

1. How is the self imagined in this poem? Do you see evidence of a “democratic self”?

He has a good sense of self but he’s not consistent – first he says everyone will know him, but then he says he’s part of everyone. Democratic self = conflict, questioning. It’s not stable or consistent.

2. Trace the self’s journey from I-LII – how does the self change in this poem?

He first establishes individuality, and then accepts and realizes that everyone’s part of a bigger group of people. Compares growth of person to nature – grass. Personifies nature with people – we both grow. The self is clear at the beginning, and then becomes less clear as the poem goes on.

3. What is the relationship between the I and you of this poem? Who is the you?

The you is society as a whole, he’s teaching them that we’re all connected through nature – atoms, grass, born here of parents...first he overpowers them – what I shall assume you shall assume. But then he puts himself into the group in the last few lines, when he says he’ll be fiber for their being.

4. What does the grass symbolize?

Message = universal – grass is everywhere, it’s a group, but each stalk is an individual that’s part of a whole. Also, can look at one thing and have many different interpretations. Can be applied to grass and poetry. Why grass? It’s a basic part of nature. It’s like a democracy – you’re an individual, but everyone’s the same.

5. What is a key problem or tension in this poem?

Tension of authority – I celebrate myself and what I shall assume you shall assume – he’s the authority figure. But it’s contrasted in the second part – you shall not look through my eyes nor take things from me – separates himself from the authority of the you. Questions his own authority when the child asks him what’s grass and he doesn’t know how to answer. Last few lines – I stop somewhere waiting for you – the you has authority and he has to wait for that.

Tenderly I will use you, curling grass – who’s he speaking to? The grass. Once you follow that, he breaks it up – maybe you’re from young men or old people – goes back to other idea about atoms constantly changing, nothing’s ever lost. Also, literally, bury people under grass, atoms disintegrate into earth.

The I and the you are constantly moving, changing.