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Date:

**Discussion Guide: Transcendentalism--to Feminism  
Ms. Otayco**

**Walt Whitman**

**“On the Beach At Night”**

1. Describe the scene of the poem:  
The poem takes place on a beach in the dead of night.
2. In the description of the clouds, what lines are a naturalist image of nature and why?  
The images presented are naturalist because they seem to think that only nature controls the world.
3. Vocabulary: Look up Pleiades, ether, lord-star Jupiter and define them. What tone do these images add to the poem? These images add a sense of grandeur to the poem because external stimuli are being alluded to.
4. What lines are a transcendental image of nature and why?  
Line 12, "soon to devour all", is a transcendentalist image of nature because
5. On line 25, what is the “something” that is even more immortal than the stars? How does this fit a Transcendentalist viewpoint? The sun and moon are more immortal, fitting the transcendentalist view of nature.
6. Read the biographical information on Whitman. What connections can you make between the writer and this poem?  
Whitman enjoyed appreciating nature and trying to understand it so he could better absorb all it had to offer.
7. What is the tone and theme of the poem?

**“When I Heard the Learn’d Astronomer”**

1. Where are we? Describe the setting. What is happening in this scene?  
We are sitting and listening to a man talk of all his learning.
  2. What does the repetition of certain words do to the tone of the poem?  
It makes the tone consistent.
  3. What is the theme of the poem, and how is that theme transcendentalist?  
The theme of the poem is that nature is always in control, and despite what we know, we never know everything.
  4. What is the tone of the poem?  
The tone of the poem is respectful and reverent.
- “Beat! Beat! Drums!”**

1. What do the drums symbolize?  
The drums symbolize the sounds of war.
2. How would you describe the affect of the drums on the town?  
The drums make the people of the town apprehensive.
3. What theme or message does this poem give us about war?  
Even if you are winning a war, it still hurts.
4. Link the poem to Whitman's life. Why might he write about war in this way?  
Whitman experienced a lot of horrors during his stint as a nurse.  
**"From Song of Myself"**

1. In stanza one, characterize the narrator's tone. As he talks about himself, what is his mood or attitude?  
The narator is cocky and arrogant.
2. Find lines from stanza one that suggest a transcendentalist view of the world and nature. The author suggests a transcendentalist view of the world in lines 3 and 4.
3. In stanza 6, grass is associated with different metaphors. List 5 of them.  
A flag, a kerchief, a gift, a hierohlyphic and a uniter.
4. What does the narrator mean when he says "Or I guess it is a uniform hieroglyphic,/ And it means, Sprouting alike in broad zones and narrow zones,/Growing among black folks as among white?" He is trying to say that the grass is the same everywhere - nature does not differentiate with race.
5. What does the grass image suggest about life and death?  
The grass image suggests that ultimately, we all live and die the same.
6. In stanza 52, what animal does the narrator compare himself to?  
He compares himself to a hawk.
7. In your opinion, what is a barbaric yawp? What would your barbaric yawp be if you could shout over the rooftops of the world? I would not have a yawp, as I prefer to keep my things to myself.
8. What is this song a celebration of?  
This song is a celebration of the author.
9. What is the tone/theme of the poem?  
The theme of the poem is quite proud.

#### **Frost Questions:**

##### **"Fire and Ice"**

1. Based on the poem, what do you think Frost sees as more prevalent emotion in the world? Desire (fire) or Hate (ice?). Frost sees fire as the more prevalent emotion.

2. How are the two emotions seen as similar in the poem—in terms of their affect on the world? They both can be equally destructive - because although they may do good differently, they destroy all the same.

#### “The Road Not Taken”

1. What is the main conflict of the speaker?  
The conflict is that he does not know what path to choose.
2. What road does he take?  
Ultimately, the author chooses the path not taken because he wants to know why it is not taken.
3. What do the lines “Yet knowing how way leads on to way/I doubted if I should ever come back” mean? He does not know if he ever wants to come back to his normal life after this experience.
4. What is the last stanza saying? In what ways can this be seen as a poem of indecision?  
The last stanza says that he chose the road less take, but came back in the end.
1. What is the tone of the poem? Cite lines to show this.  
The tone is very sad and nostalgic (4, 10).
2. What is the theme of the poem?  
The author has been rejected all around the world and is always alone and lives alone.
3. What are the main devices of it?  
The main devices are flasbacks and imagery.

#### “Design”

1. What is the main image of the poem in the first 8 lines (octave), and how is this image a naturalistic representation of nature?  
He talks of how nature is beatiful in creation and destruction.
2. What is the “design” within the poem? How is it beautiful, elegant, yet frightening at the same time?The design in the poem is the cycle of life and death, frightening and beautiful at once.

#### “Birches”

1. Find two beautiful images of nature in the first stanza and tell me why they are beautiful. 1. A sunny winter day - it is cold, yet sunny so everyone can go play. 2. Summer and winter.
2. In stanza 2, what is the man remembering from his boyhood?  
He is remembering the loneliness of his childhood and how he turned to nature to be his friend.
3. When does the man want to go back to being a swinger of birches?  
He wants to escape the complexity of adulthood.
4. The man talks about getting away from earth for awhile—never to return—but what keeps him from doing that? He is kept from doing that by his maturity and adult ideals.

5. On lines 55-56, the man wants to once again climb black branches up toward heaven, till the tree can bear him no more, and he dips back toward earth again. Why does he only want to go toward heaven but not fully to heaven? He wants to be near heaven, but he does not want to die.

