





Letters, 1940; special diploma. Lincoln Memorial University, 1940; Litt.D., Lafayette College, 1940; Litt.D., Wesleyan University, 1940; Litt.D., Yale University, 1940; Litt.D., Harvard University, 1940; Litt.D., Syracuse University, 1941; Litt.D., Dartmouth College, 1941; L.L.D., Rollins College, 1941; Phi Beta Kappa Poet, College of William and Mary, 1943; L.L.D., Augustana College, 1948; honorary Ph.D., Upsala College, 1950; Pulitzer Prize for *Complete Poems*, 1951; National Institute and American Academy of Arts and Letters Gold Medal, 1952; Commanders Cup of the Order of the North Star (Sweden), 1953; Poetry Society of America Gold Medal, 1953; Tamiment Institute Award, 1953; L.L.D., University of Illinois, 1953; New York Civil War Round Table Silver Medal, 1954; Boston Arts Festival Poetry Prize, 1955; Litt.D., University of North Carolina, 1955; Award of Merit, University of Louisville, 1955; humanities award, Albert Einstein College of Medicine, 1956; named honorary ambassador for North Carolina, 1958; Lincoln Day speaker, U.S. Congress, 1959; Litt.D., Upsala College, 1959; Litteris et Artibus medal from King Gustav VI of Sweden, 1959; Roanoke-Chowan Poetry Cup for *Harvest Poems*, 1960; named poet laureate of Illinois, 1962; Presidential Medal of Freedom, 1964.

**Death:** Flat Rock, North Carolina, 22 July 1967

American poet and biographer Carl Sandburg sketched a revealing portrait of himself in the preface to his *Complete Poems* (1950): “there was a puzzlement,” he said, “as to whether I was a poet, a biographer, a wandering troubadour with a guitar, a midwest Hans Christian Andersen, or a historian of current events. . .” He was 72 in 1950 and “still studying verbs and the mystery of how they connect nouns . . . I have forgotten the meaning of twenty or thirty of my poems written thirty or forty years ago. I still favor several simple poems published long ago which continue to have an appeal for simple people.”

Sandburg wrote a landmark six-volume biography of Abraham Lincoln. A consummate platform performer, he roamed the United States for nearly a half century, guitar in hand, collecting and singing American folk songs. For his own children and children everywhere he wrote *Rootabaga Stories* (1922) and *Rootabaga Pigeons* (1923), some of the first





authentic American fairy tales. He was a journalist by trade; his newspaper reporting and commentary documented labor, racial and economic strife as well as other key events of his times. But Carl Sandburg was first and foremost a poet, writing poems about America in the American idiom for the American people. The titles of his volumes of poetry testify to his major themes: *Chicago Poems* (1916), *Cornhuskers* (1918), *Smoke and Steel* (1920), *Good Morning, America* (1928), *The People, Yes* (1936).

Louis Untermeyer described Sandburg in 1923 as the “emotional democrat” of American poetry, the “laureate of industrial America.” Harriet Monroe, founder and first editor of *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*, gave Sandburg’s poetry its first serious audience in 1914. She believed that this son of Swedish immigrants was particularly suited to write about the “incomplete, but urgent and hopeful” American democracy. She wrote in *Poets and Their Art* (1926) that Sandburg was bent on the business, “in the deepest sense a poet’s business, of seeing our national life in the large – its beauty and glory, its baseness and shame.”

Sandburg’s vision of the American experience was shaped in the American Midwest during the complicated events which brought the nineteenth century to a close. His parents were Swedish immigrants who met in Illinois, where they settled in search of a share of American democracy and prosperity. August Sandburg helped to build the first cross-continental railroad, and in the twentieth century his son Carl was an honored guest on the first cross-continental jet flight. August Sandburg was a blacksmith’s helper for the Chicago Burlington and Quincy Railroad in Galesburg, Illinois, when his son was born on 6 January 1878 in a small cottage a few steps away from the roundhouse and railroad yards. Carl August Sandburg was the second child and first son of the hard working Sandburgs. He grew up speaking Swedish and English, and, eager to be assimilated into American society, he Americanized his name. In 1884 or 1885, “somewhere in the first year or two of school,” he began to call himself Charles rather than the Swedish Carl because he had “a feeling the name Carl would mean one more Poor Swede Boy while the name Charles filled the mouth and had ‘em guessing.”





