

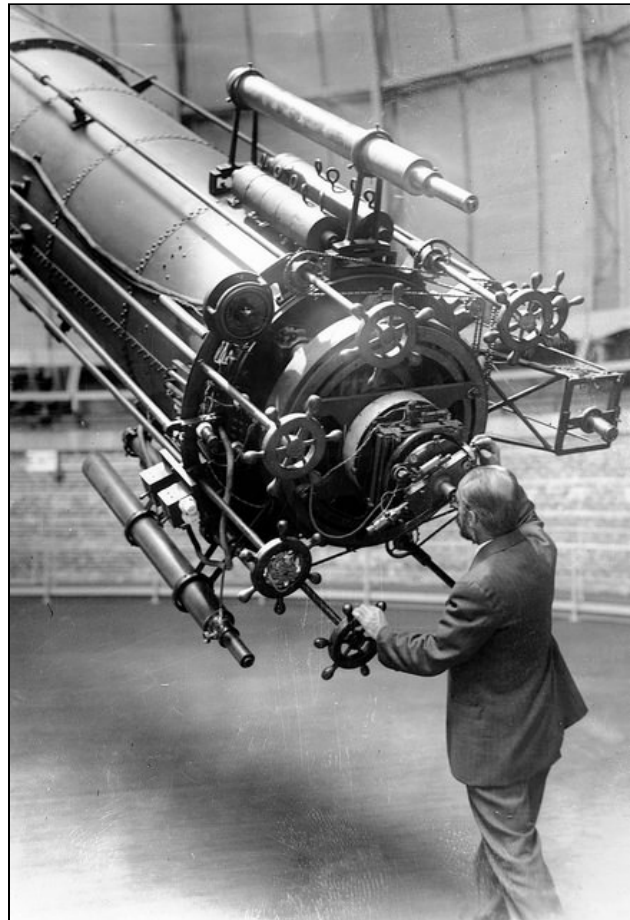
Name: _____ Class: _____

When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer

By Walt Whitman
1867

Walt Whitman is a famous American poet who is often called the father of the "free verse" style of poetry. He wrote during the time of urbanization in America. "When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer" was published in 1867, describing one character's experience listening to a "learn'd" man. As you read the poem below, take notes on the way Whitman describes the astronomer's lecture.

- [1] When I heard the learn'd astronomer,
When the proofs, the figures, were ranged in
columns before me,
When I was shown the charts and diagrams, to
add, divide, and measure them,
When I sitting heard the astronomer where he
lectured with much applause in the lecture-
room,
- [5] How soon unaccountable I became tired and sick,
Till rising and gliding out I wander'd off by myself,
In the mystical moist night-air, and from time to
time,
Look'd up in perfect silence at the stars.



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Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: Which of the following best describes a theme of the poem? [RL.2]
 - A. Astronomy is an important study because it blends mathematics and science.
 - B. Human beings are not intelligent enough to truly understand the wonders of the world.
 - C. In order to be a respected expert in a field of study, one must study in a school.
 - D. A person should rely on their own thinking instead of feeling pressure to conform.

2. PART B: Which of the following quotes best supports the answer to Part A? [RL.1]
 - A. "the figures, were ranged in columns before me" (Line 2)
 - B. "he lectured with much applause in the lecture-room" (Line 4)
 - C. "Till rising and gliding out I wander'd off by myself" (Line 6)
 - D. "Look'd up in perfect silence at the stars" (Line 8)

3. In the poem, why does the speaker leave the lecture hall? [RL.3]
 - A. The speaker becomes annoyed with space and the night-sky after listening to the lecture.
 - B. The speaker becomes physically ill and slips out of the lecture hall during the applause.
 - C. The speaker does not care for the astronomer's clinical observation of the stars.
 - D. The speaker is excited about the lecture and wants to test the astronomer's theories.

4. What does the term "mystical" reveal about the speaker? [RL.6] [RL.4]
 - A. The speaker believes in the supernatural and rejects science.
 - B. The speaker views nature as magical and is in awe of it.
 - C. The word has a deep connection with space bordering on worship.
 - D. The word makes the speaker seem somewhat delusional and strange.

5. How does the free verse structure reflect the central theme of the poem? Cite evidence from the poem to support your answer. [RL.5]
