

A poem about ... ?

Below are all the words to a poem by Walt Whitman. Read through them and then answer the questions that follow:

a a advancing air along and and and and and and beach beachy breasting careering careering combs combs confronting cutting daylight death-wind demoniac dim distance easterly edge fierce firm fitfully flaring forms gale group high hoarse incessant is is lashing laughter midnight midnight milk-white milk-white murk muttering never out of of of of of of on out peeling piercing red remitting roar roar running sand sand savage savagest sea shadows shouts signal slanting slowly slush slush snow spirits spray steadily steady storm struggling swirl that that that the the the the the the the the the the the their there those through through through till tireless trinity trinity undertone warily watchful watching waves weird wending where wild wild with wreck

1. After reading through the words once, give your first impressions as to what the poem is about.
2. Now go through and make a list of, or highlight, all the verbs ending in 'ing'; what sort of feelings are evoked by the words you find?
3. Find, and highlight, or make a note of, all the words which are to do with human sounds; what sorts of sounds are mentioned? Are they quiet or loud noises? Do they suggest calm or angst?
4. Find, and highlight, or underline, words which show the time of day. Are the words suggesting a similar time of day or times hours apart? What do you think the effect of this contrast might be in the poem?
5. Count up how many words there are under each initial letter; so, for example, count up all the words beginning with 'a', all those beginning with 'b' etc. Ignore the words 'a', 'and' and 'the'. Which letter sound has the most words? Why do you think the poet has used so many words beginning with this letter sound? Think about the sound of each letter – try reading out the words to a partner and consider whether they are 'hard' or 'soft' sounds.
6. Overall, what do you think the poem is about now? What sort of impression do you get from looking at the words in alphabetical order? Have a go at using the words listed to create your own version of the poem; it is not necessary to 'get it right' – just have a go at using the language Whitman used and see what sort of poem you can create.