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There were seven children in the Sandburg family, and the two youngest sons died of diphtheria on the same day in 1892. Charles Sandburg had to leave school at age thirteen to work at a variety of odd jobs to supplement the family income. As a teenager he was restless and impulsive, hungry for experience in the world beyond the staid, introverted prairie town which had always been his home. At age eighteen he borrowed his father's railroad pass and had his first look at Chicago, the city of his destiny. In 1897 Sandburg joined the corps of more than 60,000 hoboes who found the American railroads an exhilarating if illicit free ride from one corner of the United States to another. For three and a half months of his nineteenth year he traveled through Iowa, Missouri, Kansas, Nebraska and Colorado, working on farms, steamboats, and railroads, blacking stoves, washing dishes, and listening to the American vernacular, the idiom which would permeate his poetry.



Carl Sandburg (soldier # 58) in Spanish American War

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The journey left Sandburg with a permanent wanderlust. He volunteered for service in the Spanish-American War in 1898 and served in Puerto Rico from July until late August. As a veteran, he received free tuition for a year at Lombard College in Galesburg and enrolled there in October 1898. He was offered a conditional appointment to the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, New York, on the basis of his Spanish-American War service, but in June 1899 he failed entrance examinations in arithmetic and grammar. He returned to Lombard, where he studied until May of 1902, when he left college without enough credits for graduation.

At Lombard, he encountered the first catalyst for his poetry, Prof. Philip Green Wright, economist, scholar, and poet. Wright fostered Sandburg's interest in writing and published the young poet's first small books at his Asgard Press, which he modeled after William Morris' Kelmscott Press and its offspring, Elbert Hubbard's Roycroft Press. On the small handpress in the basement of his Galesburg home, Wright set the type for Charles A. Sandburg's *In Reckless Ecstasy* (1904), *Incidentals* (1907), *The Plaint of a Rose* (1908), and *Joseffy* (1910). The last book was commissioned by Joseffy, a magician, musician, inventor,

*"And there was never a time."  
Sandburg later said of [Philip]  
Wright, "when he didn't deepen  
whatever of reverence I had for the  
human mind and the workings of a  
vast mysterious Universe."*

—Niven

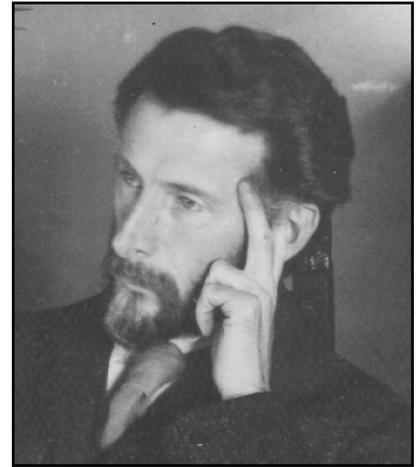


and wanderer, who wanted an “appreciation” to promote his lyceum appearances. The three other early works, slim booklets which are now rare collectors’ items, contain Sandburg’s juvenilia, which he viewed in retrospect as “many odd pieces . . . not worth later reprint.” They record the tentative and conventionally modeled lyrics of a young poet deeply influenced by Villon, Browning, Kipling, Emerson, and Whitman, as well as idealistic aphorisms in the style of Elbert Hubbard. These early writings are foretokens of the major themes of Sandburg’s later poetry, as well of the idealism which led him to become an activist and organizer for the Social Democratic party in Wisconsin from 1907 until 1912.

