

O Pioneers!

PREVIEW:

On the paper given to you by your teacher, draw or write a description of a pioneer.

CLASS NOTES:

Read this:

Walt Whitman, 1819-1892, lived through most of America's 19th century. He was born on Long Island in New York and raised as a Quaker. He founded a newspaper and tried to work as a teacher, but mostly he was a writer. During the Civil War, he served as a volunteer nurse in army hospitals in Washington, D.C. He moved to New Jersey after the war because of health problems.

Whitman self-published his first edition of *Leaves of Grass*, a collection of his striking, non-traditional poetry, in 1855. He would continue to revise and republish *Leaves of Grass* throughout his life, revising the poems in it, taking some out and putting some new ones in. The last edition was published in 1891, just before his death.

Whitman was not well-received at first, but as the years went by and he kept writing and producing his own brand of poetry, critics began to take notice. Most people agreed that he was one of the most important poets of the 19th century. Even before he was elderly, Whitman wore a full gray beard and looked like an Old Testament prophet. He eventually came to be known as "The Good Gray Poet" and was widely accepted as a great American poet.

The poem "O Pioneers!" (style note: poem titles go in quotation marks; book titles go in italics) was first published in Whitman's collection *Drum Taps* (1865) and then again in his 1867 edition of *Leaves of Grass*. Writing at the end of the Civil War, Whitman places the hope for a new America squarely on the shoulders of people moving westward. The poem rebukes (sharply disapproves of) the establishment in Europe and even in the "old" America, and places its faith in youth, strength, daring and perseverance.

Source for biographical background

Baym, Nina, ed. *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, Second Edition, Vol. 2. New York: W. W. Norton, 1984.

Read poetry.

Your teacher will give you a paper copy of the poem "O Pioneers!" by Walt Whitman. **Read it through one time to yourself.** For today's work, use the paper copy and highlight/annotate as you read and work.

Now, read the poem again.

This time, open this website (<https://soundcloud.com/dailypoetry/will-geer-reads-walt-whitmans>) and follow along as actor Will Geer reads it aloud. You can make more annotations on your paper copy as you listen.

With the partner sitting next to you or by yourself, spend some time looking for key characteristics in the poem. **Follow directions to complete the questions and answer the prompts below:**

1. This poem is about people, places, and movement. Find and copy a phrase or line that refers to:
 - a. A person or people:
 - b. A place or places:
 - c. Movement or a way of moving:
2. The poem is written in quatrains. A **quatrain** is a stanza of four lines. A **stanza** is a section of poetry, similar to a paragraph in prose. How many stanzas of quatrains are there in "O Pioneers"?
3. Does the poem **rhyme**?
4. Does the poem seem to have a regular **meter** (such as iambic pentameter)? Or does the meter seem irregular?

With or without a regular meter, is the poem still rhythmic – that is, does it seem to have a beat?

5. What is the repeated last line of all the stanzas?
6. The word "O" is an **interjection**. An interjection is defined as an "abrupt remark, meant as an aside or interruption." The word "O" -- present in the last line of each stanza – is "used as an expression of surprise, pain, annoyance, longing, gladness" and more, according to *dictionary.com*.
Is Whitman using the word "O" the same way in each stanza, or is his meaning changing, according to what that stanza is about? That is, is he always expressing the same emotion when he says "O," or is he expressing a different emotion?

Give at least two examples as evidence to support your answer. Say what emotion you think Whitman is using for the lines you quote. The emotions can be the same or different.

7. **Repetition** is a literary device. Authors know a lot of words, so if you see an author repeating the same words, it's significant – it's not just because they couldn't think of different words. The author wants to make the idea clearer and emphasize its importance. Quote lines here that show repetition. Do not quote the last line of each stanza (we already covered that).

8. There are specialized types of repetition. If an author repeats the same word or phrase at the end of a sentence or clause, that is called **epiphora**. There are several stanzas in this poem that include epiphora. Copy one example here (Logic check: You will have to copy more than one line if you want to show repetition. Do not quote the last line of each stanza -- we already covered that.)

9. All languages have a regular word order in their sentences, called **syntax**. If the regular syntax of a sentence is inverted or switched up, that can be called **anastrophe**. There are multiple examples of **anastrophe** in this poem.

In places, Whitman switches up the usual adjective-noun order of English. (A poet might say "the baby beautiful," while we usually put our adjectives before our nouns, such as "the beautiful baby.")

Whitman also inverts the usual verb-direct object order. (A poet might say "the ocean sailing." We usually give the verb and then the direct object, as in "sailing the ocean.")

Whitman sometimes inverts subject-verb order. (A poet might say, "A leprechaun am I." We would usually say – in American English -- "I am a leprechaun.")

Give three examples of **anastrophe** from the poem. Follow the models provided for the examples (give stanza #, quote, show the way it would have been written following regular word order).

Example 1: From Stanza 6, "mountains steep" instead of "steep mountains"

Example 2: From Stanza 8: "Colorado men are we" instead of "We are Colorado men"

Example 3:

Example 4:

Example 5:

10. Diction refers to the word selection by an author. Authors know a lot of words, so it's significant that they choose some words and not others. The author's diction can create a **mood** in the mind of the reader and establish a **tone** in the author's voice. Diction, tone and mood can reveal an author's **point of view** about a topic.

In "O Pioneers!" Walt Whitman directly addresses the subject of his poem, the pioneers. He says directly to them who he thinks they are and what he thinks they are like. He also contrasts the pioneers against people who are not pioneers: people who have come before in history, people who are comfortable in their Eastern lives, or people who cannot move West for some reason.

Hunt for words and phrases that Whitman uses to describe or discuss both groups of people. Copy your samples into the table. Try to have a good collection on both sides, at least 7, 10 is better, 15 is great. The examples don't count.

PIONEERS	NOT PIONEERS
Impatient tan-faced	Shrouded bards

- a. Based on Whitman's **diction** – his word choice – which group does he prefer, the pioneers or the not-pioneers?
- b. Select one piece of evidence from your "Pioneers" list and write one sentence that shows how your evidence proves your answer to the above question. Use the sentence stem below:

Whitman's diction shows that he favors the pioneers because he uses words such as _____, which means . . .

- c. Select one piece of evidence from your "Not Pioneers" list and write one sentence that shows how your evidence proves your answer to the above question. Use the sentence stem below:

Whitman's diction shows that he does not favor the people who are not pioneers because he uses words such as _____, which means . . .

FINALE:

Go back to your personal vision of pioneers from the preview question. Is your depiction of pioneers aligned with Whitman's vision in this poem? Yes / No

- **If you answered yes,** find ONE quotation, ONE adjective and ONE image that illustrates/elaborates the vision you share with Whitman. Paste them here.

- **If you answered no,** how would you revise your vision now? Find two images and two adjectives that demonstrate the difference between your vision and Whitman's. Paste them here.