

# Walt Whitman's Leaves of Grass: A Study Guide

Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* is one of the most important and influential works of American literature. First published in 1855, the poem is a sprawling collection of free verse that celebrates the American spirit and the beauty of the natural world. It has been praised for its originality, its powerful language, and its unique vision of America.



## Study Guide for Walt Whitman's Leaves of Grass

(Course Hero Study Guides) by Course Hero

★★★★★ 5 out of 5

Language : English

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This study guide will provide you with an in-depth analysis of *Leaves of Grass*. We will explore the poem's themes, its structure, and its use of language. We will also discuss the poem's critical reception and its place in American literature.

## Themes

The main themes of *Leaves of Grass* are:

- **The American spirit:** Whitman celebrates the American spirit of democracy, individualism, and optimism. He believes that America is a land of opportunity where anything is possible.
- **The beauty of the natural world:** Whitman is a passionate lover of the natural world. He finds beauty in everything from the smallest flower to the largest mountain. He believes that nature is a source of inspiration and renewal.
- **The importance of the individual:** Whitman believes that each individual is unique and valuable. He celebrates the diversity of the American people and he urges them to be true to themselves.

## Structure

*Leaves of Grass* is a sprawling collection of free verse poems. The poem is divided into twelve sections, each of which focuses on a different theme.

The sections are as follows:

- **Starting from Paumanok:** This section introduces the poem and its themes. Whitman celebrates the American spirit and the beauty of the natural world.
- **Song of Myself:** This is the longest and most famous section of the poem. Whitman explores the themes of the individual, the body, and the soul.
- **Children of Adam:** This section celebrates the beauty of the human body and the act of love.
- **Calamus:** This section explores the theme of male friendship and love.

- **Salut au Monde!:** This section is a celebration of the world and all its inhabitants.
- **Birds of Passage:** This section explores the theme of travel and the American experience.
- **Sea-Drift:** This section is a meditation on death and the afterlife.
- **By the Roadside:** This section is a collection of short poems that explore the themes of nature, love, and death.
- **Drum-Taps:** This section is a collection of poems about the American Civil War.
- **Memories of President Lincoln:** This section is a tribute to Abraham Lincoln following his assassination.
- **Autumn Rivulets:** This section is a collection of short poems that explore the themes of nature, love, and death.
- **Sands at Seventy:** This section is a reflection on Whitman's life and work.

## Language

Whitman's use of language is one of the most distinctive features of *Leaves of Grass*. He uses a free verse style that is characterized by its long lines, irregular rhythms, and lack of rhyme. He also uses a wide variety of language, including slang, colloquialisms, and even profanity. This unique style of language helps to create the poem's sense of immediacy and intimacy.

## Critical Reception

*Leaves of Grass* has been praised by critics for its originality, its powerful language, and its unique vision of America. However, the poem has also been criticized for its lack of structure and its sometimes vulgar language. Despite these criticisms, *Leaves of Grass* remains one of the most important and influential works of American literature.

## Place in American Literature

*Leaves of Grass* is a landmark work in American literature. It helped to break down the traditional boundaries of poetry and it paved the way for new forms of expression. The poem has had a profound influence on subsequent generations of American poets, including Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, and Allen Ginsberg.

Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* is a complex and challenging work of art. However, it is also a rewarding work of art that can offer readers a deep understanding of the American spirit. This study guide has provided you with an in-depth analysis of the poem's themes, structure, language, critical reception, and place in American literature. We hope that you will continue to explore this great work of American literature.



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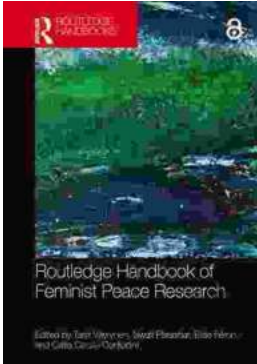
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