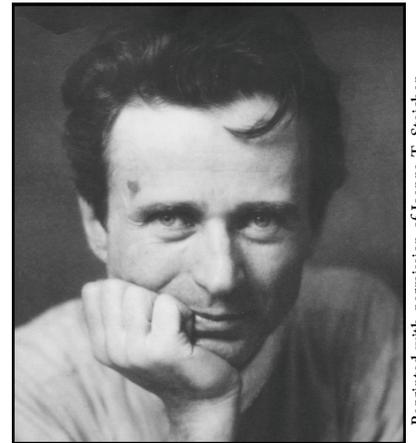
By the time he was 30, Sandburg had tried a variety of jobs, often supporting himself as an itinerant salesman of Underwood and Underwood stereopticon equipment and pictures. He tried to establish himself as a Lyceum and Chautauqua lecturer, published occasional poems, and worked for a variety of periodicals. In 1908 he married Lilian Steichen, sister of photographer Edward Steichen, who had already achieved some international success with his artistic photographs. Lilian Steichen was a beautiful Phi Beta Kappa graduate of the University of Chicago, a schoolteacher, and an active Socialist. Sandburg said later that the three chief influences in his life were Philip Green Wright, Edward Steichen, and Lilian Steichen Sandburg, his wife for fifty-nine years. He called her Paula, and she urged him to return to his christened name Carl, to affirm his Swedish roots. She also urged him to concentrate on his poetry, and her steady faith in his work undergirded his long struggle to find his own poetic style and a serious audience for his poetry.

From 1910 until 1912 Carl and Paula Sandburg lived in Milwaukee, where Sandburg was instrumental in the Milwaukee Socialists’ unprecedented political victory in 1910. When Emil Seidel was elected Milwaukee’s first Socialist mayor in that year, Sandburg, then thirty-two, was appointed his secretary. Sandburg left city hall in 1911 to write for Victor Berger’s *Social Democratic Herald* in Milwaukee. In June 1911 the Sandburg’s first child, Margaret, was born. A second daughter died at birth in 1913; Janet was born in 1916, and Helga was born in 1918. In 1912 the Sandburgs moved to Chicago, where Sandburg joined the staff of the

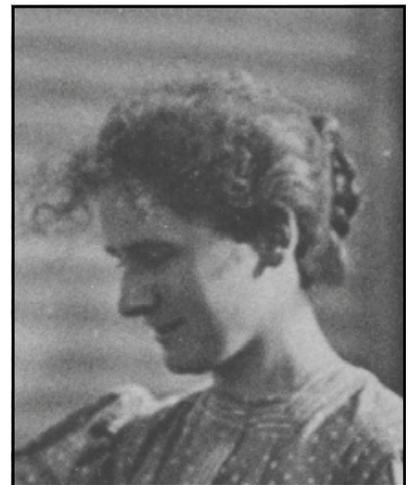
*Three of Carl’s greatest influences...*



*Philip Green Wright*



*Edward Steichen*



*Lilian Steichen (Paula) Sandburg*

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passionate social concerns. He covered war, racial strife, lynchings, mob violence, and the inequities of the industrial society, such as child labor, and disease and injury induced in the workplace. These concerns were transmuted into poetry. *Chicago Poems* offered bold, realistic portraits of working men, women, and children; of the “inexplicable fate” of the vulnerable and struggling human victims of war, progress, business. “Great men, pageants of war and labor, soldiers and workers, mothers lifting their children—these all I touched, and felt the solemn thrill of them” Sandburg wrote in “Masses.” “And then one day I got a true look at the Poor, millions of the Poor,/patient and toiling; more patient than crags, tides, and stars; innumer-/able, patient as the darkness of night—and all broken, humble ruins of nations.”

Sandburg’s themes in *Chicago Poems* reflect his Socialistic idealism and pragmatism, but they also contain a wider humanism, a profound affirmation of the common man, the common destiny, the common tragedies and joys of life. Just as Sandburg’s subject matter transcended that of conventional poetry, his free verse form was unique, original, and controversial. Some critics found his forms “shapeless” and questioned whether Sandburg’s work was poetry at all. In her *Tendencies in Modern American Poetry* (1917), Sandburg’s respected friend and colleague Amy Lowell called him a lyric poet but stated that “the lyricist in him has a hard time to make itself heard above the brawling of the marketplace.” She praised Sandburg’s virility and tenderness, his originality and strength, and ratified his importance as a democratic poet. But she objected to the propagandistic overtones she perceived in Sandburg’s poetry. In June 1917 Sandburg wrote to Lowell in his own defense that his aim was not to advance social theories, but “to sing, blab, chortle, yodel, like people, and people in the sense of human beings subtracted from formal doctrines.”

