

SONG OF MYSELF

Walt Whitman

WALT WHITMAN (1819- 1892), the 'people's poet', is perhaps the most individualistic literary figure that America has ever produced. He began working as a carpenter before his twelfth birthday. He also worked as a printer, teacher, and editor and was volunteer nurse during the Civil War. Whitman's poetry, all of which is collected in *Leaves of Grass*, is known for its free rhythms and lack of rhyme. Whitman first published it at his own expense in 1855. However, the free form of the poems and the joyful dedications to the 'importance of the individual' were not well received at first. In fact, his collection of poems cost Whitman his job, as it was taken to be obscene. In 1881, after many editions, *Leaves of Grass* finally found a publisher willing to print it uncensored. Translations of this collection were enthusiastically received in Europe, but Whitman remained relatively unappreciated in America. It was only after his death that he could win appreciation in America for his original and innovative expression of American individualism. His important works include *Leaves of Grass* (1855) and *Drum Taps* (1866).



A. Work in small groups and discuss these questions:

- 1 How will you express your feeling when you feel delighted?
- 2 Which type of song do you like to sing?
- 3 In what way does our singing reveal our mood?

SONG OF MYSELF

I celebrate myself, and sing myself,
And what I assume you shall assume,
for every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.

I **loafe** and invite my soul,
I **lean** and loafe at my ease observing a **spear** of summer grass 5
My tongue, every atom of my blood, form'd from this soil, this air,
Born here of parents, born here from parents the same, and their parents the same,
I, now thirty-seven years old in perfect health begin,

Hoping to cease not till death,

Creeds and **schools in abeyance**,
Retiring back a while **sufficed** at what they are, but never forgotten, 10

I **harbour** for good or bad, I permit to speak at every **hazard**,
Nature without check with original energy.



B.1. 1. Read the following sentences and write 'T' for true and 'F' for false statements :

- The poet enjoys himself and sings for the self.
- The speaker is different from others.
- The poet discards nature's beauty.
- Every atom of blood is the same in all human beings.
- The poet is associated with a particular school of thought.
- The poet has overcome his greed.

B.1. 2. Answer the following questions briefly:

- Who is the speaker in this poem?
- How old is he?
- Why does the speaker use 'you' twice?
- What is meant by 'Nature without check with original energy'?
- What is the theme of the poem?
- How does the speaker establish relation between 'me' and 'you'?
- What does he observe in summer?
- What has formed the speaker's blood?
- What does he hope to do?
- What does he want to do with creeds?
- What does he want to speak about?

GLOSSARY AND NOTES

celebrate (v): rejoice, have a good time

assume (v): accept that something is true, suppose

loafe (old spelling): loaf (modern spelling), wander

lean (v): take support, rest

spear (n): mast, spike, top point

creeds (n): religious beliefs

schools (n): systems of thought

in abeyance (phr): suspended, withheld

sufficed (v): to be enough

harbour (v): believe, keep feelings or thoughts in mind

hazard(n): peril, danger

C. 1. LONG ANSWER QUESTIONS

1. Give a summary of the poem.
2. What similarities does the poet draw between two human beings?
3. Explain the line: 'Hoping to cease not till death'
4. Comment on the subjectivism (personal feeling) in the poem.
5. Why does the poet not want to bother himself with 'Creeds and schools'?
6. What does the poet mean by 'Nature without check with original energy'?

C. 2. GROUP DISCUSSION

Discuss the following in **groups** or **pairs**:

1. We dress ourselves not to impress others but to please our 'self'.
2. Failures and success are temporal.

C. 3. COMPOSITION

Write a short essay in about 150 words on the following:

- a. Religion does not teach hatred.
- b. Life is a grand battle.

D. WORD STUDY

D.1. Dictionary Use

Ex.1. Look up a dictionary and write two meanings of the following words – the one in which it is used in the lesson and the other which is more common

assume	observe	form
cease	school	harbour

D.2. Word-formation

Read the following lines carefully:

Hoping to cease not till death

Retiring back a while.....

In the above lines, 'hoping' and 'retiring' are derived by adding '-ing' to 'hope' and 'retire' respectively.

Ex.1. Select five words from your day- to- day life and add the suffix '-ing' to them to form new words.

D.3. Word-meaning

Ex 1. Write the antonyms of the following words and use them in your sentences:

perfect.....

cease

hope

permit

original

E. GRAMMAR

Ex. 1. Read the following line from the poem:

'I celebrate myself, and sing myself'

In the given line 'myself' is a reflexive pronoun which has been used twice. Its usage in both the clauses is different. In the first clause, it is a reflexive pronoun, but in the second, it is object to a verb ('sing').

Supply related reflexive pronouns in the following list:

Pronoun

I

We

You

They

She

He

It

Reflexive Pronoun

Ex. 2. Construct meaningful sentences with the help of the following verbs. Do not forget to use 'reflexive pronouns' after the verbs; for, these verbs are always followed by them:

enjoy
serve
absent
help
control

F. ACTIVITIES

Ex.1. Interview at least five of your classmates and try to find out:

- What do they do when they are very happy?
- What do they do when they are very sad?
- What do they do when they are very angry?

Write a comprehensive report in about 250 words

