

Name: _____ Class: _____

I am the people, the mob

By Carl Sandburg

Carl Sandburg (1878-1967) was an American poet and writer who won three Pulitzer Prizes in his lifetime. "I am the people, the mob" was published in Chicago Poems in 1916 alongside a collection of poems that pay tribute to the common man. As you read, pay attention to how the poet's use of figurative language contributes to the mood.



Men and women planting potatoes (c. 1950)

I AM the people—the mob—the crowd—the mass.

Do you know that all the great work of the world is done through me?

I am the workingman, the inventor, the maker of the world's food and clothes.

I am the audience that witnesses history. The Napoleons come from me and the

Lincolns. They die. And then I send forth more Napoleons and Lincolns.

I am the seed ground. I am a prairie that will stand for much plowing. Terrible storms

pass over me. I forget. The best of me is sucked out and wasted. I forget. Everything but Death comes to me and makes me work and give up what I have. And I forget.

Sometimes I growl, shake myself and spatter a few red drops for history to remember.

Then—I forget.

When I, the People, learn to remember, when I, the People, use the lessons of

yesterday and no longer forget who robbed me last year, who played me for a fool—

then there will be no speaker in all the world say the name: "The People," with any fleck of a sneer in his voice or any far-off smile of derision.

The mob—the crowd—the mass—will arrive then.

Text-Based Questions:

Directions: Answer the following questions in complete sentences.

1. Who is the speaker? Support your answer with evidence from the text.

2. Cite three examples of **personification** in the poem.

3. What is the **mood** of this poem? Support your answer with evidence from the text.

4. According to the text, who matters? Cite specific examples from the text to support your answer.

5. Consider your answer to question 3. Why do those people matter? Support your answer with evidence from the text.

6. In your own words, summarize what the speaker says about forgetting. Support your answer with evidence from the text.



For Teachers

Suggested Text Pairings:

“Halsted Street Car” by Carl Sandburg (Poetry)

“Halsted Street Car” is another poem by Carl Sandburg from the same collection of poems. In the poem, he paints a picture of the weary faces of the working class. Pair “I am the people, I am the mob” with “Halsted Street Car” to engage students in an in-depth analysis of the work of Carl Sandburg. Find “Halsted Street Car” at CommonLit.org (**Technology, Progress & Industry** → **What are the costs and benefits of technology?** → 7th-8^h Grade).

“Thousands of Years from Now” by Hans Christian Anderson (Short Story)

Hans Christian Anderson (1805-1875) was a Danish writer whose short story “Thousands of Years from Now” imagines what the future might be like as a result of technology. Pair “I am the people, I am the mob” with “Thousands of Years from Now” to teach students a different perspective on the costs and benefits of technology. Find “Thousands of Years from Now” at CommonLit.org (**Technology, Progress & Industry** → **What should the future look like?** → 7th-8^h Grade).

Other Related Resources:

Article about the Chicago Literary Renaissance

The Chicago Literary Renaissance (approx. 1912-1925) applies to writing from Chicago based authors that were influenced by the industrialization of the city. Pair “I am the people, I am the mob” with Britannica’s article about the Chicago Literary Renaissance to provide context for students so that they may better understand the time and place in which Sandburg was writing.

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/110480/Chicago-literary-renaissance>