The reviews for *Chicago Poems* were predictably disparate in their assessment of what the reviewer for the *American Library Association Booklist* (October 1916) called Sandburg’s “tradition-shattering poetry,” but the criticism which caused him long hours of reflection was Lowell’s view that there was too much propaganda in his work. He continued as a journalist, joining the *Chicago Daily News* in 1917 as a labor reporter and editorial writer, but he was a





poet by vocation. His newspaper job exposed him to the issues and conflicts of his time. The grim realism of labor conflict, racial strife, and mob violence in Chicago and the growing chaos of World War I led Sandburg to a growing cynicism and pessimism. He struggled for an equilibrium which would help him avoid the confusion of poetic theme and propaganda of action. But Sandburg was becoming the poet of democracy, and he believed that the poet had a public duty to speak of his times.

*Cornhuskers* (1918) is a celebration of the prairie, the agrarian life, the people living it. The volume includes some revealing autobiographical poems, many gentle, lyrical evocations of his family life, and poignant portraits of American working men and women reminiscent of *Chicago Poems*. The strength of *Cornhuskers* rests in its remarkable war poems. In the concluding section, "Shenandoah," Sandburg sketches with a deceptively gentle irony the phantoms of soldiers who died in past battles of earlier wars. He concludes with a forceful and bitter attack on modern warmongers who use the lives and deaths of "A Million Young Workmen, 1915":

The kings are grinning, the kaiser and  
the czar—they are alive riding in leather-  
seated motor cars, and they have their  
women and roses for ease, and they eat  
fresh poached eggs for breakfast, new  
butter on toast, sitting in tall water-tight  
houses reading the news of war.

I dreamed a million ghosts of the young  
workmen rose in their shirts all soaked in  
crimson. . . and yelled:

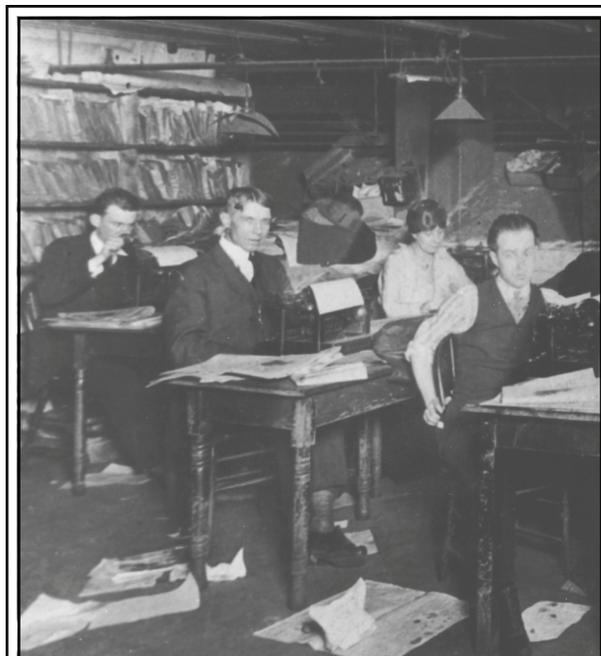
God damn the grinning kings, God  
damn the kaiser and the czar.

Critical reception for *Cornhuskers* was mixed, ranging from the view that Sandburg was in the front rank of American poets to the opinion that his outspoken idealism prevented him from being a poet at all. Some reviewers described him as the first American poet of his generation, revealing the "vitality and strength of the English tongue as it was in its beginnings" (*Review of Reviews*, January 1919), while others, such as the *New York Times* reviewer, commented on the



melancholy mood of the book, attributing it to “the racial soberness of the Scandinavian” (12 January 1919).

