those of mechanics, each one singing his as it should be blithe<sup>1</sup> and strong,
  - The carpenter singing his as he measures his plank or beam,
  - The mason<sup>2</sup> singing his as he makes ready for work, or leaves off work,
- [5] The boatman singing what belongs to him in his boat, the deckhand singing on the steamboat deck,
  - The shoemaker singing as he sits on his bench, the hatter singing as he stands,
  - The wood-cutter's song, the ploughboy<sup>3</sup>'s on his way in the morning, or at noon intermission or at sundown,
  - The delicious singing of the mother, or of the young wife at work, or of the girl sewing or washing,
  - Each singing what belongs to him or her and to none else,
- [10] The day what belongs to the day—at night the party of young fellows, robust<sup>4</sup>, friendly,
  - Singing with open mouths their strong melodious songs.



"Walt Whitman Steel Engraving" is in the public domain.

I Hear America Singing by Walt Whitman is in the public domain.

1. Blithe (adjective): carefree, joyous

- 2. Someone who builds with stone
- 3. A boy who guides work animals across a farm, drawing a plough
- 4. Robust (adjective): strong and healthy; vigorous



## **Text-Dependent Questions**

#### Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. How do the images in the poem contribute to overall theme? Cite at least two pieces [RL.2] of specific evidence from the text in your response.

- 2. PART A: In the final line, what does the phrase "Singing with open mouths" suggest [RL.3] about what it means to be American?
  - A. that they are diverse, open-minded, tolerant people.
  - B. that they want to be heard.
  - C. that they are generous and benevolent people.
  - D. that they are bold and proud people.

### 3. PART B: Which phrase provides the best support for the answer to Part A? [RL.1]

- A. "varied carols"
- B. "blithe and strong"
- C. "what belongs to him or her and to none else"
- D. "delicious singing of the mother"
- 4. Walt Whitman has been called the father of the free verse. What effect does this [RL.5] poetic form have on the poem overall?



## **Discussion Questions**

Directions: Brainstorm your answers to the following questions in the space provided. Be prepared to share your original ideas in a class discussion.

1. Why is it significant that Walt Whitman discusses the mechanic, carpenter, mason, and boatman? What is his point?

2. Consider other perspectives: how might the American experience depicted in this poem differ from that of immigrants, or of African-Americans (remember, slavery was abolished in 1865 – 5 years after this poem was published)?

3. Compare this poem with your vision of America today. Using supporting evidence, answer this question: How has America changed over time?