

Title: O Captain! My Captain!	Grade: 8th Grade
Content: English Language Arts (History)	Duration: 60 minutes

Standards:

- **RL.8.12:** Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings
- **RL.8.13:** Read and comprehend high quality dramas, prose, and poetry of appropriate quantitative and qualitative complexity for Grade 8.

Objective:

Students will determine metaphorical meanings of a high quality poem.

Resources Needed:

- Pencil/paper or print out graphic organizer below.

Introduction:

Right now! I mean now! Read this poem aloud. I don't care who's in the room. I don't care where you are. Stand up and read this poem! Read it with feeling! Read the punctuation!

O Captain! My Captain!

BY WALT WHITMAN

O Captain! my Captain! our fearful trip is done,
 The ship has weather'd every rack, the prize we sought is won,
 The port is near, the bells I hear, the people all exulting,
 While follow eyes the steady keel, the vessel grim and daring;
 But O heart! heart! heart!
 O the bleeding drops of red,
 Where on the deck my Captain lies,
 Fallen cold and dead.

O Captain! my Captain! rise up and hear the bells;
 Rise up—for you the flag is flung—for you the bugle trills,
 For you bouquets and ribbon'd wreaths—for you the shores a-crowding,
 For you they call, the swaying mass, their eager faces turning;
 Here Captain! dear father!
 This arm beneath your head!
 It is some dream that on the deck,
 You've fallen cold and dead.

My Captain does not answer, his lips are pale and still,
 My father does not feel my arm, he has no pulse nor will,

The ship is anchor'd safe and sound, its voyage closed and done,
From fearful trip the victor ship comes in with object won;
 Exult O shores, and ring O bells!
 But I with mournful tread,
 Walk the deck my Captain lies,
 Fallen cold and dead.

- Dude, Mr. Walt Whitman loved this Captain. This Captain must have been quite a guy.
- Can you tell something is up? If you read this poem *literally*—just as it is—it is an awesome poem about a beloved and respected captain and the ship he brings safely to harbor, but the fact that “Captain” is always capitalized hints at the *figurative* meaning; Walt Whitman wrote this poem to honor a particular someone who bravely got a figurative ship to safety though he died in the process. Any guesses?
- What if I told you Whitman wrote this during the Civil War? Yep, you guessed it. The Captain is none other than Abraham Lincoln. Whitman wasn't, at first, a huge Lincoln fan, but after seeing all the man did to try to keep his country together, he became a fan: a big fan.
- This poem is what's called an **extended metaphor**. If I said Abraham Lincoln is *like* a captain, that would be a *simile*. If I say Abraham Lincoln *is* a captain, that's a *metaphor*. An *extended metaphor* is just what it sounds like: take the metaphor (Lincoln is Captain) and extend it throughout an entire figurative narration.
- I love extended metaphors! They're like crossword puzzles you get to solve and you feel so smart when you figure out each part. That's your task. Be the genius who analyzes the poem, cracking the extended metaphor code.
- Using the graphic organizer below, find metaphors in the poem, writing the quoted words, phrases, lines, in the left column while naming the person, place, thing, idea that it stands for in the right column. I've done the first one for you.

Finished Product:

Extended metaphor assignment sheet.

Adaptations:

Here is a beautiful reading performance of the poem:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HSAymj4hp7Y>.

To work on reading fluency, read along with this narrator several times.

Write in Quotes from the Text	Explain the Metaphorical Meaning
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “Captain” 	<p>The Captain is Abraham Lincoln, who was President of the United States during the Civil War. The Civil War, 1861-1865, was a war between the states: North versus South.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “Ship” ● “vessel” 	<p>The captain steers the ship, so Abraham Lincoln steers . . .</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “the prize we sought is won” ● “anchor’d safe and sound” ● “its voyage closed and done” 	
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