

I Hear America Singing

by **Walt Whitman (1819-1892)**

This poem belongs to *Leaves of Grass*, published in 1855, which is considered to be the most important collection of poems in American Literature.

Whitman is the poet of the **American Dream**, of its ideals of **freedom, prosperity** and **democracy**.

The poem ***I Hear America Singing*** deals with these ideals.

I Hear America Singing.

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 woodcutter's song, the ploughboy's on his
way in the morning, or at noon intermission or at
sundown,

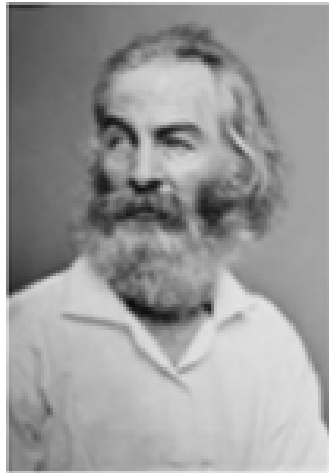
The delicious singing of the mother, or of the
young wife at work, or of the girl sewing or
washing,

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.

The poem consists of one stanza, which is made up of eleven lines. Whitman writes in his characteristic free verse. The structure is simple - it follows the simple **list format** that Whitman commonly employs in his poetry.



I Hear
America
Singing!

What's on Whitman's list?

The list includes different categories of American *workers*.



Why are these people singing?

They are happy (they are very different from the people described by William Blake in his poem *London* ...)!

In *I Hear America Singing* **everybody** is happy to carry out his (or *her*...) job.

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,

Focus on the workers listed in the poem: is there any order in the sequence in which they are mentioned?

The different categories of workers are mentioned according to the importance they have in the economic and social growth of their country: the list, in fact, starts with the workers of the industry (who *literally* built America...).

line 8: The delicious singing of the mother, or of the young wife at work,
or of the girl sewing or washing,

Focus on line 8, where women are introduced: how are they presented? Do you think the view the poet gives of women is conventional or innovative?

The view Whitman gives of women is both conventional and innovative. They are presented as mothers and wives, but... **they are in the list**: even mothers and wives contribute to the growth of their country, in the same way as the other workers do.

In conclusion, what is the view of American society given by Walt Whitman in *I Hear America Singing*?

I Hear America Singing is a poem which celebrates the ideals of freedom, prosperity and democracy of America: Whitman gives an **enthusiastic and exalted view** of the contribution of American workers to the progress of their country.