

English 1 Poetry Unit: America Poems

Name: _____

Period: _____

With your group, take five minutes to answer the following questions. Each group member must write the group's collective answers on a separate piece of paper.

1. What does it mean to be American?
2. How would you describe the typical American?
3. What makes America different from other places?

After we have read the following poem as a class, answer the four questions that follow with your group.

“I Hear America Singing”

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.

“I Hear America Singing” Questions

1. What makes this poem powerful? What language or poetry devices really stand out?
2. What is Whitman trying to show the reader about America?
3. What America does he see?
4. Is the poem hopeful or not hopeful? How do you know?

Now, follow along as we read the next two poems as a class. Once we've finished, answer the appropriate questions with your group on a separate piece of paper.

I, Too

Langston Hughes

I, too, sing America.

I am the darker brother.
They send me to eat in the kitchen
When company comes,
But I laugh,
And eat well,
And grow strong.

Tomorrow,
I'll be at the table
When company comes.
Nobody'll dare
Say to me,
"Eat in the kitchen,"
Then.

Besides,
They'll see how beautiful I am
And be ashamed—

I, too, am America

"I, Too" Questions

1. What makes this poem powerful? What language or poetry devices really stand out?
2. What is Hughes trying to show the reader about America? What America does he see?
3. How is this similar or different than Whitman's America? What about Hughes' America?
4. Is the poem hopeful or not? How do you know?

I, Too, Sing América

Julia Alvarez

I know it's been said before
but not in this voice
of the plátano
and the mango,
marimba y bongó,
not in this sancocho
of inglés
con español.
Ay sí,
it's my turn
to oh say
what I see,
I'm going to sing America!
with all América
inside me:
from the soles
of Tierra del Fuego
to the thin waist

of Chiriquí
up the spine of the Mississippi
through the heartland
of the Yanquis
to the great plain face of Canada
--
all of us
singing America,
the whole hemispheric
familia
belting our canción
singing our brown skin
into that white
and red and blue song --
the big song
that sings
all America,
el canto

que cuenta
con toda América:
un new song!
Ya llegó el momento,
our moment
under the sun --
ese sol that shines
on everyone.
So, hit it maestro!
give us that Latin beat,
¡Uno-dos-tres!
One-two-three!
Ay sí,
(y bilingually):
Yo también soy América
I, too, am America.

“I, Too, Sing América” Questions

5. What makes this poem powerful? What language or poetry devices really stand out?
6. What is Alvarez trying to show the reader about America? What America does she see?
7. How is this similar or different than Whitman's America?
8. Is the poem hopeful or not? How do you know?