

“I Hear America Singing”

Time Estimate: 45-50 minutes

Overview

After reading and analyzing a poem about work by Walt Whitman, students write a group poem of their own.

Language Arts Standards

Students should:

Writing

- Use the general skills and strategies of the writing process.
- Use the stylistic and rhetorical aspects of writing.
- Use grammatical and mechanical conventions in written compositions.

Reading

- Use reading skills and strategies to understand and interpret a variety of literary texts.
- Understand the ways in which language is used in literary texts (e.g., personification, alliteration, simile, metaphor, imagery, hyperbole, beat, rhythm).
- Make connections between characters or simple events in a literary work and people or events in his or her own life.
- Understand the use of language in literary works to convey mood, images, and meaning.

Listening and Speaking

- Use listening and speaking strategies for different purposes.
- Use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).
- Adjust use of spoken, written, and visual language to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences.

Sources: *National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE): Standards in Practice; Mid-Continent Resources for Education and Learning (MCREL)*

Materials and Preparation

Read through the lesson in its entirety and highlight sections you want to cover, given your particular time constraints and group of students.

- Photocopy the poem “I Hear America Singing”, one per student.
- Cut several pieces of (8.5” x 11”) paper into 1” strips, enough to supply one strip per student.
- One large sheet of colored construction paper or posterboard—onto which strips of paper will be glued to create the group poem.
- Gluesticks.

See the concluding sample “Letter to Parents/Guardians”. Send copies home to extend the activity outside of the classroom. Feel free to revise or to incorporate into an e-mail, newsletter, voicemail, or other correspondence with parents and guardians.

Procedure

I Hear America Singing

Poetry Analysis & Discussion

Time Estimate: 25-30 minutes

- Hand out a copy of the poem to each student.
- Ask several volunteers to take turns reading the entire poem aloud. Direct students, as the poem is read, to circle any words they're not sure they understand. Also encourage them to notice if the poem "feels" different when read by different students.
- Collect a list of vocabulary words on the board. Ask students, as a class, to guess what each word might mean and compile a list of guesses. Which definition do they think makes the most sense, given the context of the poem?
- Assign words to student pairs to look up in a dictionary or an on-line dictionary such as www.onelook.com (which searches many dictionaries at once).
- Student pairs report definitions.

Invite students to untangle the meaning of the poem. Select from the following discussion questions:

1. What do you notice about this poem?
2. What do you think this poem is saying, in your own words?
3. What do you notice about the people in this poem? Prompts, if needed: Who are they? Do they have anything in common? Who's *not* in this poem?
4. Show of hands: How many of you have ever given any thought to a woodcutter's or boatman's experience?

Walt Whitman was a writer who took the time to notice—and therefore appreciate—everyone, especially people who did rather ordinary and mundane things. For our world to function, there are people who need to do things that we rarely give a second thought to. Think of your lunch today, for example. Lunch is necessary to keep us alive! But do you pause to give much thought—or appreciation—to the many people who made your lunch possible? Let's list everyone involved... What about farmers? Pickers? Truckers? Cashiers? Parents who buy food?... For the rest of this week, take time to "see" people you typically overlook. How does their work make a difference? Who do they help?

5. Do you assume the mason/carpenter/wood-cutter is a man or a woman? How come?
6. Agree or disagree: A boy could have been "sewing" or "washing"?
7. What does Whitman mean by "singing"? Are people actually singing songs while they work?
8. What kinds of things might singing mean in this poem? How do you feel when you sing? (Discuss singing as a metaphor for happiness and being "in tune" with oneself.)
9. Agree or Disagree: It's possible to "sing" (be happy) in *any* job.
10. What do you think it takes to really love what you do at work?
11. Why do people work, anyway? Compile a list of answers on the board. E.g., to survive and pay the bills, to make use of and develop their skills and talents, to change the world for the better, to feed their spirits, etc.
12. What job might make you sing when you're older, and why?

