

About Walt Whitman

Walt Whitman was the first unique voice in poetry in the United States.

Whitman was born on May 31, 1819, to a working class family in West Hills, New York. He was part of the first generation of Americans born in a free country. His father was a farmer and a carpenter.

When Walt was almost 4 years old, his family moved to Brooklyn. Whitman's finished his formal education by age 11. But he continued to learn by reading, visiting museums, and talking and debating with everyone he met.

When Whitman was 12 years old, he became an apprentice to a newspaper printer. He was soon seeing his own words in print. The newspaper was called the *Long Island Patriot*. Whitman worked as a printer until he was 17. He then began teaching. Between school terms, he spent his time reading and writing.

In 1846, Whitman became the editor of the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*. He left in 1848 when he disagreed with the owner's political views. For the next year, he published his own newspaper. There he could express his opinions freely, including his opposition to slavery. The newspaper was called *The Freeman*. He then took a job with a newspaper in New Orleans, Louisiana. It was the first time he had been out of New York City. He traveled by train, steamboat, and stagecoach. Although the job did not last long, it gave him an opportunity to see more of the United States and its diversity.

In 1855, Whitman published a book of poems called *Leaves of Grass*. The poems did not have a regular rhythm or rhyme scheme. Although the first edition was not popular with readers, the book became Whitman's lifework. He issued new editions throughout his life as new poems were added. The poems focus on the beauty of nature, the beauty of human beings, the force of love, and the value of democracy.

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Whitman's younger brother George was a soldier in the U. S. Civil War. When he was wounded, Whitman went to Virginia to take care of him. Whitman was moved by the struggles of the other wounded young men. After George returned to battle, Whitman continued to work as a volunteer nurse in the army hospitals in Washington, D.C. He wrote and published poems about the war, entitled *Drum Taps* (1865). These poems also became part of *Leaves of Grass*.

In 1873, Whitman had a stroke. He moved to New Jersey to stay with George and released several more editions of *Leaves of Grass*. Walt Whitman died on March 26, 1892.