

**Name:**

**Date:**

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

**Walt Whitman**

**“On the Beach At Night”**

1. Describe the scene of the poem:
2. In the description of the clouds, what lines are a naturalist image of nature and why?
3. Vocabulary: Look up Pleiades, ether, lord-star Jupiter and define them. What tone do these images add to the poem?
4. What lines are a transcendental image of nature and why?
5. On line 25, what is the “something” that is even more immortal than the stars? How does this fit a Transcendentalist viewpoint?
6. Read the biographical information on Whitman. What connections can you make between the writer and this poem?
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?
2. What does the repetition of certain words do to the tone of the poem?
3. What is the theme of the poem, and how is that theme transcendentalist?
4. What is the tone of the poem?

**“Beat! Beat! Drums!”**

1. What do the drums symbolize?
2. How would you describe the affect of the drums on the town?
3. What theme or message does this poem give us about war?
4. Link the poem to Whitman's life. Why might he write about war in this way?

### **"From Song of Myself"**

1. In stanza one, characterize the narrator's tone. As he talks about himself, what is his mood or attitude?
2. Find lines from stanza one that suggest a transcendentalist view of the world and nature.
3. In stanza 6, grass is associated with different metaphors. List 5 of them.
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?"
5. What does the grass image suggest about life and death?
6. In stanza 52, what animal does the narrator compare himself to?
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?
8. What is this song a celebration of?
9. What is the tone/theme of the poem?

### **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?).

2. How are the two emotions seen as similar in the poem—in terms of their affect on the world?

“The Road Not Taken”

1. What is the main conflict of the speaker?
2. What road does he take?
3. What do the lines “Yet knowing how way leads on to way/I doubted if I should ever come back” mean?
4. What is the last stanza saying? In what ways can this be seen as a poem of indecision?

“Acquainted with the Night”

1. What is the tone of the poem? Cite lines to show this.
2. What is the theme of the poem?
3. What are the main devices of it?

“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?
2. What is the “design” within the poem? How is it beautiful, elegant, yet frightening at the same time?

“Birches”

1. Find two beautiful images of nature in the first stanza and tell me why they are beautiful.
2. In stanza 2, what is the man remembering from his boyhood?
3. When does the man want to go back to being a swinger of birches?
4. The man talks about getting away from earth for awhile—never to return—but what keeps him from doing that?

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?

**“This is a Photograph of Me” by Margaret Atwood**

1. Describe the photo in the first stanza.
2. In stanza 2, what image becomes really clear?
3. ‘This is supposed to be a photograph of the speaker, but what image stands out? What might this image symbolize?
4. What does the photograph suggest about people’s ability to see the speaker?
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?
6. So where is she located in the photograph now?
7. What might this poem be saying about death and nature?
8. What might this poem be saying about how women are perceived by society?

**Dickinson Questions:**

**Dickinson’s #185**

1. According to the speaker, when is it “fine” to have faith?
2. According to the speaker, when is it better to rely on science?
3. What is the theme of the poem?

**Dickinson’s #249**

1. What kind of love is the love between the lovers of this poem?

2. In this poem, Dickinson writes a metaphor for the heart. What is the heart compared to?
3. Why must the heart do away with the compass and chart?
4. What does the heart wish at the end of the poem?

#### **Dickinson's #254**

1. Dickinson writes a metaphor for hope in this poem. What is hope compared to?
2. In what conditions does "hope" flourish? What does this say about when we need hope the most?
3. In your own words, what is the last stanza of the poem saying?

#### **Dickinson's #303**

1. First of all, what is being personified in the first stanza?
2. How would you characterize this female soul?
3. What types of people are unable to move this soul?

#### **Dickinson's #465**

1. After reading stanza one, how is the tone appropriate for one who is about to die?
2. What are the "Eyes" of stanza 2, and what might the King be?
3. What happens to the keepsakes of the speaker?
4. What might the fly symbolize?
5. What are the "Windows," and what do you think happens to the speaker after death?

#### **Dickinson's #613**

1. What does the speaker mean when she says, "They shut me up in Prose?"
2. Describe the speaker's childhood.

3. If one looks inside the speaker's brain, however, what will they find?
4. According to the speaker, what does one have to do in order to abolish his/her captivity?

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

1. In stanza one, what ideas are personified?
2. What does the speaker mean when she says, "Because I could not stop for Death--/He kindly stopped for me--?"
3. How is Death described? What kind of person is he and what is his relationship to the speaker?
4. What is the speaker's outlook on "Death,"—what is her tone regarding him?

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

"Lady Lazarus"

1. Stanza 1: What has the speaker done again—one year in every ten?
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?
3. Why is the speaker's face "featureless" in stanza 3?
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?
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?
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.
7. Why does the speaker describe dying as "an art"?

8. Who was Lazarus? Why is the title perfect for this poem? How is the speaker Lady Lazarus?
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.
10. Consider the speaker's audience. Who is she speaking to?