

Before You Read

Full Powers by Pablo Neruda

LITERARY FOCUS: METAPHOR

Which description is more exciting to read: *Many ants ate the picnic food* or *An army of ants attacked the picnic basket*? You probably preferred the second sentence, in which ants are compared to an attacking army. This comparison is an example of a metaphor. A **metaphor** is a figure of speech that makes a comparison between two unlike things without using a word such as *like*, *than*, *as*, or *resembles*.

As you read Pablo Neruda's "Full Powers," think about the metaphors he creates. Then, think about why he chose to make those comparisons and how they add meaning to the poem.

READING SKILLS: COMPARING AND CONTRASTING POEMS

Walt Whitman, an American, and Pablo Neruda, a Chilean, came from different parts of the world and lived in different centuries, yet their writing shares certain similarities in style and theme. In fact, Neruda has said he was inspired by Whitman and owed him "this marvelous debt that has helped me to live."

When you compare and contrast poems, you look for ways in which they are similar and ways in which they differ. Some of the elements of poetry you should consider in making comparisons and contrasts are these:

Subject: What is each poem about?

Sounds: What sound devices does each poet use? Are the poems written with strict regard for meter and rhyme, or are they written in free verse?

Imagery: What pictures does each poem create?

Figures of speech: What metaphors and similes are found in each poem?

Tone: What is the tone of each poem, or its attitude toward life or toward its subject?

Theme: What does the poem reveal about human life or human experience?



Literary Skills
Understand metaphor.

Reading Skills
Compare and contrast poems.

Full Powers

Pablo Neruda

translated by Ben Belitt and Alastair Reid

CLARIFY

Re-read lines 1–5. What might the speaker mean when he says he uses the night’s interruption to “recover space” and “gather shadows”?

INTERPRET

What does the speaker mean by the **metaphors** “keys” and “locks” in lines 6–11?

INTERPRET

What does the speaker mean by his comment in line 14?

I write in the clear sun, in the teeming street,
at full sea-tide, in a place where I can sing;
only the wayward night inhibits me,
but, interrupted by it, I recover space,
5 I gather shadows to last me a long time.

The black crop of the night is growing
while my eyes meanwhile take measure of the meadows.
So, from one sun to the next, I forge the keys.
In the darkness, I look for the locks
10 and keep on opening broken doors to the sea,
for it to fill the wardrobes with its foam.

And I do not weary of going and returning.
Death, in its stone aspect, does not halt me.
I am weary neither of being nor of non-being.

15 Sometimes I puzzle over origins—
was it from my father, my mother, or the mountains
that I inherited debts to minerality,

the fine threads spreading from a sea on fire?
And I know that I keep on going for the going’s sake,
20 and I sing because I sing and because I sing.

There is no way of explaining what does happen
when I close my eyes and waver
as between two lost channels under water.
One lifts me in its branches toward my dying,
25 and the other sings in order that I may sing.

“Full Powers” from *A New Decade (Poems: 1958–1967)* by Pablo Neruda, translated by Alastair Reid. English translation copyright © 1969 by Alastair Reid. Reprinted by permission of Grove/Atlantic, Inc.

And so I am made up of a non-being,
and, as the sea goes battering at a reef
in wave on wave of salty white-tops
and drags back stones in its retreating wash,
so what there is in death surrounding me
opens in me a window out to living,
and, in the spasm of being, I go on sleeping.
In the full light of day, I walk in the shade.

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IDENTIFY

According to the speaker, what makes him “keep on going” (line 19)? Why does he “sing” (line 20)? Underline the answers he gives.

INTERPRET

Re-read lines 26–33. What does the speaker mean when he says that death “opens in me a window out to living”? (line 31)

FLUENCY

Read aloud the boxed passage twice. Remember, in reading most poems you must not stop at the ends of lines unless a punctuation mark indicates that you should pause (comma or dash) or make a full stop because it is the end of a sentence (period). In your second reading, try to use your voice to express the tone of these lines.

