

Poetry Analysis

“I Hear America Singing” (1860) by 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 ploughboy'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.

Questions

1. How does the speaker portray America?
2. What words or phrases suggest the people are singing with joy and pride?
3. What is the tone of the speaker?
4. What word does Whitman use repetitively throughout the poem to create rhythm throughout the poem? Why other reason does he do this?
5. What do all of the workers mentioned have in common?
6. What jobs are left out? Why do you think Whitman chose to exclude some work?
7. What is the theme of this poem?
8. Why do you think Whitman chose to write this poem in free verse?

“I, Too” (1926) Poem by Langston Hughes Questions

1. Considering Walt Whitman’s poem “I Hear America Singing,” what does the speaker mean when he says “I, too, sing America”?
2. Hughes’ reference to Whitman’s poem is an example of what literary device?
3. Who sends the speaker to the kitchen to eat?
4. Why does the speaker laugh when he is sent away to the kitchen? Why does the speaker find this humorous?
5. When the speaker says, “Tomorrow, I’ll be at the table,” he doesn’t literally mean “tomorrow.” What does “tomorrow” symbolize?
6. What is the tone of the speaker?
7. The line “When company comes” is an example of what poetic device?
8. After reading Hughes poem, what is ironic about Whitman’s line “Each singing what belongs to him or her and to none else” given that “I Hear America Singing” was written in 1860?

Constructed Response Question

In these two poems, both authors share their personal vantage point of America. What does America look like to you? How does it compare to Whitman’s and Hughes’ experience? Answer in a minimum of five sentences.
