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



Great American Poems

(Ed.) Daniel Reed

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



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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' treatment of the same subject or theme.
4. distinguish between iambic trimeter, tetrameter, and pentameter, and identify examples of each in the text.
5. comment on the themes, concerns, and trends in poetry from the time of the American War for Independence to after the second World War.
6. define all of the vocabulary words listed in the study guide.
7. identify examples of the poetic sound devices of alliteration, assonance, consonance, inversion, and internal rhyme.
8. identify the poetic form elements of stanza, couplet, and sonnet.
9. identify examples of the poetic rhetorical elements of metaphor, simile, irony, allusion, imagery, personification, anaphora, apostrophe, and epistrophe.
10. understand the value of poetry as a form of protest.
11. understand the value of poetry as a form of self-expression.
12. understand the value of poetry as a form of praise.
13. infer details not explicitly stated in the text.
14. understand the effects of repetition, diction, and syntax in a poem.
15. identify a poem's rhyme scheme and denote it in capital letters.

Great American Poems

Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Consider the evolution of poems with regard to construction. How might the departure of strict meter and rhyme reflect a greater phenomena?
2. Discuss whether postmodern poets such as T.S. Eliot and E.E. Cummings have truly abandoned form or simply traded form for a new, different structure dependent only upon the words chosen and how they appear on the page. Is it possible that the postmodernists use form more than anyone in history? Describe the control over the audience that Cummings's form creates.
3. Discuss Whitman's sentiment toward science as it is portrayed in "When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer."
4. Contrast the nature of Death as it appears in Poe's "Annabel Lee" and Dickinson's "Because I could not stop for Death."
5. Discuss the way in which the use of vernacular language affects the tone and characterization of a poem. Use "The Bumblebee" and "The Cremation of Sam McGee" as the basis of your discussion.
6. Compare Edgar Allan Poe's "The Raven" with "I Knew a Man by Sight." Discuss why Thoreau's mentor and fellow Transcendentalist might have referred to Poe as "that jingle man." Look for differences in depth and perspective between the two poems.
7. Describe the religious contradictions in "The Battle Hymn of the Republic."
8. Discuss the speaker's sense of ideal beauty as it is portrayed in "Trees." What characteristics of the tree make it better than a poem? Is it truly better?
9. Identify the elements juxtaposed in each of the following poems:
 - "Smoke"
 - "The Cyclists"
 - "Hod Putt"
 - "Fire and Ice"
 - "War is Kind"

Are the pairs in each poem natural opposites, or are they things that would not ordinarily be compared? What relationships are forced within these poems?

Great American Poems

“Upon A Wasp Chilled With Cold”

by Edward Taylor

Vocabulary

apothecary – a pharmacist

capital – the head of

dun – yellow-gray

furred – covered

fustian – common

hasp – to fasten

pipes – voice

precept – a belief

turret – to adorn (with)

1. What two animals are mentioned in the poem, and which one is real?

2. The speaker emphasizes what the wasp lacks, despite seeing evidence to the contrary. What does the wasp not have?

3. To the speaker, what is the significance of the complexity of such a small creature?

4. Metaphysical poets interpret physical beauty as symbolic of a greater beauty, as though the beauty we see were merely puddles from an infinite, flowing, underground river. What is the source of the beauty Taylor sees?

“The Village Blacksmith”
by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Vocabulary

chaff – husks of grain
repose – rest
sexton – a church official and custodian
sinewy – tough; strong

1. In this poem, what does the act of metalworking symbolize?

2. What is the source of the blacksmith's confidence?

3. What poetic device occurs in line five of the third stanza? Identify at least two other examples of this device elsewhere in the poem.

4. In the speaker's metaphor of life, what is symbolic of deeds and thoughts?

“The Chambered Nautilus”

by Oliver Wendell Holmes

Vocabulary

feign – to pretend**irised** – iridescent; rainbow-colored**main** – the open ocean**rent** – torn apart**Siren** – bird-women of Greek mythology whose songs lure sailors into shipwrecks**stole** – moved quietly**Triton** – a sea god; son of Poseidon of Greek mythology

1. In what condition is the specific nautilus observed by the speaker?

2. What is the “dim dreaming life” in line eleven?

3. The nautilus is a metaphor for what, as the speaker suggests? What details of the nautilus support this connection?

4. Compare this poem to “Upon A Wasp Chilled With Cold.” How does the significance of the animal differ between the two poems?

“The Battle Hymn of the Republic”

by Julia Ward Howe

Vocabulary

burnished – polished
contemners – despisers
vintage – wine

1. The phrase “grapes of wrath” in line two is an allusion to the Old Testament of the Christian Bible. What are the grapes of wrath in this context, and what does the vintage, or wine, symbolize? What poetic device is demonstrated in this example?

2. What is the intent of this poem?

3. Describe the purpose of each stanza of the poem.

4. This poem, though written over a century ago, continues to spark controversy among both religious and secular groups. Is the poem religious, as the titular word “hymns” suggests, or is it nothing more than a martial call to arms that exploits belief for the purpose of recruiting followers? To answer, use your knowledge of religion and the history surrounding the American Civil War.
