



Walt Whitman Association's Annual High School Poetry Contest **MULTITUDES**

What does it mean to think of yourself not as sealed off from the world around you but rather emerging in conversation with it? How do we think of ourselves as part of broader collectives - as communities, neighbors, families, or, as Whitman described it, multitudes?

Be inspired!

Here are some poems by Walt Whitman that can help you think about this year's theme:

One's-Self I Sing

Starting from Paumanok

Song of Myself (1891 ed.)

Sections 16, 20, 24, 33, 51

I Hear America Singing

Among the Multitude

By Blue Ontario's Shore

By That Long Scan of Waves

O Me! O Life!

In Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself," the poet thinks of his own identity expansively, sharing space and movement with others and even making room for changes and revisions. The poet's "myself" is neither singular nor settled but rather a way of being that emerges when we think about ourselves as part of the wider world. I am not alone, the poet writes; "I am large...I contain multitudes."

The Walt Whitman Association invites young poets in our region to craft their own poems that speak to their relationships to the wider world. This might lead poets to think about the multitudes around them - human, animal, or environmental - that shape their identity. Poets may even reflect on the multitudes that they contain on a personal level - the different forms their identity takes or the feelings that shift and change but still make up who they are.

Poets may choose any style of poetry that suits their work. Submissions will be judged on their originality, thoughtful use of language, and affinity with the year's theme. **Submissions are due April 17, 2026.**

Winning poems will be published in the Walt Whitman Association newsletter and winners will be invited to read their poems at the annual Walt Whitman birthday celebration. Prizes include The Bernadette Stridick Award for first place (\$150), second place (\$100), third place (\$50), and 3 honorable mentions (\$25 each).

Submission Guidelines

- Poems will be accepted from students in grades 9-12, living in Camden, Burlington, Gloucester, Atlantic, Delaware, Montgomery, and Philadelphia counties.
- Poems must be word processed and may not exceed 2 pages.
- To ensure fairness in the judging process, no identifying information about the author or school may appear on the pages of the poems themselves.
- Poems must be accompanied by a separate cover page that contains the title of the poem as well as the full name, grade, school, & email address of the student author as well as the name and email address for the student's English teacher.
- The cover page and poem should be submitted as one document. Email attachments must be in Microsoft Word (.doc or .docx) or in a PDF. Please email all submissions to wwapoetrycontest@gmail.com.
- Teachers submitting their classes' work should send their students' poems together in a single document. Please make a numbered table of contents as the first page of your group's submission that lists the poem titles, poets' names, grade levels, and email addresses that corresponds with the order in which they appear in the document. Please also be sure to include the teacher's name, school, and email address at the top of the document.