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Prestwick House
Literature
Teaching Unit
Chapter-by-Chapter Study Guide



101 Great American Poems

(Ed.) Andrew Carroll

- Learning objectives
- Study Guide with short-answer questions
- Background information
- Vocabulary in context
- Multiple-choice test
- Essay questions
- Literary terms



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101 Great American Poems

Note

This Poetry Teaching Unit is designed to be worked through in the order presented. Occasionally, a study question on one poem may refer to another poem encountered earlier in the Unit. This approach encourages students to build on what they have learned and make connections, somewhat as they would when progressing through a novel's chapters.

Teachers wishing to bypass certain poems or to teach them in a different order will find, however, that the Unit can be easily adapted to their needs. The vast bulk of the study questions focus on the poem directly at hand; the bulk of the test questions focus on the poems deemed most likely to be taught if others are passed over. To adapt the Unit, teachers should simply scan the study and test questions and cross out any undesired ones before reproducing the pages for students.

Please also note that, in order to complete the essay portion of the provided test, students will need access to either their books or photocopies of the poems to be discussed.

All references come from the 1998 Dover Thrift Edition of *101 Great American Poems*, edited by Andrew Carroll, *et al.*

101 Great American Poems

Objectives

By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to:

1. understand and explain the relationship of a poem's form to its content.
2. compare and contrast two or more poems through an examination of both form and content.
3. compare and contrast two or more poets' treatments of the same subject.
4. distinguish between iambic pentameter, tetrameter, and trimeter, and point out examples of each in the text.
5. comment on the themes, concerns, and trends in North American poetry from its inception to the early 1920s.
6. define all of the vocabulary words listed in the study guide.
7. identify the following figures of sound and point out examples of each in *101 Great American Poems*: alliteration, assonance, consonance, internal rhyme, and half rhyme.
8. identify the following forms and elemental units of poetry and point out examples of each in *101 Great American Poems*: sonnet, foot, stanza, strophe, quatrain, catalog verse, couplet, tercet, narrative poem, lyric poem, prose poem, and free verse.
9. identify the following figures of speech and point out examples of each in the text: metaphor, simile, irony, synecdoche, allusion, imagery, hyperbole, personification, narrator, anaphora, parallelism, dialect, elision, theme, and tone.
11. understand the value of poetry as a form of protest.
12. identify and comment on milestones in North American poetry—for example, the first publication by an American poet.
13. infer details not explicitly stated in the text.
14. understand the difference between the poet and the narrator of the poem.
15. understand the effects of repetition, diction, and syntax in a poem.
16. identify a poem's rhyme scheme and denote it in capital letters.

101 Great American Poems

Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Discuss the ways in which alliteration and internal rhyme saturate Poe's "The Raven" and the effect they have on the poem's tone.
2. Compare and contrast Sandburg's representation of the fog as a cat in "Fog" and Eliot's representation of the fog as a cat in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock".
3. Compare and contrast the ways in which Lincoln and McKay treat the subject of longing for one's childhood home in "My Childhood's Home I See Again" and "The Tropics in New York," respectively.
4. Discuss the relationship of form to content in Cullen's "Incident". How does the form affect one's experience of the poem?
5. Discuss both Holmes' and Crane's use of the poem as a form of protest. How effective are their poems as vehicles of protest? Is poetry an effective form of protest in today's society?
6. Discuss both Bryant's and Longfellow's use of the poem as an inspirational device. Is poetry an effective form of inspirational writing in today's society?
7. Compare and contrast Lindsay's and Whitman's treatment of the same subject in "Euclid" and "When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer", respectively.
8. Compare and contrast Lindsay's and Sandburg's treatment of the same subject in "The Leaden-Eyed" and "I Am the People, the Mob", respectively.
9. Compare and contrast Marianne Moore's "Poetry" and Archibald MacLeish's "Ars Poetica" in terms of content and voice.
10. Discuss the way that Marianne Moore and William Carlos Williams bring a rigorous attention to form to their "free" verse.
11. Discuss Walt Whitman's formal and thematic innovations in light of the American poetry which directly preceded him.
12. Discuss James Weldon Johnson's and Langston Hughes' use of dialect in their poetry. How do you think it affected the kind of audience poetry received at the time?

“Thanatopsis”
by William Cullen Bryant

Vocabulary

blight – something that impairs one’s growth and deflates one’s spirit
patriarchs – males in power
hoary – grown gray with age; ancient
sepulchre – tomb
pensive – thoughtful
venerable – honorable; honored
scourged – severely punished

1. What does the poem’s title mean?

2. When Bryant writes that Nature “speaks/A various language” and refers to Nature as “she,” what literary device is he using?

3. What, according to the speaker, will make the reader become “a brother to the insensible rock/And to the sluggish clod”?

4. Re-state Bryant’s “All that tread/The globe are but a handful to the tribes/That slumber in its bosom” in simple, modern English.

**“Concord Hymn”
by Ralph Waldo Emerson**

Vocabulary

votive – given as the mark of a vow or pledge
sires – fathers

1. What has happened to the “rude bridge”?

2. What does the speaker ultimately ask the “Spirit” to do?

3. “Occasional poems” are poems written to be read on a specific occasion, much as speeches are written. What occasion was “Concord Hymn” written to mark?

“The Builders”
by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Vocabulary

show – something insubstantial; something done just for appearance’s sake

minute – tiny

ample – large; sufficient in size

ascending – rising to greater heights

attain – accomplish; reach

1. Who are the “Builders”?

2. While “The Builders” does not have the same theme as “Thanatopsis”, the two poems do have important points in common.

A. In what way is each poem’s intent to inspire the reader?

B. What shared vision do the poems have about the individual’s relationship to all humankind?

3. The speaker imagines the builders building a “house” with “turrets” and a “firm and ample base.” What, metaphorically, are the builders building?

**“O Captain! My Captain!”
by Walt Whitman**

Vocabulary

keel – the body of a ship
rack – in this case, stress or torture

1. How does this poem differ formally from the other Whitman poems you have read?

2. How does the captain's death affect the speaker's experience of the victory?

3. Why do you think Whitman chose to use this form—so different from his usual approach—for this poem?

4. “O Captain! My Captain!” was written as part of a series of poems about President Lincoln's death. What internal hints are there that suggest the poem's subject matter?
