

*any further, let go your hand from my shoulders,
Put me down and depart on your way.*

After closing the book, I told the students that I would be conducting three readings from Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* that Friday evening: one short, one medium, and one long. Owing to limited space, I told them, I had decided to hold an auction to determine who could attend. I passed out sheets of paper so that they could bid for a space; but before they did so, I had a question to ask them.

I asked half the students to write down whether, hypothetically, they would be willing to pay me \$10 for a 10-minute poetry recitation. I asked the other half to write down whether, hypothetically, they would be willing to listen to me recite poetry for ten minutes if I paid them \$10.

This, of course, served as the anchor. Now I asked the students to bid for a spot at my poetry reading. Do you think the initial anchor influenced the ensuing bids?

Before I tell you, consider two things. First, my skills at reading poetry are not of the first order. So asking someone to pay me for 10 minutes of it could be considered a stretch. Second, even though I asked half of the students if they would pay me for the privilege of attending the recitation, they didn't have to bid that way. They could have turned the tables completely and demanded that I pay them.

And now to the results (drumroll, please). Those who answered the hypothetical question about paying me were indeed willing to pay me for the privilege. They offered, on average, to pay me about a dollar for the short poetry reading, about two dollars for the medium poetry reading, and a bit more than three dollars for the long poetry reading. (Maybe I could make a living outside academe after all.)