I Hear the Classroom Singing

Poetry Writing

Time Estimate: 20 minutes

- Give each student a strip of paper and explain the assignment: “We’re going to write a ‘singing’ poem of our own, modeled on Whitman’s. This will be titled ‘I Hear the Classroom Singing’ and describe what makes each one of us sing.”
- Ask each student to write a list on a piece of paper (not on the strip): “Everyone write down 3 things you are naturally good at.” Nip potential objections in the bud:

I know some of you might be thinking “But I’m not good at anything!” And I know that, factually, this just isn’t true! I want you to think outside the box. Maybe you’re naturally good at something that’s not commonplace: Are you a girl who’s good at making decisions? Are you a boy who has a gift for making plants grow in a garden? Are you good at making up plays with your friends? Making jewelry? Building forts? Playing the drums? Training your dog?
- Next ask students to add to their lists: “Now write down at least 3 things you simply *love* to do. This may or may not be related to the things you are good at.” Provide a few examples: playing the drums, doing flip-turns in the pool, organizing your notebook, making homemade pizza, talking to your friends, etc.
- Ask students to pair up and do the following:
 1. Read your lists to each other.
 2. Choose 1 thing from your list that makes you “sing” the loudest and explain why.
- Write the following sentence on the board:

I hear **[name]** singing, as she/he **[does something he/she is good at or loves to do]**.
- Student pairs swap lists. On a strip of paper, each student fills in the blanks describing his or her *partner*, based on their conversation or the list in front of them. Encourage students to write creatively.
- Everyone stands in a circle with their strips of poetry. “One after another, with no interruptions, read the lines of poetry you’ve written about one another. Let’s hear the poem unfold.”
- With gluesticks, students glue their lines onto a single sheet of paper to create a group poem: colored construction paper, origami paper, etc. Encourage students to discuss and figure out what order they’d like the lines to go in.
- Make a photocopy of the poem for each student.



Younger students can create a “Poster Poem.” Students write their individual lines on bigger strips of paper that can be glued to a large sheet of posterboard (painted or collaged by students beforehand). Students bring in pictures of themselves, or some kind of meaningful memento, to put next to their line.

*Optional Extensions***Singing on the Job: A Guessing Challenge****Time Estimate:** homework assignment, plus 15-20 minutes in class

Each student asks one adult they know (a parent, teacher, neighbor, etc.) to answer this question: “What is something about your job that makes you ‘sing’ – that makes you really happy?” Students write down answers and bring these to class the next day. One by one, students read answers aloud—*without* revealing the profession of the source. The class guesses what job might go with each answer and the reasons why. Only then are the source’s identity and job revealed.

Singing: An Interview**Time Estimate:** 15-20 minutes

Invite the principal, another teacher, or coach to class. Students interview them to discover what ‘sings’ to them about their work—as well as the things that bring them to life outside of work. What kinds of things might they want to highlight on a personal business card?

**Singing at Work****Time Estimate:** see main activity

Encourage employees to pair up with students and participate in the poetry-writing activity. If you hold a panel discussion, ask employees to talk about what makes them “sing” on—and off—the job.

Select Resources

Visit the Walt Whitman archive (www.whitmanarchive.org) to hear an audio recording of Whitman himself reading “America.” Note: Have hard copies of the poem on hand to follow along with, as the recording is scratchy.

See poems written in Whitman’s own hand at this Library of Congress site:

<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/wwhtml/wwhome.html>. Don’t miss the cardboard butterflies!

Walt Whitman: Words for America by Barbara Kerley, illustrated by Brian Selznick (New York : Scholastic Press, 2004.) This book, appropriate for 8-12 year olds, is a great way to introduce and begin studying the time period from 1819 to 1892. Walt Whitman’s life and poetry can be better appreciated when set in a story explaining the events of that time period.

Dear Parents and Guardians,

*In conjunction with **Take Our Daughters And Sons To Work® Day**, our class has been discussing a Walt Whitman poem titled "I Hear America Singing". I encourage you to extend this lesson and continue this discussion at home.*

Here are some sample questions/topics for you to discuss with your child:

Do you agree or disagree:

1. It's possible to "sing" (be happy) in *any* job.
2. What do you think it takes to really love what you do at work?
3. What job might make your child "sing" when he or she is older, and why?

Thank you for your interest and participation.

Best,

I Hear America Singing

by Walt Whitman

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 wood-cutter'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.

Business Card Networking Party

Time Estimate: Business card design 35-50 minutes

Networking party 15-30 minutes

Overview

Students identify and write about their skills and talents, create their own business cards, and then attend a “networking party” where they brainstorm ideas for small-business ventures that will help make the world a better place.

