
The Sounds of Whitman's Memories

High (9th – 12th grade)

Time required: 45-50 minutes

Specific recommendation: Honors-level English, 10th/ 11th grade

Goals/Objectives:

- Identify Walt Whitman's purpose for including "drums" and "bugles" in his poem "Beat! Beat! Drums!"
- Differentiate between Whitman's mood in "Beat! Beat! Drums!" and "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd"
- Identify instruments to accompany "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd" and "O Captain! My Captain!"
- Define "soundscape" and identify soundscapes in "Memories of Lincoln"

Common Core Standards:

- RL.9-10.7: Analyze the representation of a subject or a key scene in two different artistic mediums, including what is emphasized or absent in each treatment
- W.9-10.1: Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence

Materials:

- **Song of America Links**

To print:

Basic Musical Elements handout: <https://songofamerica.net/downloads/basic-musical-elements-handout/>

Walt Whitman printable timeline: <https://songofamerica.net/downloads/walt-whitman-timeline/>

"Memories of Lincoln" worksheet:

<https://songofamerica.net/downloads/memories-of-lincoln-worksheet/>

To reference:

Song of America online timeline: <http://songofamerica.net/timeline/> (Civil War & Reconstruction)

Song of America Walt Whitman page: <http://songofamerica.net/writer/whitman-walt>

To listen to:

Song of America Walt Whitman radio program:

<https://songofamerica.net/program/song-of-walt-whitman/>

Song of America "Memories of Lincoln" song page: <http://songofamerica.net/song/memories-of-lincoln>

Instruction:

- The teacher introduces the poet Walt Whitman, Lincoln's assassination, and the state of America at that time [<http://songofamerica.net/timeline/> (Civil War & Reconstruction) & <https://songofamerica.net/downloads/walt-whitman-timeline/>]

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Created for the Hampsong Foundation's Song of America Curriculum Initiative (<http://songofamerica.net/for-educators>)

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Please reference the creators of the handout, the Hampsong Foundation and Song of America when necessary.

For more information, please visit <http://songofamerica.net/> & <http://hampsongfoundation.org/>

- The teacher introduces page 1 of the “Memories of Lincoln” worksheet [<https://songofamerica.net/downloads/memories-of-lincoln-worksheet/>] and a student reads the entire poem “Beat! Beat! Drums!” out loud.
 - The teacher defines what a soundscape is, and the class makes a list on the board or projector: “What sounds does Whitman reference in this poem, musical or otherwise?”
- The teacher explains that William Neidlinger’s song “Memories of Lincoln” is a song in three parts, using excerpts from Whitman’s poetry, and students listen to the first part of the “Memories of Lincoln” [<https://songofamerica.net/program/song-of-walt-whitman/> at 38:55, or at 38:01 with Thomas Hampson introduction] with text “Beat! Beat! Drums!”
 - This recording is also found on the song page of “Memories of Lincoln”:
<http://songofamerica.net/song/memories-of-lincoln>
- Class discussion: “Why did Whitman write about these particular instruments to memorialize Lincoln?”
 - Halfway through the discussion, the teacher hands out page 3 of “Memories of Lincoln” worksheet: “How do these instruments reflect Whitman’s emotion towards Lincoln and his death as delineated in this poem? How is that emotion interpreted in Neidlinger’s musical setting?”
 - Refer to the *Song of America* Basic Musical Elements handout for an easy guide to talking about music:
<https://songofamerica.net/downloads/basic-musical-elements-handout/>
- *Guided Practice*
 - A student reads the entirety of “When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom’d” (page 2 of the worksheet). Students listen to this second part of the song “Memories of Lincoln” and independently or with a partner write two to three instruments that would fit with the poem
 - Class discussion: “What instruments did you choose that would fit with the poem? What do you imagine the soundscape to be?”
- *Independent Practice*
 - Students listen to the third and final part of “Memories of Lincoln” with the words of “O Captain! My Captain!” (second half of page 2 of the worksheet), and then a student or the teacher reads the poem “O Captain! My Captain!” aloud in its entirety
 - Students independently write a paragraph or create a slide presentation answering the question: “What is the mood of this ‘Lincoln memory’, and how did Neidlinger interpret Whitman’s words and emotion in his music? What is included in the soundscape of this poem? What instruments would you choose to include if you were to compose a piece for ‘O Captain! My Captain!’?”