

Before You Read

I Hear America Singing by Walt Whitman

LITERARY FOCUS: CATALOG

A **catalog** is a list of things, people, or events that are related in some way. Whitman frequently used catalogs in his poetry, extolling and celebrating various people and aspects of American life.

Create Your Own Catalog Walt Whitman celebrates the qualities that make America unique or special. Imagine that you are developing an ad campaign to encourage people to visit the place you live in. Make a catalog of the things that make *your* town or city unique.

REVIEW SKILLS

As you read "I Hear America Singing," look for the following literary device.

IMAGERY

Language that appeals to the senses. Although most images appeal to the sense of sight, they sometimes appeal to the senses of taste, smell, hearing, and touch.

My town or city is unique because . . .

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

READING SKILLS: IDENTIFYING PARALLEL STRUCTURE

Parallel structure refers to the repetition of words, phrases, and sentences that have the same grammatical structures. When a writer uses parallel structure, he or she might use a series of adjectives, prepositional phrases, verb phrases, or sentence patterns. If you write "I sang, cooked, and washed up," you are using parallel structure: You have used a series of three verbs in the past tense. If you say "I sang a song, I cooked a dinner, and I raked the yard," you are also using parallel structure. You are repeating three sentence patterns that use subject-verb-object.

Whitman uses parallel structures as he catalogs the songs he hears America singing.

Use the Skill As you read the poem, mark up the parallel sentence patterns that are repeated over and over again. Be sure to read the poem aloud to feel the rhythmic effects of all this repetition.

SKILLS FOCUS

Literary Skills

Understand the use of catalogs in poetry.

Reading Skills

Identify parallel structure.

Review Skills

Understand imagery.

I Hear America Singing

Walt Whitman

I hear America singing, the varied carols I hear,
Those of mechanics, each one singing his as it should be blithe
and strong,
The carpenter singing his as he measures his plank or beam,
The mason singing his as he makes ready for work, or leaves off
work,
The boatman singing what belongs to him in his boat, the
5 deckhand singing on the steamboat deck,
The shoemaker singing as he sits on his bench, the hatter singing
as he stands,
The wood-cutter's song, the plowboy's on his way in the morn-
ing, or at noon intermission or at sundown,
The delicious singing of the mother, or of the young wife at
work, or of the girl sewing or washing,
Each singing what belongs to him or her and to none else,
The day what belongs to the day—at night the party of young
10 fellows, robust, friendly,
Singing with open mouths their strong melodious songs.

Karen Kasmauski/Woodfin Camp & Associates.



IDENTIFY

Circle the different kinds of workers the poem **catalogs**. Underline the word repeated in almost every line.

ANALYZE

What **images** do you see as you read the poem?
(*Review Skill*)

INTERPRET

What is the **theme** in this poem—what is the speaker revealing about America?

FLUENCY

Read the poem aloud two times. On your second read, allow the rhythm created by the **catalog** to guide your interpretation.

I Hear America Singing

Reading Skills: Identifying Parallel Structure “I Hear America Singing” is full of parallel structures. In the chart below, list examples of parallel words, phrases, and sentence structures in the spaces provided.

Parallel Structure	Examples from the Poem
Repetition of words	
Repetition of phrases	
Repetition of sentence patterns	

Before You Read

I Hear America Singing by Walt Whitman

LITERARY FOCUS: CATALOG

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Create Your Own Catalog Walt Whitman celebrates the qualities that make America unique or special. Imagine that you are developing an ad campaign to encourage people to visit the place you live in. Make a catalog of the things that make your town or city unique.

My town or city is unique because . . .

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

REVIEW SKILLS
As you read "I Hear America Singing," look for the following literary device.

IMAGERY
Language that appeals to the senses. Although the senses of sight and hearing are most common, sometimes appeal to the senses of taste, smell, hearing, and touch.

SKILLS FOCUS

Literary Skills
Understand the use of catalogs in poetry.

Reading Skills
Identify sentence structure.

Relevant Skills
Understand imagery.