Language Arts Standards

Students should:

Writing

- Use the general skills and strategies of the writing process.
- Use the stylistic and rhetorical aspects of writing.
- Use a variety of prewriting strategies (e.g., make outlines, use published pieces as writing models, brainstorm, build background knowledge).

Listening and Speaking

- Use listening and speaking strategies for different purposes.
- Use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).
- Adjust use of spoken, written, and visual language to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences.

Life Skills Standards

Students should:

- Display effective interpersonal communication skills.
- Demonstrate leadership skills.
- Know strategies to effectively communicate in a variety of settings (e.g., select appropriate strategy for audience and situation).
- Provide feedback in a constructive manner, and recognizes the importance of seeking and receiving constructive feedback in a nondefensive manner.
- Use nonverbal communication such as eye contact, body position, and gestures effectively.

Sources: *National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE): Standards in Practice; Mid-Continent Resources for Education and Learning (MCREL)*

Materials and Preparation

Read through the lesson in its entirety and highlight sections you want to cover, given your particular time constraints and group of students.

- Cut white sheets of cardboard, oaktag or card stock into approximately 3.75" x 2.25" rectangular cards, one card per student. Alternately, buy blank business card sheets at an office supply store. Option: Make larger cards for younger students to facilitate ease of writing and design.
- Fine-line black markers, colored pencils, and other art supplies such as tempura paint, paint brushes, glitter, etc.
- Bring in a variety of business cards to show students: standard white with black font, cards incorporating photos or artwork, cards featuring designs on both front and back, etc. You can also ask students, in advance, to ask family members and adult friends for their business cards. Alternately, print out samples from business-card Web sites (www.businesscardsprinting.biz, www.vistaprint.com, etc.).

See the concluding sample “Letter to Parents/Guardians”. Send copies home to extend the activity outside of the classroom. Feel free to revise or to incorporate into an e-mail, newsletter, voicemail, or other correspondence with parents and guardians.

Procedure**Business Card Review****Time Estimate:** 5-10 minutes

Hand out business cards and invite students to pass these around the room. Instruct students to pay attention to what kind of information is included on each card.

Initial questions:

1. What's a business card? Why might someone have one?
2. What kinds of things do you notice about these cards?
3. Which of these cards do you like best? Why? Prompts, if needed: What's one design feature you like? The fonts? The colors? The layout of the words?
4. Does everyone need a business card?
5. Show of hands: How many of you have a business card of your own?
6. If someone asked you to name the business you're in right now, what would you say?

Point out, if needed:

A business card, as the name implies, provides a snapshot of you and your business, and gives you an easy way to introduce yourself. Business cards serve a practical purpose: If you meet someone who wants to get back in touch with you, you don't have to get out a pen and piece of scrap paper to write down your name and number; you just hand them your pre-printed business card. Business cards can also help you make a lasting impression: your card is a tiny representation of you, your abilities, and even your personality. If you design a playful card, people will sense "fun" when they look at it. If you design a formal or elegant card, people will sense those qualities when they look at it and think of you.

"I Can..."**Talent & Skill Search****Time Estimate:** 15-20 minutes**Introduce the activity:**

Let's make interesting and creative business cards of our own! Since few of you yet have a profession or business to tout, beyond the business of learning, your cards instead will feature your talents, skills, and things you take pride in. Let's take a few minutes to find out what makes each of you wonderfully and uniquely you! Then we'll figure out creative ways to represent these on business cards.

- Ask each student to write down the phrase "I can..." on the top line of a piece of paper. Students will complete at least 10 "I can" statements any way they like:

Of course, there are hundreds of basic things each of you can do—you can walk, you can skip, you can read, you can sneeze, you can smile—but I want you to be choosy and think beyond the basic. Write down things you can do that perhaps few other people can, or things you can do exceptionally well, or things that you really love doing.
- Using yourself as an example, write down 10 "I can..." statements on the board. For example:
 1. I can make music videos on my computer.
 2. I can play bluegrass fiddle.
 3. I can listen when a friend needs someone to just listen and not give advice.
 4. I can speak fluent Portuguese.
 5. I can make beautiful beaded bracelets.

