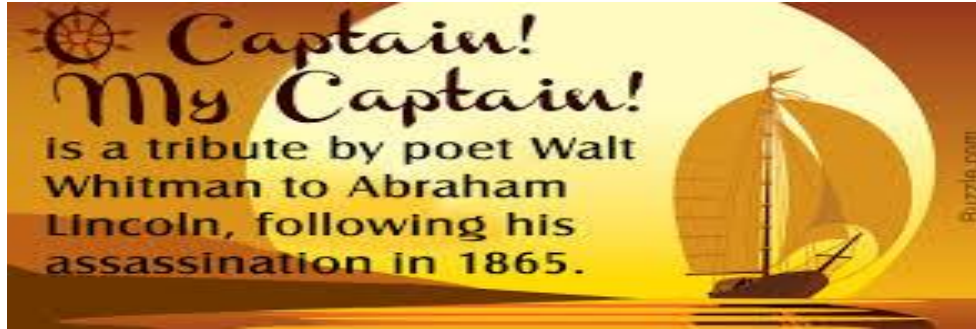
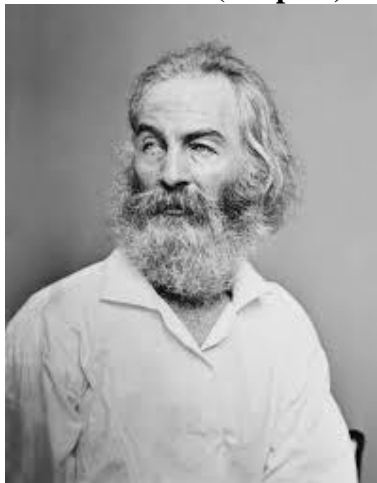


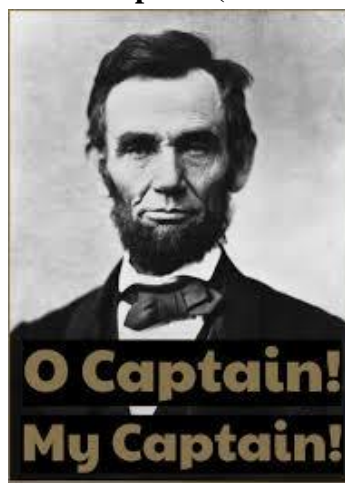
"O Captain! My Captain!" - Walt Whitman



Walt Whitman (the poet)



The Captain (Abraham Lincoln)



Abraham Lincoln served as the **16th president of the United States** from 1861 to 1865. Lincoln led the nation through its greatest moral, constitutional, and political crisis in the American Civil War. He succeeded in preserving the Union, abolishing slavery, bolstering the federal government, and modernizing the U.S. economy. He was assassinated on April 14, 1865, while attending the play *Our American Cousin* at Ford's Theatre in Washington, D.C. Shot in the head as he watched the play.



Poem

O Captain my Captain! our fearful trip is done,
The ship has weathered every rack, the prize we sought is won,
The port is near, the bells I hear, the people all exulting,
While follow eyes the steady keel, the vessel grim and daring;

But O heart! heart! heart!
O the bleeding drops of red,
Where on the deck my Captain lies,
Fallen cold and dead.

O Captain! my Captain! rise up and hear the bells;
Rise up—for you the flag is flung for you the bugle trills,
For you bouquets and ribboned wreaths for you the shores a-crowding,
For you they call, the swaying mass, their eager faces turning;

Here Captain! dear father!
This arm beneath your head!
It is some dream that on the deck,
You've fallen cold and dead.

My Captain does not answer, his lips are pale and still;
My father does not feel my arm, he has no pulse nor will;
The ship is anchored safe and sound, its voyage closed and done;
From fearful trip the victor ship comes in with object won;

Exult O shores, and ring O bells!
But I, with mournful tread,
Walk the deck my Captain lies,
Fallen cold and dead.

The elegy "O Captain My Captain" by Walt Whitman was published in November 1865, about seven months after the assassination of Abraham Lincoln. The poet is mourning the loss of a great leader.

Paraphrase of the poem: Stanza I - The speaker is a crewman on a ship. He tells his Captain that their difficult trip is over and it's been a success. They're nearing the port, where a crowd waits to celebrate their return. The opening lines introduce the metaphorical comparisons in the poem: The Captain is Abraham Lincoln.

The ship is America.

The "fearful trip" successfully completed is the Civil War.

The speaker also refers to "my" Captain, indicating a more personal relationship than that between a superior and subordinate.

Stanza II - The speaker reveals their success came at a high cost. The Captain is dead. The speaker is dejected. The repetition of "heart" in the fifth line works to establish the speaker's grief over the Captain's death. Figuratively, it could represent the nation's initial reaction to

Lincoln's death. There's a repetition of "my" Captain, emphasizing the feeling the speaker has for his superior.

Stanza III : The speaker implores his Captain to get up because everything's for him. The bells, the music, the flowers, the wreaths and the flag are all for him. The gathered crowd is there to celebrate the Captain, and they can't wait to see him. The speaker shows denial by asking someone he knows is dead to "rise up". He can't fully accept that it's true. Metaphorically, America celebrated President Lincoln after the Union's victory in the Civil War. The feeling was short-lived, as the celebratory feeling will be in these lines. All of the things waiting at the dock work for a celebration and a funeral. "My" Captain appears for the third time.

Stanza IV: The crewman now refers to his Captain as "dear father", showing he viewed him as much more than a commanding officer. His denial continues as he says the Captain's death must be a dream. As a metaphor, Lincoln is being called a "father"—he was more than a leader as well, as America looked to him as a father-figure. Many Americans would have found it hard to believe Lincoln was dead, thinking it must be a dream.

Stanza V: The speaker isn't talking to his Captain now. He's beginning to accept that he's dead. The ship reaches port safely. He reaffirms that they've completed their objective. Likewise, individual Americans would eventually accept that Lincoln was dead. The fact remains that the Civil War was successfully fought. Again, the speaker says "my" Captain and adds "my" father.

Stanza VI: The crowd will celebrate the ship's triumphant return. The speaker, however, will mournfully walk the deck where his Captain died. Similarly, the nation in general will rejoice over their victorious military campaign. Some, however, like the speaker, will be in mourning over Lincoln's death. This tragedy will overshadow the greater victory.

Summation: The poem's extended metaphor compares President Lincoln to a captain steering the "ship of state"—guiding the Union through the Civil War.