READING SKILLS: IDENTIFYING PARALLEL STRUCTURE

Parallel structure refers to the repetition of words, phrases, and sentences that have the same grammatical structures. When a writer uses parallel structure, he or she might use a series of adjectives, prepositional phrases, verb phrases, or sentence patterns. If you write "I sang, cooked, and washed up," you are using parallel structure: You have used a series of three verbs in the past tense. If you say "I sang a song, I cooked a dinner, and I raked the yard," you are also using parallel structure. You are repeating three sentence patterns that use subject-verb-object.

Whitman uses parallel structures as he catalogs the songs he hears America singing.

Use the Skill As you read the poem, mark up the parallel sentence patterns that are repeated over and over again. Be sure to read the poem aloud to feel the rhythmic effects of all this repetition.

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I Hear America Singing

Walt Whitman

I hear America singing, the varied carols I hear,
Those of mechanics, each one singing his as it should be blithe and strong,
The carpenter singing his as he measures his plank or beam,
The mason singing his as he makes ready for work, or leaves off work,
The boatman singing what belongs to him in his boat, the deckhand singing on the steamboat deck,
The shoemaker singing as he sits on his bench, the hatter singing as he stands,
The wood-cutter's song, the plowboy's on his way in the morning, or at noon intermission or at sundown,
The delicious singing of the mother, or of the young wife at work, or of the girl sewing or washing,
Each singing what belongs to him or her and to none else,
The day what belongs to the day—at night the party of young fellows, robust, friendly,
Singing with open mouths their strong melodious songs.



Karen Karamauk/Woodfin Camp & Associates.

IDENTIFY

Circle the different kinds of workers the poem catalogs. Underline the word repeated in almost every line.

ANALYZE

What images do you see as you read the poem? (Review Skill)

all kinds of people singing as they work

INTERPRET

What is the theme in this poem—what is the speaker revealing about America?

Possible response:

America is diverse, and everyone has a part to play.

FLUENCY

Read the poem aloud two times. On your second read, allow the rhythm created by the catalog to guide your interpretation.

SKILLS PRACTICE

I Hear America Singing

Reading Skills: Identifying Parallel Structure "I Hear America Singing" is full of parallel structures. In the chart below, list examples of parallel words, phrases, and sentence structures in the spaces provided.

Parallel Structure	Examples from the Poem
Repetition of words	The word "singing"
Repetition of phrases	The delicious singing of the mother, or of the young wife at work, or of the girl sewing or washing
Repetition of sentence patterns	The carpenter singing his as he . . . / The mason singing his as he . . . / The boatman singing, etc.

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Before You Read

from Song of Myself, Number 33 by Walt Whitman

LITERARY FOCUS: FREE VERSE

Free verse is poetry that does not follow a regular meter (a pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables) or rhyme scheme. Instead of having a set number of syllables, for example, a line in a free verse poem can be of any length. Although free verse abandons some elements of traditional poetry, it uses many others. As you read the excerpt from "Song of Myself, Number 33," which is written in free verse, notice how the following devices add to the power and the message of the poem.

alliteration	The repetition of consonant sounds: "I understand the large hearts of heroes,"
assonance	The repetition of vowel sounds: "How the silent old-faced infants and the lifted sick,"
onomatopoeia	The use of words whose sounds echo their meanings: "Hell and despair are upon me, crack and again crack the marksmen,"
parallel structure	The repetition of phrases, clauses, or sentences that have the same grammatical structure: "Again the long roll of the drummers, Again the attacking cannon, mortars,"

REVIEW SKILLS
Look for examples of figurative language as you read the following poem.

FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE
Words or phrases that describe something in terms of another, or different thing, and are not meant to be taken literally. Figures of speech include similes, metaphors, and personification.

SKILLS FOCUS

Literary Skills
Understand the characteristics of free verse.

Reading Skills
Use context to clarify a writer's ideas.

Review Skills
Understand figurative language.

READING SKILLS: PARAPHRASING

When you **paraphrase**, you restate a writer's ideas in your own words. A paraphrase should include all the details of the original. It is unlike a **summary**, which includes only the most important details. Paraphrasing is a useful skill for explaining difficult terms or ideas. It can also help you check your comprehension of what you've read. Here is an example:

Original Line: "I understand the large hearts of heroes, / The courage of present times and all times, . . ."

Sample Paraphrase: "I know that heroes have enormous compassion. Their courage is everlasting."

Use the Skill As you read this excerpt from the poem, paraphrase passages you have trouble understanding.