

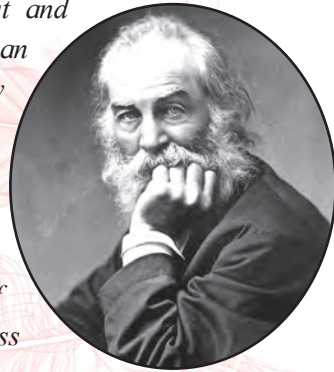


## 2.1 Song of the Open Road

### ICE BREAKERS

- Choose the mode of travel that you would like the most for a journey.  
(a) Airways      (b) Waterways      (c) Railways      (d) Roadways  
Give reasons for your preference.  
(a) .....  
(b) .....  
(c) .....
- Discuss with your partner, the preparations you would like to make for the journey chosen.  
(a) .....  
(b) .....  
(c) .....  
(d) .....
- Discuss the ways in which you would overcome the problems/ hindrances/ difficulties you face during your journey.  
(a) .....  
(b) .....  
(c) .....  
(d) .....
- During every journey we have to observe certain rules. Discuss your ideas of the journey without any restrictions. You can begin like this—  
(a) I would go alone / with selected friends/ .....  
(b) .....  
(c) .....  
(d) .....

**Walt Whitman (1819 to 1892)** was an American poet, essayist and journalist. Whitman is among the most influential poets in the American canon and is often called 'The Father of Free Verse.' He grew up in Huntington in a family with difficult economic status. His major work 'Leaves of Grass' was published in July 1855. His 'O Captain! My Captain!', a poem written on the death of Abraham Lincoln, is widely popular.



The section one of 'Song of the Open Road' from 'Leaves of Grass', is a beautiful blend of self-awareness, free will and tenderness of heart. It gives us poet's realization that along the journey of life one will face a test of wisdom which is not tested in any school or university. A road is something everyone uses, whether rich or poor and it forces all levels of people to associate with one another. The road signifies 'mobility.' One can take the road as a point to start over towards something new. Whitman talks about the people and places. He argues against staying in one place for too long, although the hospitality may be true.

## Song of the Open Road

### Guess the meaning:

- Afoot

**whimper** : make a series of low, weak, sad cries, especially with fear and pain

**querulous** : complaining, showing that one is irritated

Afoot and light-hearted I take to the open road,  
Healthy, free, the world before me,  
The long brown path before me leading wherever I  
choose.  
Henceforth I ask not good-fortune, I myself am  
good-fortune,  
Henceforth I **whimper** no more, postpone no more,  
need nothing,  
Done with indoor complaints, libraries, **querulous**  
criticisms,  
Strong and content I travel the open road.  
The earth, that is sufficient,

I do not want the **constellations** any nearer,  
I know they are very well where they are,  
I know they suffice for those who belong to them.  
(Still here I carry my old delicious burdens,  
I carry them, men and women, I carry them with me  
wherever I go,  
I swear it is impossible for me to get rid of them,  
I am fill'd with them, and I will fill them in return.)

*-Walt Whitman*

**constellations** : in this context (i) fate / destiny  
(ii) influential groups of people

## BRAINSTORMING

- (A1) (i) Pick out the lines showing that the poet is prepared to enjoy every moment of his journey.
- (ii) By 'old delicious burdens' the poet means—
- (a) the luggage
  - (b) the food he carries
  - (c) the stress he bears during the travels
  - (d) sweet memories of the past
- (iii) The poet is a person who is free from all inhibitions. Discuss how the concept of 'freedom' is expressed in the poem.



**(A2) (i) Following are the activities of the poet related to his journey on the road. Divide them into two parts as ‘activities the poet will practise’ and ‘activities he will not practise’.**

- (a) Walking along the road though he does not know where it reaches
- (b) Complaining about the discomforts during the journey
- (c) Postponing the journey
- (d) Praying for good fortune
- (e) Carrying the fond memories of the good people
- (f) Creating contacts with famous and influential people
- (g) Striving to achieve high and bright success
- (h) Reflecting and developing his own ‘self’

**(ii) Write down the traits the poet exhibits through following lines. One is done for you.**

(a) Henceforth, I ask for no good fortune—I myself am good fortune :  
Self-confidence

(b) Henceforth, I whimper no more, postpone no more, need nothing—

(c) I do not want the constellations any nearer—

(d) I swear it is impossible for me to get rid of them—

(e) I am filled with them – I will fill them in return—

**(iii) ‘Healthy, free, the world before me’.**

**Express your views regarding the above line.**

**(A3) The poet has used many describing words such as ‘healthy’ in this poem. Make a list and classify them as -**

(a) For the world .....

(b) For himself .....

(c) For the road .....

**(A4) (i) Read the expression ‘old delicious burdens.’ A burden cannot be delicious. The poet has used this combination of words to express that he has many sweet memories of the people and places which he would like to remember forever. The poet has used seemingly contradictory expressions to convey the meaning that his heart is full of sweet memories of good and kind people. Though he wants to be free from any type of attachment, he wants to cherish these sweet memories in his heart forever.**

The expression contains opposite ideas that make it seem absurd or unlikely, although it may be true. This is called 'Paradox.'

- (ii) The road in the poem does not mean only the road to travel. The poet wants to suggest the road of life. Explain the metaphor with the help of the poem.
- (iii) Free Verse: Free Verse is a poetry that does not rhyme or have a regular rhythm. The features of Free Verse are—

It is a literary device that is free from limitations of regular metre or rhythm, does not rhyme with fixed forms, and still it provides an artistic expression. In this way, the poet can give his own shape to a poem as he desires and can use various poetic devices to create the effect he considers suitable for the piece.

As Free Verse gives greater freedom for choosing words and conveying their meanings to readers, it is free from artificiality of a typical poetic expression. This technique is commonly used in modern poetry.

**Remember —**

- (a) Although Free Verse requires no metre, rhyme or other traditional poetic techniques, it is the use of internal pattern of sounds, the choice of exact words and their chosen places are the factors which attribute the Free Verse, its lyrical or rhythmic beauty.
- (b) Free Verse is completely different from 'Blank Verse' which essentially has to occur in iambic pentameter. Blank verse is poetry written with regular metrical but unrhymed lines. It is described as 'the most common' form of English poetry which has been influential since the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

- (iv) There are certain words that are repeated in the poem.

For example, 'no more' (Line 7).

Find out other similar expressions. Explain the effect they have created in the poem.

- (v) The use of personal pronoun 'I' is evident and prominent in this poem. Give reasons.

- (A5) (i) With the help of the following points, write a poetic appreciation of the poem 'Song of the Open Road'.

- About the poem / poet and the title
- The theme
- Poetic style

- The language/ poetic devices used in the poem
- Special features
- Message, values, morals in the poem
- Your opinion about the poem

**(ii) Write four to six lines of Free Verse on the topic ‘The road that leads to my college’. Express that it is the road to knowledge and bright future. You may begin like this: Every day I tread with the bag of books ...**

**(iii) Write a blog on the following topic.**

(a) Man is free by birth.

**(iv) Expand the ideas suggested in the following lines:**

(a) All roads lead to Rome.

(b) A man without liberty is a body without a soul.

**(A6) (i) Take help from the sources available on the internet and make a list of proverbs and quotations about ‘road.’**

**(ii) Read the poem ‘The Road Not Taken’ by Robert Frost.**