Full Powers

Reading Skills: Comparing and Contrasting Poems Pablo Neruda acknowledged his debt to Whitman for his poetic inspiration. Compare “Full Powers” to the three Whitman poems you have just read. Fill out the chart below with details you find in the poems.

Elements of Poetry	Whitman’s poems	Neruda’s poem
Subject		
Sounds		
Imagery		
Figures of speech		
Theme		

Before You Read

Full Powers by Pablo Neruda

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Literary Skills
Understand metaphor.

Reading Skills
Compare and contrast poems.

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SKILLS PRACTICE

Song of Myself, Number 52

Reading Skills: Comparing Themes Across Texts The chart below lists some details from "Song of Myself, Number 33" and "Song of Myself, Number 52." For each selection, fill in a **theme** the details suggest to you. When you finish, think about the themes you have listed. Are they the same or similar? Write your response on the lines below the chart.

Sample responses appear below.

Details from "Song of Myself, Number 33"	Possible Theme
"All this I swallow, it tastes good, I like it well, it becomes mine," (line 10)	All of life's experiences are part of us; we are a part of all things; we are part of everything.
"All these I feel or am," (line 16)	
"I take part, I see and hear the whole," (line 42)	Possible Theme
Details from "Song of Myself, Number 52"	
"I sound my barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world," (line 3)	The poet writes for the whole world; even in death we are part of life; we experience the world together.
"I bequeath myself to the dirt to grow from the grass I love," (line 9)	
"I stop somewhere waiting for you," (line 16)	

Comparing Themes In what way are the themes in the two poems similar or the same?

Sample response: Whitman seems to be saying that to live fully you must absorb the experiences of others and become one with the natural world.

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Full Powers

Pablo Neruda
translated by Ben Belitt and Alastair Reid

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 at full sea-tide, in a place where I can sing;
 only the wayward night inhibits me,
 but, interrupted by it, I recover space,
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 while my eyes meanwhile take measure of the meadows.
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 10 and keep on opening broken doors to the sea,
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And I do not weary of going and returning.
 Death, in its stone aspect, does not halt me.
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 And I know that I keep on going for the going's sake,
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 when I close my eyes and waver
 as between two lost channels under water.

25 One lifts me in its branches toward my dying,
 and the other sings in order that I may sing.

CLARIFY

Re-read lines 1–5. What might the speaker mean when he says he uses the night's interruption to "recover space" and "gather shadows"?

Possible response:

He sleeps and fills up his mind with dreams and ideas.

INTERPRET

What does the speaker mean by the metaphors "keys" and "locks" in lines 6–11?

The "keys" are the answers he finds through writing poetry; the "locks" are the questions he poses at night while dreaming.

INTERPRET

What does the speaker mean by his comment in line 14?

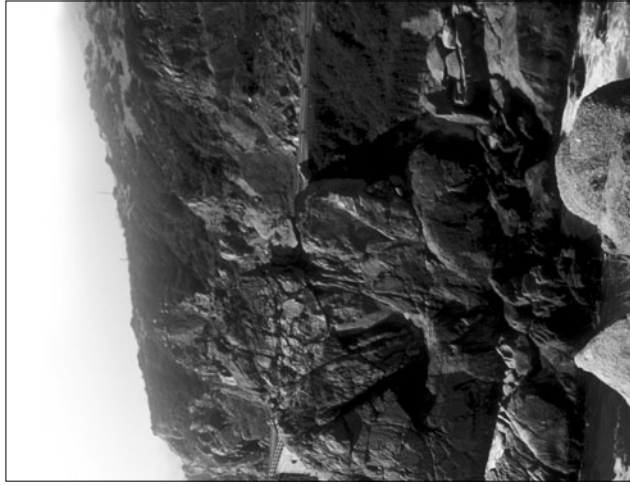
He is neither eager for death nor clinging to his life.