By the time the book appeared in October 1918, Sandburg was in Stockholm, Sweden, for his first closeup view of his parents’ homeland, as well as for a brief view of World War I. He stayed on after the November Armistice to continue his work as Eastern European correspondent for the Newspaper Enterprise Association and became entangled with wartime bureaucracy when he brought back to the United States a trunk full of Russian literature and propaganda and some funds intended for the Finnish People’s Republic Movement in New York. His good intentions validated, Sandburg was not charged with any violations of the Trading with the Enemy Act, but he was sobered and distressed by the questioning of his loyalty as an American citizen.



Carl as a journalist at the Chicago Daily News

Back at work at the *Chicago Daily News*, he covered a range of postwar issues, as well as the ongoing racial and labor conflicts in Chicago. He was assigned to investigate the background of racial tensions in the city during the summer of 1919, and his thoughtful series of articles proved tragically prophetic when the Chicago Race Riots erupted in late July. Alfred Harcourt gathered Sandburg’s columns into a book entitled *The Chicago Race Riots, July 1919* (1919).

Once again, Sandburg transmuted the harsh reality of his times into poetry, and the emerging volume, *Smoke and Steel* (1920), was dedicated to his brother-in-law, Edward Steichen. As in preceding volumes, Sandburg vividly depicts the daily toil of the working man and women, “the people who must sing or die.” The smoke of spring fields, autumn leaves, steel mills, and battleship funnels is the emblem and extension of “the blood of a man,” the life force which undergirds the industrial society and the larger human brotherhood: “Deep down are the cinders we came from--/ You and I and our heads of smoke,” he wrote in the title poem. Sandburg’s American landscape broadens in *Smoke and Steel* from Chicago and the prairie to specific scenes in places such as Gary, Indiana; Omaha, Nebraska; Cleveland, Ohio; Kalamazoo, Michigan; Far Rockaway; New York; the Blue Ridge; the Potomac. In all of these places Sandburg

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found a common theme, the struggle of the common man, the quest of the “finders in the dark.” “I hear America, I hear, *what* do I hear?” he wrote in “The Sins of Kalamazoo.”

Sandburg’s voyage to Sweden and his perspective of World War I are transcribed in the poems in two sections of *Smoke and Steel* titled “Passports” and “Playthings of the Wind.” Harsh depictions of human cruelty (a lynching is graphically described in “Man, the Man-Hunter,” for instance) are juxtaposed to the gentle, often joyous lyricism of poems about Paula Sandburg, family, home, and the beauty of nature.

*Smoke and Steel* is a strong but uneven work, and it elicited contradictory critical views. In a review for the 15 January 1920 issue of the *New Republic* Louis Untermeyer hailed the book as “an epic of modern industrialism and a mighty paean to modern beauty” and named Sandburg and Robert Frost as America’s two major living poets. Other critics charged that Sandburg had no sense of the past or vision of the future and that he had begun to produce an indiscriminating quantity of work, often imitating himself in the process. In the 9 December 1920 issue of the London *Times* a reviewer mused that Sandburg’s poems were true to a certain kind of life and that they were undoubtedly American but questioned whether Sandburg’s work constituted “a high and right art.”

The negative appraisals were overshadowed for Sandburg by the welcome acclaim of his friend Amy Lowell. “Reading these poems gives me more of a patriotic emotion than ever ‘The Star-spangled Banner’ has been able to do,” she wrote in the *New York Times* (24 October 1920). “This is America and Mr. Sandburg loves her so much that suddenly we realize how much we love her, too.” Earlier lectures about propagandistic poetry aside, Lowell forecast that posterity would rank Sandburg “high on the ladder of poetic achievement.”

In 1921 Sandburg was 43 years old, comfortably employed by Victor Lawson and Henry Justin Smith at the *Chicago Daily News*, and a poet whose three books had earned him a widening reputation and prestigious awards—including the Poetry Society of America Award, which he shared with Margaret Widdemer in 1919, and the Poetry Society of America Annual Book Award, which he shared with Stephen





Vincent Benet in 1921. He lived with his wife and three small daughters in Elmhurst, Illinois, and traveled with increasing frequency on the college lecture circuit, reading his poetry and playing and singing American folksongs from his flourishing collection. His growing disillusionment with “the imbecility of a frightened world” was intensified by deep personal sorrow and anxiety at the discovery that his eldest child, Margaret, suffered from nocturnal epilepsy, an illness for which there was no effective treatment in 1921.