6. I can throw a football 30 yards.
7. I can make delicious pepperoni pizza.
8. I can write poems, especially haiku.
9. I can design a flower garden.
10. I can tell you a lot about ancient Greece.

- After students finish their “I can” statements, do a quick go-round, asking each student to share several things he or she can do.

What a talented group! These many things we can do are our “competencies.” Does anyone know what the word “competent” means?

- Direct students to read down their list of statements, and check (P) 4 or 5 competencies to feature on their business cards.
- Students now translate sentences into descriptive titles using adjectives and nouns. Demonstrate, using your own list of “I Can” statements. Check 4 or 5 statements—representing a range of competencies—and ask students to help you generate positive, eye-catching titles. Draw a large sample business card on the board. Example:



Option: Walk through another example. Ask a student volunteer to share his or her five selected competencies. The class, working as a “coaching team,” helps him or her generate interesting titles for the business card.

- Student pairs help each other come up with interesting titles. Once they’ve finished, ask several student volunteers to share titles with the class.

Business Card Design & Creation

Time Estimate: 15-20 minutes

- Ask students to consider basic design elements. Have sample cards available.
 1. What design elements might you use to catch someone’s eye? Compile a list on the board. Prompts, if needed: Bright color? A design or drawing around the border? Different sized writing? A personal logo? Front and back designs?
 2. Remember, your card is a snapshot of *you*. What’s *your* style? What design will capture your unique personality? Prompts, if needed: simple and understated, splashy and loud, happy and colorful?
- Students can sketch ideas on scrap paper. Encourage them to draw/write on cards in pencil first, and then finalize designs using fine-point black markers, colored pencils, and any other art supplies you have on hand.

Option: If you have access to computers, students can create business cards using templates on Microsoft Word or other design software. If possible, encourage students to scan in and incorporate their original artwork.

- Debrief before students share their cards at a “Networking Party”:
 1. Do any of you feel like your business card is “bragging”? Is there anything wrong with tooting our own horns?
 2. You can update your business card whenever you want. What is something you’d like to add to your business card in the next year?

Networking Party

Time Estimate: 15-30 minutes

Sample introduction:

In this room right now, we have an astounding number of abilities, skills, talents and interests. And this also means that, in this room right now, there exist an astounding number of business possibilities: new and exciting ways we might become business partners and combine our abilities, skills, talents and interests to help make the world a better place. One way we can discover these possibilities is by networking.

- Does anyone know, or guess, what “networking” is? Compile answers on the board.

Networking is all about making connections. It’s based on the idea that “two heads are better than one.” Networking is when people talk and brainstorm and share ideas to achieve a specific goal. Sometimes people network to find a new job. And sometimes people network to come up with an exciting new business idea. This is exactly what we’re going to do—we’re going to have a networking party—using our new business cards to help!

Explain the assignment:

1. Walk around the room, as though you were at a party, introduce yourself to someone (remember to shake hands!), and swap business cards.
 2. Have a conversation and see if there’s a way to combine your interests and skills to create a new way to do some good and help make the world a better place.
 3. If you come up with an interesting idea, come up to the board and write this down on our master list: “New Business Ventures.”
 4. If you can’t find a good connection, move on and talk to someone else. Be sure to shake hands and say goodbye at the end of every conversation.
 5. Talk with at least 5 different people. Try to remember the skills and talents of everyone you meet because, even if the two of you couldn’t find a connection, you might be able to connect that person with someone else down the line or you might be able to work with them in the future.
- Before students begin, review basic (business) etiquette: “How do you greet someone you’re meeting for the first time?” Compile a list on the board. For example: Make eye contact, shake someone’s hand, confidently introduce yourself, etc.
 - Ask a student to demonstrate with you. Feel free to make this funny. For example: “There’s something called a handshake. And there’s nothing worse than a *limp* handshake! Will someone give me an example?...” To help break the ice, invite student pairs to practice introducing themselves to one another.
 - If you deem it useful, walk through one or two case studies as a class. Use the samples provided, or ask two students to volunteer. Document ideas on the board.
 1. Say you discover, upon reading each other’s business card, that one person is fluent in Spanish and the other is good at jewelry making. What might you do together to make a positive difference in the world? Sample venture: Make bracelets with inspiring Spanish sayings that we send to our pen pals in Honduras (or sister school across town, or Spanish-speaking hurricane victims, etc.).

