

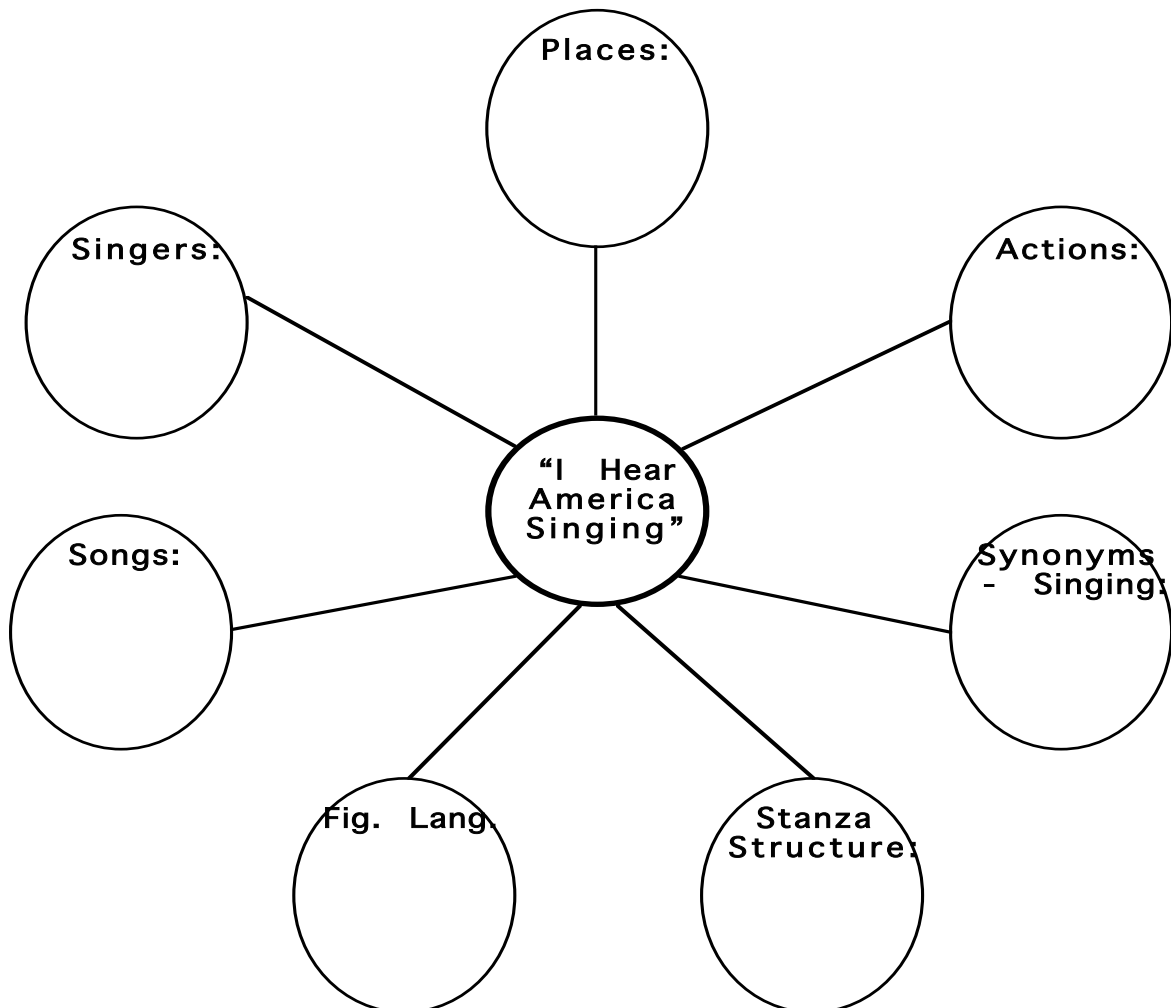
**USING WALT WHITMAN'S "I HEAR AMERICA SINGING"
TO COMPOSE AN AUDIO POEM (from *Read and Write It Out Loud* by Keith Polette, Allyn & Bacon 2004)**

Purposes: To use sensory images (especially sound); to observe; to use alliteration and onomatopoeia; to understand the style of Walt Whitman's "I Hear America Singing"; to read critically and write purposefully.

Summary: "I Hear America Singing" (Appendix A) offers a lyrical, free-verse catalogue of singing-workers and their songs.

BEFORE WRITING: Reading to Write

- Whitman's poem is entitled "I Hear America Singing"; what "songs," or types of songs, do you think he will mention?
- Before reading Whitman's poem, fill out the following web with predictions as to what you think might be contained in the poem:



- Read Whitman’s poem.

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 belong to him in his boat, the deck-hand singing on the
 steamboat deck,
 The shoemaker singing as he sits on his bench, the hatter singing as he stands,
 The woodcutter’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.

- After reading the poem, make a list of everything you noticed in the poem. Be specific: focus on stanza structure, sensory images, figurative language, line-breaks, sentence length, singers, songs, and synonyms for singing.

Examples:

The words “I hear” are in the poem

Lots of different people are mentioned in the poem: mechanics, carpenter, mason, boatman, shoemaker, woodcutter, mother, wife—all working people

Different songs are mentioned: all workers’ songs (the songs are the work and the work is the song)

People are doing different kinds of work: measuring, ploughing

The poem doesn’t rhyme

The poem is one long (run-on) sentence

There are no similes or metaphors, just strong concrete language

The poem celebrates work and workers, suggesting that the life is a chorus of work and working

The poem is one stanza

The poem contains many adjectives: blithe, strong, robust

The poem is set in America, in specific working locations

STEP ONE: Rehearsal/Prewriting

Topic: place and sounds

Audience: other class members

Form: free verse, lyrical, cataloguing poem

Purpose: to describe

Generate & Organize Ideas:

- a. Make a list of places that are noisy.

