

O Captain! My Captain!

Instructions for 3 document analysis:

- A. Read through each of the 3 documents below.
- B. Use the 3 documents to answer the questions at the end of the 3 documents.
- C. Use evidence from the documents to back up your reasoning for all answers.

Document 1

"O Captain! My Captain!" Wikimedia Foundation, Inc., 2012.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/O_Captain!_My_Captain! 3.

"**O Captain! My Captain!**" is an [extended metaphor poem](#) written in 1865 by [Walt Whitman](#), concerning the death of [American president Abraham Lincoln](#).

Analysis

Walt Whitman wrote the poem after [Abraham Lincoln's assassination](#). Repeated metaphorical reference is made to this issue throughout the verse. The "ship" spoken of is intended to represent the [United States of America](#), while its "fearful trip" recalls the troubles of the [American Civil War](#). The [title role](#) "Captain" is Lincoln himself.^[1]

With a conventional meter and rhyme scheme that is unusual for Whitman, it was the only poem anthologized during Whitman's lifetime. Many articles of the time stated that Whitman was planning to change his writing style, and after reading this poem, they were shocked with his counter-attack on the media. This was the only poem that he had ever written like this.^[2]

The Poem

*O Captain! my Captain! our fearful trip is done;
The ship has weathered every rack, the prize we sought is won;
The port is near, the bells I hear, the people all exulting,
While follow eyes the steady keel, the vessel grim and daring:*

*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;
Rise up—for you the flag is flung—for you the bugle trills;
For you bouquets and ribboned wreaths—for you the shores a-crowding;
For you they call, the swaying mass, their eager faces turning;
Here Captain! dear father!
This arm beneath your head;
It is some dream that on the deck,
You've fallen cold and dead.*

*My Captain does not answer, his lips are pale and still;
My father does not feel my arm, he has no pulse nor will;
The ship is anchored safe and sound, its voyage closed and done;
From fearful trip, the victor ship, comes in with object won;
Exult, O shores, and ring, O bells!
But I, with mournful tread,
Walk the deck my Captain lies,
Fallen cold and dead.*

Modern versions

In 1996, [Israeli](#) songwriter [Naomi Shemer](#) translated the poem to [Hebrew](#) and wrote music for it. This was done in addition to several prior translations in order to mark the anniversary of Israeli Prime Minister [Yitzhak Rabin's assassination](#) which took place one year earlier, in 1995. The song is since commonly performed or played in Yitzhak Rabin memorial day services all around Israel.

"Passage", a [Z. Randall Stroope](#) composition for [SATB](#) choir, has a similar message to "O Captain! My Captain!" and actually quotes one section: "Captain my captain, rise up and hear the bells. Rise up, for you the flag is flung! For you bouquets and ribbon'd wreaths".

In popular culture

The 1989 film [Dead Poets Society](#) also makes repeated references to the poem, especially when English teacher John Keating ([Robin Williams](#)) tells his students that they may call him "O Captain! My Captain!" if they feel daring. At the end of the film, the students show their support to the recently-dismissed Keating in defiance against the school's headmaster, by calling the phrase in the classroom.

In the 1996 science fiction novel [The Truth Machine](#), the protagonist repeats the poem's opening line in his mind, to exploit a software bug in the book's otherwise infallible [lie detector](#).

The Lawrence Arms allude strongly to the poem in their 2004 song "Necrotism: Decanting the Insalubrious (Cyborg Midnight), Part 7." The lyrics tell of America's decline using Whitman's metaphor (This ship is sinking), and the final verse begins, "Oh Captain! My Captain!"

The phrase has also been used on the animated show Archer and on the NBC show Parks and Recreation.

Document 2

Go to the following website to access the second document:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abraham_Lincoln_assassination

"Assassination of Abraham Lincoln." Wikimedia Foundation, Inc., 2012.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abraham_Lincoln_assassination. 4.

Document 3

Go to the following website to access the third document:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Civil_War

"American Civil War." Wikimedia Foundation, Inc., 2012.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Civil_War. 7.

Using the above three documents answer the questions below use evidence from the documents to back up your reasoning.

Questions
1. Explain the metaphor of the poem? Explain the comparison between Lincoln and the captain as well as the ship and America. Use examples from the text to explain your meaning. <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
2. What affect do you think this poem had on those that loved and supported Lincoln as well as those that strove for unity in America during the Civil War? Use examples from the text to explain your meaning.

3. What is the main idea and conclusion of this poem? Use examples from the text to explain your meaning.

4. What affect do you think this poem had on those that didn't support Lincoln as well as those that wanted to separate from America during the Civil War? Use examples from the text to explain your meaning.

5. What are the differences and similarities between the Captain and Lincoln as well as the ship and America? Use examples from the text to back up your reasoning.

6. Summarize the message of the poem in your own words. Use examples from the text to back up your reasoning.

7. How much of this poem is opinion from Whitman and how much is based on fact? Use examples from the text to back up your reasoning.

8. Do you think that Whitman was striving to alter history when he wrote this poem? Why or why not? Do you feel like he did alter history with this poem? Use examples from the text to

back up your reasoning and examples from the world that shows whether he did or did not alter history with this poem.