Sandburg heightened his lecture activity to supplement his income so that Margaret could have every possible medical treatment for her mystifying illness, and he began to work in earnest on the *Rootabaga Stories* (1922), a charming, whimsical series of fables invented for his own children. A sequel, *Rootabaga Pigeons*, appeared in 1923.

He managed amid family stress to produce his fourth book of poetry, a slim volume entitled *Slabs of the Sunburnt West* (1922), dedicated to his youngest child, Helga. The book begins with a muted portrait of Chicago, “The Windy City,” a catalog of the city’s monotony and vitality, its weather and its people. “And So Today,” an extended eulogy to an unknown soldier, brings a certain closure to the war poems of this period of the poet’s life. There are poems to well-known subjects — including sculptor Constantin Brancusi, Charlie Chaplin, and Robert Frost. The title poem uses the vehicle of the journey of an overland passenger train to unite the past and present members of the great “procession” of “wonderful hungry people” who created the American nation. For the first time Sandburg made extended use of the catalog, the repetitive accrual of images in parallel forms and the quotation of American slang and platitudes.

These devices irritated some critics, who found Sandburg’s work incoherent and his vocabulary dated. “Slang is last night’s toadstool growth.” Clement Wood wrote in the *Nation* (26 July 1922), warning that Sandburg wrote in “unfamiliar rhythms, and a vocabulary that tomorrow will speak only to the archeologist.” But other critics admired Sandburg’s virility and originality, his mellower, more musical tone and his cogent style. Malcolm Cowley pointed out in the *Dial* (November 1922) that Sandburg’s use of parallel constructions and repetition yielded verse which “is highly organized,” producing effects “as complex and difficult





sometimes as those of Swinburne's most intricate ballads . . .  
 “ The *New York Times* reviewer warned that Sandburg “is already in danger of becoming the Professional Chanter of Virility” (4 July 1922), but on one point reviewers and Sandburg's large audience of readers agreed: he was a completely American poet, the Poet of the People.

*Slabs of the Sunburnt West* made frequent use of prose structures at a time when Sandburg was discovering an interesting fact of literary economics: prose paid better than poetry. His *Rootabaga Stories* were so successful that Alfred Harcourt proposed that Sandburg follow his longtime wish to write a juvenile biography of Abraham Lincoln. From the disillusioning realities of the world he had documented so long in poetry, journalism, and political speeches, Sandburg turned to the refuge of history and legend. He began to immerse himself in Lincoln research and in American folklore and folk music. For the next seventeen years, in the prime of his creative life, Sandburg focused on one central, overriding subject: Abraham Lincoln. He took “occasional detours” for poetry, producing two significant volumes. *Good Morning, America* in 1928 and *The People, Yes* in 1936. But the poet who had shown the American people the reality of their language and their lives in his innovative verse forms began the long work of presenting to them the higher reality of their mythology and legends in the tragic folk hero Lincoln and in *The American Songbag*, an anthology of American folk music that he edited in 1927.

The title poem of *Good Morning, America*, composed and delivered as the Phi Beta Kappa Poem at Harvard University in 1925, was Sandburg's strongest affirmation yet of “the

little two-legged joker . . . Man.” The collection begins with thirty-eight “Tentative (First Model) Definitions of Poetry” and moves—with a panoramic sweep reflecting Sandburg's departure from realism—into mythology, legend, history, and a universal humanism. Sandburg converts an informed view of history, the product of his mounting Lincoln research, into poetic subject matter. His extended catalog of proverbs and folk idioms foreshadows the content of *The People, Yes* as it dramatizes “the short miserable pilgrimage of mankind.”