Examples: School, football stadium, factory, street corner, airport, school pep rally, cafeteria, party . . .

- b. Choose one place that has particular and varied noises made by various people. List the people and the noises they make.

Example: School

Teachers lecturing, first graders chattering, principal squawking, bus driver yelling

STEP TWO: Drafting

Definition: Whitman's poem is free verse: it is free verse because it is "free" of meter and rhyme. Also, in place of formal stanza structure, it consists of a long, freewheeling sentence. Notice also the catalogue in Whitman's poem: the long list of songs and singers of songs; the catalogue suggests the idea that everyone has a song to sing and that freedom and democracy are found in the song of work. Notice too that Whitman uses his direct (the poem is free of similes and metaphors) free verse to communicate the idea that "life is a chorus and everyone who works adds music and harmony to the larger song."

- GUIDELINES TO FOLLOW FOR WRITING AN "I HEAR . . ." POEM:

Write a poem in which you incorporate the noises and people you listed in step one by doing the following:

- a. Write in the style of Whitman: each line should be a part of a catalogue of specific people and the sounds they make at a specific place. In each line mention someone who makes noise and describe the noise he or she makes. Be specific; use concrete language.
- b. Begin the poem with: "I hear the _____ ing, the various _____ I hear."

The first blank should contain a noun that refers to a place: church, school, mall, football stadium, and daycare center . . .

The second line should contain a verb ending in -ing that gives an overall sense of the kind of noise you hear at the place in the first blank.

The next blank should contain a noun that refers to the various noises in the second blank.

The following lines should each describe a noise that is made in the place (setting) of the poem; each line should also describe who is making the noise. The idea of the poem is to describe the various people and the noises they make in one place.

- c. Use free verse and create specific, concrete images in each line
- d. Use alliteration and onomatopoeia

- DEFINITIONS: alliteration and onomatopoeia

Alliteration: the repetition of the same consonant sounds or of different vowel sounds at the beginning of words or in stressed syllables. Example: Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers.

Onomatopoeia: the formation or use of words such as buzz, snap, pop, sizzle, bang, or murmur that imitate the sounds associated with the objects or actions they refer to.

- e. Use noun-participle combinations to begin each line (after the first line): teacher singing, principal squawking, children chattering [to review participles, see the simulated journal writing activity]; follow the noun -ing combination by describing where the noise is taking place or how the noise sounds
- f. Do not use strong meter or rhyme; avoid similes and metaphors

Example of a draft:

I Hear the School

I hear the school.
The bus driver coming to the bus stop,
First graders talking,
The teacher saying stuff
The principal talking on the loud speaker,
Girls talking,
Kids playing,
Other kids eating and talking,
And then time to go.

STEP THREE: Revising

- Be sure you have used noun-participle combinations: instead of “principal on the loud speaker,” write something like, “The principal squawking the intercom announcements of the day
- Fire weak verbs; replace them with strong ones: instead of “ the bus driver comes to the bus stop,” write something like, “the bus driver grunting a groan as he lurches to the bus stop”
- Find strong and vivid synonyms for your noise-nouns and verbs: instead of “girls talking,” write something like, “the girls in the back row whispering their secrets and sighing their sighs”
- Be sure each line contains strong, concrete language (avoid abstractions): instead of “time to go,” write something like, “And, finally, the bell’s sweet buzzing that tells me it’s time to go home!
- Use alliteration: instead of “kids eating and talking” write something like, “cafeteria mouths munching in chorus and hollering, hooting, and howling”
- Use onomatopoeia: instead of the “principal on the loud speaker, “ write something like, “ the principal squawking”

Example of a revised draft (contains mechanical errors):

I Hear the School Singing

I hear the school singing, the various noises I hear.
The bus driver grunting a groan as he lurches to the bus stop,
First graders chattering as they scamper into the school house,
The teacher singing her good mornings” to lines of upturned faces
The principal squawking the intercom announcements of the day,
The girls in the back row whispering their secrets and sighing their sighs,
Feet slapping asphalt as they shift a slide in games of dodge-ball,
Cafeteria mouths munching in chorus and hollering, hooting, and howling
And, finally, the bell’s sweet buzzing that tells me it’s time to go home!

- Share your poem with members of your writing response group. Ask them to check your poem for the revision items mentioned in this step.

STEP FOUR: Editing

Check your poem's structure: be sure it follows the format outlined in the rehearsal stage; be sure words are spelled correctly; be sure your punctuation is consistent and correct (commas, apostrophes, semi-colons, colons, periods).

Example of an edited draft:

I Hear the School Singing

I hear the school singing, the various noises I hear.
The bus driver grunting a groan as he lurches to the bus stop,
First graders chattering as they scamper into the schoolhouse,
The teacher singing her "good mornings" to lines of upturned faces,
The principal squawking the intercom announcements of the day,
The girls in the back row whispering their secrets and sighing their sighs,
Feet slapping asphalt as they shift and slide in games of dodge-ball,
Cafeteria mouths munching in chorus and hollering, hooting, and howling,
And, finally, the bell's sweet buzzing that tells me it's time to go home!

STEP FIVE: Sharing/Publishing

Read your poem aloud.