

# I Hear America Singing

By Walt Whitman, 1867

Walt Whitman (1819 - 1892) American poet, essayist, journalist, and humanist. Whitman is among the most influential poets in the American canon, often called the father of free verse, breaking the boundaries of traditional poetic form. Some say that you cannot really understand America without having studied Walt Whitman – he is America. Walt Whitman walked about in his America, noticing and noting down the minute details of a sky studded with stars or people at work, like the butcher-boy, the blacksmith, the surgeon etc. His most famous work is called 'Leaves of Grass'.

## Reading

Singing is what Walt Whitman hears – and does. Experiment with ways to read the poem aloud; you may want to study his use of the *free verse* (not using a strict rhyme scheme but another kind of complex pattern).

- 1 **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,  
5 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;  
10 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 –  
15 Each singing what belongs to 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.



canon *sb* kanon; kunstværker, som man finder essentielle for fx en nations kultur  
carol *sb* jubelsang  
blithe *adj* munter, ubekymret  
carpenter *sb* tømrer  
mason *sb* murer, stenhugger  
deckhand *sb* dæksdreng  
hatter *sb* hattemager  
plough *vb* pløje  
inter'mission *sb* pause  
ro'bust *adj* stærk