

This writing idea prompts you to undertake research and use this in the creation of a poem based on the work of American poet Walt Whitman.

The following extracts are taken from Whitman's poem *Salut Au Monde* where he celebrates the world at large. This is a very long poem and in it he imagines seeing and hearing all parts of this world. He writes about it by using the simple repetition of the phrases *I hear* and *I see*:

What do you hear Walt Whitman?

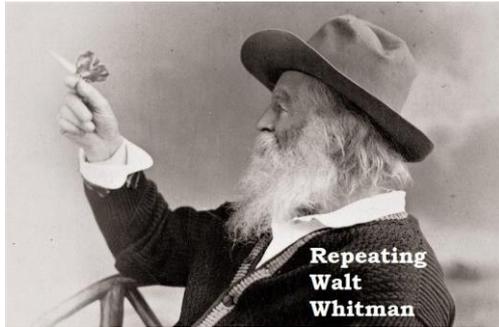
*I hear the workman singing and the farmer's wife singing,
I hear in the distance the sounds of children and of animals early in the day,
I hear emulous shouts of Australians pursuing wild horse,
I hear the Spanish dance with castanets in the chestnut shade, to the rebeck and guitar,
I hear the continual echoes from the Thames,
I hear fierce French liberty songs,
I hear of the Italian boat-sculler the musical recitative of old poems,
I hear locusts in Syria as they strike the grain and grass with their showers of their
terrible clouds -*

What do you see Walt Whitman?

*I see a great round wonder rolling through space,
I see diminute farms, hamlets, ruins, graveyards, jails, factories, palaces, hovels, huts of
barbarians, tents of nomads upon the surface -
I see mountain peaks, I see the sierras of Andes where they range,
I see plainly the Himalayas, Chian Shahs, Ghauts,
I see the giant pinnacles of Elbruz, Kazbek, Bazardjusi,
I see the Styrian Alps, and the Karna Alps -*

The complete poem contains thirteen sections and covers ten pages in the book from which these extracts are taken. But don't worry, you aren't expected to write this much!

The poem's power comes from its relentless repetition of the detail – largely geographical – contained in each line. It is less *poetic* than some of his other writing, but it is still an evocative and interesting idea.



Writing

First stage: You will need to decide what ‘world’ you want to write about. Here are some options:

- the whole world, as in Whitman’s poem
- the world of your neighbourhood, local community, village, town, city
- the world of school, football, social media, shopping and so on
- an imaginary world, like a distant or newly discovered planet

You can decide to write about any ‘world’ that you feel you will be able to imagine and research a large number of details/features that can be seen and heard.

Second stage: This is the research stage. If you are writing about the whole world, you should use an encyclopaedia, atlas and other geographical resources to find out as much information as you can about a wide range of places. Be prepared to mention the unusual and the ordinary. Whitman doesn’t seem to have much to say about Britain in only mentioning the Thames! However, the Spanish have *castanets* and *chestnut-shade* featured in their line.

Look for the exotic names of unfamiliar places and any other interesting details that you can find. Find out about strange customs and traditions.

If the ‘world’ you have chosen is more localised or specialist, you should still attempt to compile as much relevant detail about your choice as you can before writing the poem.

Final stage: In writing up your whole poem, you will write at least two sections: one with each line beginning *I hear* and one with each line beginning *I see*. Try to arrange your lines in the most interesting way, contrasting or complementing them as you write.

There are variations/additions you can make to Whitman’s model, for example:

- add adverbs to describe how you see and/or hear what you describe
- add other senses, like taste and touch
- alternate between seeing and hearing (and/or other senses)
- write your observations as rhyming couplets (but don’t begin with this idea!)