

Whitman Questions

Song of Myself-1, 6, 21

1. Section 1 of *Song of Myself* celebrates the poet's individuality or self. How do these lines make it clear that this self is also representative and universal, sharing its being with all others?
2. In *Nature*, Emerson said that the present generation should enjoy an original relationship with the universe, seeing nature with fresh sight rather than relying in other authorities. How do lines 10-13 reflect this theme?
3. To what does the poet compare the grass in this section of the poem?
4. What idea is introduced by describing the grass as "the beautiful uncut hair of graves"?
5. How do sections 1 and 6 reflect the idea of humanities connection to nature?
6. In section 21, the poet erases the usual distinctions that we make in life—between the body and the soul—by resolving all parts into the whole of the poet's being and his poem. "The pleasures of heaven are with me," he tells us, "I graft and increase upon myself...." How does he deal with the miseries of life—"the pains of hell?"
7. Having praised men and women equally, the poet chants of the pride that all should share in their common humanity. What does the poet think of pride based upon size or accomplishments or high office?
8. Lines 25-26 portray the poet as a companion of the earth and sea. How does this image reinforce the theme of the poet as an all-inclusive presence?

Song of Myself-31 and "When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer"

9. In *Song of Myself*-31, what examples does the poet give of common things that are really equal to more awesome things?
10. "Learn'd Astronomer" compares two types of knowledge: the astronomer's kind and another kind which the poet feels in "the mystical moist night air" What is the astronomer's type of knowledge? What kind of knowledge does the speaker find by looking "in perfect silence at the stars"?
11. How do the themes of these poems relate to each other?

"On the Beach at Night"

12. Why does the child weep silently in lines 11-13?
13. How does the poet reassure the child in the fourth stanza?
14. When the poet says in line 27 that he is giving "the first suggestion, the problem and indirection," it is as if he were teaching the child her first lesson on an important and possibly difficult subject. What do you think the subject is, and what is the lesson the poet wants to teach the child?
15. What do you think he means by "something" in the last stanza—the "something" that is immortal and will endure? Do you think the lesson he intends for the child is clear?

Song of Myself-52

16. What qualities does the poet say he shares with the spotted hawk?
17. Beginning with line 9, the poet makes one of his most direct addresses to his reader. What, in your own words, is his parting message?
18. What do you think the poet means when he says in line 10, "If you want me again look for me under your boot-sole"?
19. In this last section *Song of Myself* the poet uses the present tense. How would the meaning have changed has he spoken in the past tense?