*The people is the grand canyon of humanity  
 and many many miles across.  
 The people is pandora's box. humpty dumpty.  
 a clock of doom and an avalanche when it  
 turns loose.  
 The people rest on land and weather. on time  
 and the changing winds.  
 The people have come far and can look back  
 and say, “We will go farther yet.”*

—*The People, Yes*, 97



Sandburg’s two-volume *Abraham Lincoln: The Prairie Years* brought him new celebrity and financial stability in 1926. *The American Songbag*, warmly received and reviewed in 1927, testified not only to Sandburg’s versatility but to his comprehensive interest in documenting the American experience. If the Poet of the People needed further ratification of his place as a popular American literary figure, *Good Morning, America* received such an endorsement from the majority of critics. Sandburg was compared to Whitman, praised for his humor, his vision, the rhythms of his verse. Some critics, such as Perry Hutchison, chided that Sandburg demonstrated no real growth as a poet, that he had “sat too long at the feet of Walt Whitman” (*New York Times*, 21 October 1928). But the consensus was that “sunburned Carl Sandburg, in love with the earth,” as Leon Whipple called him in *Survey* (1 November 1928), had found the subject and the style vigorous and free enough for “a Continental plateau and the Great Divide ...”

*“Poetry is the capture of a picture, a song, or a flair, in a deliberate prism of words.”*  
*— Good Morning, America*

In the early 1930s Sandburg formed a life-long friendship with Archibald MacLeish, and the men carried on an introspective dialogue about the obligations of the poet to speak to the issues of his times. The Depression years provoked in Sandburg a profound desire to console “the people of the earth, the family of man,” to lift the hopes of the people who, “In the darkness with a great bundle of grief,” marched “in tune and step/with constellations of universal law.” Sandburg relinquished his *Chicago Daily News* job in 1932 to devote his full time to writing biography and poetry; he began to take a “detour” from work on the last stages of *Abraham Lincoln: The War Years* to write a long, innovative poem based in part on the lessons he had learned from Lincoln and American history. *The People, Yes*, an epic prose-poem, is in many ways the culmination of Sandburg’s work as a poet. He crafted it over an eight-year period, fusing the American vernacular with the details of history and contemporary events. Sandburg’s immersion in the Lincoln era had given him an informed sense of history, and he saw striking parallels between Lincoln’s time and the Depression years. Believing that economic inequity lay at the root of all social injustice, from labor conflict to racial and civil strife, he responded to the economic and social upheavals of the 1930s with *The People*,





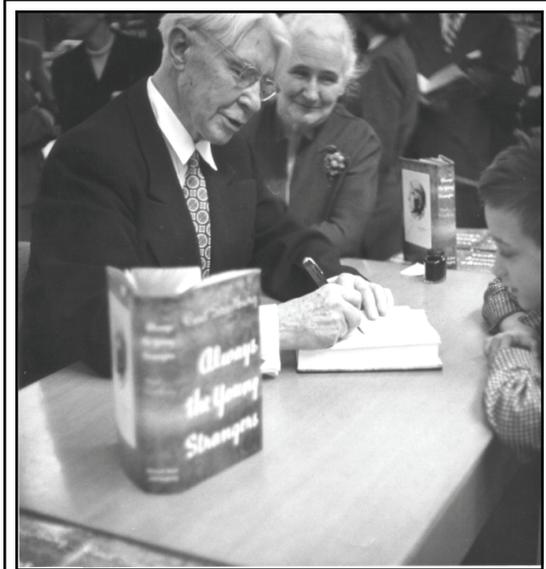
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Yes, his testament to the seekers and the strugglers, the people who were the counterparts of his own immigrant parents. “Man is a long time coming,” Sandburg concluded in the final, one hundred and seventh, stanza of the poem. “Man will yet win./Brother may yet line up with brother.”



Carl (with Paula) signs a book for a young fan

The critics looked for coherence and could not find it, sought structure and could not find that, and wondered anew if the Poet of the People could in fact write poetry at all. But there was generous praise for Sandburg’s vision of the American people as heroic, for his lusty humor and vivid irony, for his success in rendering “the authentic accents of his brother.” Sandburg’s readers embraced the book and wrote to him in legions to thank him for it. He took all responses in stride. He had written the poem he wanted to write, and he called it the “best memorandum I could file for the present stress.”