2. You find out, upon exchanging business cards, that one person is great at baseball and the other is skilled at making pizza. Sample venture: Sell pizza at little league games and donate the proceeds to a charity of our choice.
- As students “network,” walk around the room (in role as a party attendee) and help generate ideas as needed. E.g., “Hi, my name is _____ and I’ve been looking forward to meeting you! I’ve heard that both of you are amazingly skilled and creative. May I join your conversation?... ”
 - Afterwards, ask a student to read aloud the master list of “Business Ventures”. Invite business partners to explain their ventures in more detail.

Debriefing Questions:

1. Do you notice any missed opportunities?
2. Did any of you talk with someone whom you think should definitely talk to—and swap creative ideas with—someone else?
3. Which of these ideas seem easily doable?

Sample wrap-up:

Throughout your lives, each of you will have opportunity after opportunity to be creative and innovative, both on and off the job, in ways that not only make money, but that make the world a better place. Exciting new businesses, products, medical breakthroughs, scientific discoveries, theater companies, artistic approaches, you name it, all of these happen when people network and pool together their unique skills, talents, interests and ideas—and turn them into opportunities. So keep up your own good work—and be sure to share it with others!

Optional Extensions

Business Plans

Time Estimate: 1 class period

Student business partners write simple business plans describing their new ventures. Sample sections: Business Name & Description—what makes your product or service unique? Product Market—who are your potential customers and why do they need your product? Marketing Plan—how will people find out about your product? Business Budget—what price will you charge for your product so that you make a profit? Staff Bios & Qualifications—who are you and how are you qualified to run this business? Do you need any additional staff? If so, what are they responsible for?

Resume Writing

Time Estimate: 20 minutes

Students create their own resumes on-line (www.careerkids.com/resume.html). Simply fill in the blanks and a resume is automatically generated.

Letters of Reference

Time Estimate: Homework assignment

Discuss the purpose of a “reference letter”. Ask students to write down the names of 3 people they might ask for a reference letter: “It’s best to ask someone who knows you well and thinks you’re the greatest, perhaps a relative, teacher, or friend.” Students choose one person and ask them to write short letter of reference (one paragraph will do) describing the student’s strengths.

Cover Letters

Time Estimate: 20-40 minutes

Students choose a job they'd like to land right now or next summer. For example: baby sitter, lawn mower. Students write cover letters to potential employers, explaining a few reasons why they think they are qualified and will do a wonderful job. Review the basics of formatting a letter (date, heading, address, salutation, body, closing, signature, etc.). Students swap letters, assume the role of the employers, and give constructive feedback: Would you want to hire this person? Why or why not? How could this letter be more persuasive?



Business Cards

Time Estimate: 15 minutes

Employees show students their business cards. If you were to make a personal card, what would you add to this? Talk with kids about the things you do outside of work – as a parent, community member, volunteer, etc.

Networking

Time Estimate: 15 minutes

Employees tell students about networking experiences they've had (that worked for them) and how new ideas get generated in this business.

Newspaper Article

Time Estimate: 15-30 minutes

Invite students, individually or in pairs, to write an article for their school paper about their experience on Take Our Daughters And Sons To Work® Day. What did you see? Whom did you meet? What did you like? What didn't you like? What did you learn? Can you imagine yourself in a job like this? Why or why not? What are the benefits of this day? How can kids get the most out of the day?

Select Resources

Both teachers and older students can learn about entrepreneurship, financial literacy, and turning interests into opportunities at www.youngbiz.com.

Dear Parents and Guardians,

In conjunction with **Take Our Daughters And Sons To Work® Day**, students have identified and written about their skills and talents, and are creating their own business cards. I encourage you to extend this lesson and continue this discussion at home.

Here are some sample questions/topics for you to discuss with your child:

What are five things you'd choose to feature on a "personal" business card of your own: talents, skills, things you take pride in, etc. Be sure to include (and talk with your child about) the things you do outside of work – as a parent, community member, volunteer, etc.

1. Write short letter of reference for your child (one paragraph will do) describing his or her strengths.

Thank you for your interest and participation.

Best,