

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Class: \_\_\_\_\_

# O Captain! My Captain!

By Walt Whitman  
1865

*From 1861-1865, the United States was involved in a civil war that claimed the lives of an estimated 620,000 people. Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865) served as president through most of the American Civil War, but was assassinated by John Wilkes Booth just weeks before the war was officially declared over. American poet Walt Whitman lived in Washington, D.C. during the war, and worked as a government clerk and a war correspondent. He also served as a volunteer nurse, caring for the thousands of wounded soldiers who filled the nearby military hospitals. Walt Whitman wrote "O Captain, My Captain!" after reflecting on the American experience in the Civil War. As you read, take notes on how the symbolism in the poem connects to the events of the American Civil War.*

[1] O Captain! my Captain! our fearful trip is done,  
The ship has weather'd<sup>1</sup> every rack, the prize we  
sought<sup>2</sup> is won,  
The port is near, the bells I hear, the people all  
exulting,  
While follow eyes the steady keel,<sup>3</sup> the vessel<sup>4</sup>  
grim and daring;

[5] But O heart! heart! heart!  
O the bleeding drops of red,  
Where on the deck my Captain lies,  
Fallen cold and dead.

O Captain! my Captain! rise up and hear the bells;  
[10] Rise up — for you the flag is flung — for you the  
bugle trills,<sup>5</sup>  
For you bouquets and ribbon'd wreaths — for you the shores a-crowding,  
For you they call, the swaying mass, their eager<sup>6</sup> faces turning;  
Here Captain! dear father!  
This arm beneath your head!  
[15] It is some dream that on the deck,  
You've fallen cold and dead.



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1. an archaic way of saying "weathered," which means "to survive" an event
2. "sought" is a past participle of the word "seek"
3. a part of underside of a boat
4. a term for a large boat
5. the repeating of a high-pitched sound from the instrument
6. **Eager (adjective):** very interested, anxious, or enthusiastic (to do or have something)