

O Captain! My Captain! (Poem)

Chapter 11: O Captain! My Captain! (Poem) · Topic 1

Key Concept

The poem uses an extended metaphor comparing a nation to a ship and its leader to a captain who has died just as the journey succeeds.

Written to mourn President Abraham Lincoln's assassination, the poem captures the bittersweet feeling of victory overshadowed by profound loss.

The poem's structure alternates between celebrating the ship's safe arrival and mourning the captain who cannot witness the victory.

This elegy explores universal themes of leadership, sacrifice, and the complex emotions of mourning someone who guided others to success.

Quick Revision Notes

- Poem: extended metaphor, nation as ship.
- Leader as captain who died at journey's success.
- Written to mourn Lincoln's assassination.
- Captures bittersweet victory overshadowed by loss.
- Structure alternates: celebration and mourning.
- Ship arrives safely; captain cannot witness.
- Elegy explores leadership, sacrifice themes.
- Also complex emotions of mourning a guide.

Practice Questions

- 1 Research Walt Whitman and this poem's historical context.
- 2 Discuss the extended metaphor of the ship and captain.
- 3 Identify lines expressing joy and lines expressing grief.
- 4 Discuss why this poem is called an elegy.
- 5 Write a short reflection on leadership and sacrifice.
- 6 Read the poem aloud noting its emotional shifts.