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And so I am made up of a non-being,
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 so what there is in death surrounding me
 opens in me a window out to living,
 and, in the spasm of being, I go on sleeping.
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IDENTIFY

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INTERPRET

Re-read lines 26–33. What does the speaker mean when he says that death "opens in me a window out to living" (line 31)?

Death makes him more aware of life.

FLUENCY

Read aloud the boxed passage twice. Remember, in reading most poems you must not stop at the ends of lines unless a punctuation mark indicates that you should pause (comma or dash) or make a full stop because it is the end of a sentence (period). In your second reading, try to use your voice to express the tone of these lines.

SKILLS PRACTICE

Full Powers

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Elements of Poetry	Whitman's poems	Neruda's poem
Subject	Subjects are America, heroes and “the people” in general, poetry, the poet's empathy with all life.	Neruda's subject is himself and his writing. Title refers to his powers as a writer.
Sounds	Whitman uses free verse, repetition of words and sentence patterns, colloquial speech. Poems sound conversational, very rhythmic.	Poem is in translation so it's hard to describe sounds of Spanish. But, like Whitman, Neruda uses a lot of parallel structures and repeats words. Words “sing” and “I” are repeated by both poets.
Imagery	Striking visual imagery, some gory images of blood, etc.	Rich images of place, such as “teeming street,” “black crop of night,” “opening broken doors to the sea, / for it to fill the wardrobes with its foam,” “sea goes battering at a reef / in wave on wave of salty white-tops / and drags back stones.”
Figures of speech	Not many figures of speech. Poetry is pretty straightforward.	Uses more elaborate figures of speech than Whitman. Metaphors of day and night throughout poem: of keys and locks in lines 6–11; says he wavers “as between two lost channels under water”; long comparison in lines 26–32; uses paradox in last line. Poem is more complex and harder to understand.
Theme	Whitman's theme is that all of human life is in his poetry, and he is part of all he surveys, all of earth and all the people in it.	He and his poetry are products of light and darkness, living and dying, being and nonbeing. Shares with Whitman love of earth and humanity.

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Collection 3: American Masters: Whitman and Dickinson

Before You Read

The Soul selects her own Society; If you were coming in the Fall

by Emily Dickinson

LITERARY FOCUS: SLANT RHYME

Not that long ago exact rhyme was part of every poet's craft. An exact rhyme occurs when the accented syllables and all following syllables of two or more words share the same sound, such as *love* and *dove* or *number* and *slumber*. Many poets in more recent times, however, have chosen not to use rhyme at all. Some do not like the constraint of a rhyme scheme, and some feel that all the good rhymes have been used already.

Other poets choose to use slant rhyme, also called approximate rhyme. Slant rhyme is a close, but not exact, rhyming sound. Examples of slant rhyme are *follow* and *below*, and *mystery* and *mastery*. Look for exact rhymes and slant rhymes in the following two poems by Emily Dickinson.

Finding Slant Rhymes Some poets like to have a list of rhymes on hand when they sit down to write a poem. Use the chart below to start your own list. The first row has been done to get you started.

Word	Exact Rhyme	Slant Rhyme
love	dove, glove, above	leave, live, loaf, grove
moon		
fight		
shimmer		

READING SKILLS: ANALYZING FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE

A major element of Emily Dickinson's poetry is her use of figures of speech. In her poems, you'll find similes, comparisons of two unlike things using words such as *like*, *as*, *than*, and *resembles*; metaphors, comparisons that do not use direct words of comparison; and personification, a type of metaphor that gives inanimate things human characteristics. You'll also find extended metaphors, metaphors developed over several lines or even over the whole poem. As you read Dickinson's poems, think about what the figures of speech mean and what they help you visualize.



Literary Skills
exact rhyme and slant rhyme.

Reading Skills
Analyze figurative language (metaphor, simile, and personification).

The Soul selects her own Society; if you were coming in the Fall 143