**"This is a Photograph of Me" by Margaret Atwood**

1. Describe the photo in the first stanza.  
The photo is old and blurred and hard to see.
2. In stanza 2, what image becomes really clear?  
The image of nature and serenity in the setting of the photo become clear.
3. 'This is supposed to be a photograph of the speaker, but what image stands out? What might this image symbolize? The image of the lake and the house stand out, symbolizing a calm depression.
4. What does the photograph suggest about people's ability to see the speaker? The people do not see the speaker for herself, but rather for what is around her.
5. What has happened to the speaker in lines 15-16? How can the photo be taken after she has drowned? Why might she have drowned?  
She has drowned in the water of societal apathy because no one cared about her as an individual.
6. So where is she located in the photograph now?  
She is everywhere and nowhere in the photo.
7. What might this poem be saying about death and nature?  
In nature, we all disappear in death to become nothing, yet part of everything.
8. What might this poem be saying about how women are perceived by society? Women are not always acknowledged for their accomplishments.

**Dickinson Questions:**

**Dickinson's #185**

1. According to the speaker, when is it "fine" to have faith?  
It is fine to have faith when one sees the future.
2. According to the speaker, when is it better to rely on science?  
It is better to rely on science in any critical situation.
3. What is the theme of the poem?  
The theme of the poem is that science trumps faith.

**Dickinson's #249**

1. What kind of love is the love between the lovers of this poem?  
They have a wild, yet luxurious love.

2. In this poem, Dickinson writes a metaphor for the heart. What is the heart compared to? The heart is compared to a ship that sets sail towards a certain course.

3. Why must the heart do away with the compass and chart?

It should not follow a plan, but chart its own path.

4. What does the heart wish at the end of the poem?

The heart wishes that it had been moored correctly.

**Dickinson's #254**

1. Dickinson writes a metaphor for hope in this poem. What is hope compared to?

Hope is compared to a bird.

2. In what conditions does "hope" flourish? What does this say about when we need hope the most? Hope flourishes when it expresses itself.

3. In your own words, what is the last stanza of the poem saying?

Hope never expects a reaction from the person it helps.

**Dickinson's #303**

1. First of all, what is being personified in the first stanza?

The soul of a human is being personified.

2. How would you characterize this female soul?

This soul is depressed, but trying to go on.

3. What types of people are unable to move this soul?

People who don't try to truly appreciate the soul.

**Dickinson's #465**

1. After reading stanza one, how is the tone appropriate for one who is about to die?

The tone is very depressed, yet calm.

2. What are the "Eyes" of stanza 2, and what might the King be?

The eyes are the eyes of society.

3. What happens to the keepsakes of the speaker?

She willed them all away to people who she thought deserved them.

4. What might the fly symbolize?

The fly symbolizes a futile and stupid creature.

5. What are the "Windows," and what do you think happens to the speaker after death?

The windows are the semblances of contact from the afterlife.

**Dickinson's #613**

1. What does the speaker mean when she says, "They shut me up in Prose?"

The speaker was oppressed with walls of text.

2. Describe the speaker's childhood.

She was very suicidal, and always depressed.

3. If one looks inside the speaker's brain, however, what will they find?  
They will find a depressed person struggling to go on.
4. According to the speaker, what does one have to do in order to abolish his/her captivity? She has to break free of her mortal bonds.

### **Dickinson's #712**

1. In stanza one, what ideas are personified?  
The idea of death is personified.
2. What does the speaker mean when she says, "Because I could not stop for Death--/He kindly stopped for me--?" She did not have time to die, so death paused for her to choose her own time.
3. How is Death described? What kind of person is he and what is his relationship to the speaker? He is a kind and sympathetic person.
4. What is the speaker's outlook on "Death,"—what is her tone regarding him?  
It is calm and quiet, and appreciative.

### **Sylvia Plath: Lady Lazarus**

"Lady Lazarus"

1. Stanza 1: What has the speaker done again—one year in every ten?  
She has tried to commit suicide.
2. Stanza 2 and 3: What war and what horrible event is being referred to? Why might Plath, a feminist writer, relate to this event?  
Plath is talking about the holocaust - a feminist writer might relate to this event because women were mistreated.
3. Why is the speaker's face "featureless" in stanza 3?  
The speaker's face is featureless because she is blending in.
4. Stanza 5-6. What happens to the tone in these stanzas? Why does she wait 5 stanzas to identify herself as a "smiling" woman?  
Until the age of 30, the woman had not quite decided what to do with life.
5. Who are the "peanut-crunching crowd" who "shoves in to see"? Why is the speaker bringing attention to the crowd? [basically, what does it say about the speaker?] Think in terms of suicide and the motivations. What are the motivations for suicide? These people are the apathetic people of society - the apathy caused her to commit suicide.
6. Sylvia Plath tried to commit suicide three times (although one was questionable it was an accident or an attempt), and the last suicide successfully took her life. Cite at least 3 lines that reflect this. Lines 35, 37, and 38 show that the author has decided to die, but she cannot manage to do so successfully.
7. Why does the speaker describe dying as "an art"?  
The speaker causes dying as an art because it is hard to do successfully.

8. Who was Lazarus? Why is the title perfect for this poem? How is the speaker Lady Lazarus? Lazarus was a man who Jesus brought back from the dead. The speaker is similar because she has also been brought back from what she hoped was death.
9. After close reading the poem and answering the above questions, what is the theme of the poem? Cite two lines which support them theme and explain **HOW** those specific lines support them theme. The theme of the poem is trying to show society skills, and then giving up on life when no one seems to care about the skills.
10. Consider the speaker's audience. Who is she speaking to? She is speaking to all the people who need to communicate with someone in a relatable position.