In 1940 Sandburg won the Pulitzer Prize for the four-volume *Abraham Lincoln: The War Years*, published in 1939. *The People, Yes* was his last major book of poetry. During the decade of the 1940s Sandburg lectured

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widely, wrote occasional poetry, involved himself actively in the war effort, and worked as a syndicated columnist. A collection of his newspaper columns and radio broadcasts was published as *Home Front Memo* (1943), along with the text and photographs from *Road to Victory*, a patriotic exhibit which he and his brother-in-law, Edward Steichen, had created for the Museum of Modern Art in 1942.

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Sandburg and MacLeish were critical of writers who remained detached from the national emergency of World War II, and Sandburg cautioned that “A writer’s silence on living issues can in itself constitute a propaganda of conduct leading toward the deterioration or death of freedom.”

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Sandburg’s commitment to speak to the issues of his times, his passion for American history, and his desire to try writing in every genre led him to sign a contract on 11 September 1943 to write an epic historical novel that Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Studios could make into what the studio hoped would be a popular wartime film. Sandburg was an innovator, seldom afraid to risk new ventures; thus he set out in 1943, at age sixty-five, to write his first and only novel,



*Remembrance Rock*. It was finally completed and published in 1948, but the film version was never made.



Sandburg had tried almost every genre by the time he won the Pulitzer Prize for poetry in 1951 for his *Complete Poems* (1950). In *Always the Young Strangers* (1953) he recorded the first twenty years of his life. Sandburg enjoyed the height of his celebrity in the 1950s, traveling widely as an increasingly visible public figure. He was a natural for the new medium of television, and his familiar face, with high cheekbones framed by the sweep of white hair, was photographed and recognized across the nation he celebrated throughout his life and work. In 1959 Sandburg and Edward Steichen traveled to the Soviet Union with *The Family of Man*, an exhibition of photographs and text which they had jointly arranged as a celebration of humanity. Sandburg made his second and final trip to Sweden at the end of that journey.

Sandburg wrote, traveled, and entertained audiences as long as he had the strength to do so. He went to Hollywood in 1960 to spend a year and a half as creative consultant to George Stevens and his film *The Greatest Story Ever Told*. The octogenarian Sandburg had by the 1960s become known as a legend in his time. "A legend in our time," he often exclaimed. "Jesus, it could be worse."

"Being a poet is a damn dangerous business," Sandburg observed at his eighty-fifth birthday dinner in 1963, on the event of the publication of his final book of poetry, *Honey and Salt*. The volume is notable for its variety, but its quality is uneven. Some of the poems are sentimental caricatures of his early work, but many of them reveal powers which had stayed and grown. *Honey and Salt* is a summation of Sandburg's life and work weighed with reflections on the passage of time, the waning of physical and creative powers, the perdurability of the physical universe, and the transitory nature of human life. *Honey and Salt* contains whimsy and pain, sentimentality and strength, and Sandburg's enduring idealism, memory, and hope, as well as his rudimentary affirmation of the bonds of universal life and the family of man.

The Sandburgs left the Midwest heartland in 1945, moving to the mountains of North Carolina in search of more solitude and space for the family and Paula Sandburg's thriving herd of





champion dairy goats. They settled at Connemara, a 245-acre estate in Flat Rock, North Carolina. Carl Sandburg died there in the hush of the mountain summer on 22 July 1967 at age eighty-nine. His wife, Paula, survived him, along with daughters Margaret, Janet, and Helga, and Helga's children, John Carl and Karlen Paula, who as teenagers had legally taken their grandmother's maiden name, Steichen. At the simple funeral ceremony in a nearby chapel, Edward Steichen placed a pine bough on Sandburg's coffin, in memory of their years of fellowship.

Unlike American writers whose families had long been American citizens, Sandburg felt no compulsion to serve a literary apprenticeship abroad. While others found stimulation and sustenance in Paris, London, or Rome, Sandburg turned to Milwaukee and Chicago. Sandburg's immigrant father never learned to write the language his son used to explore, describe, interpret, and celebrate the American experience. August and Clara Sandburg were strangers to the American prairie and robust complexity of the city Carl Sandburg sought to interpret for them and others like them. Witnessing the obstacles thrust before the modest hopes of simple working people such as his parents, Carl became the passionate champion for people who did not have the words or power to speak for themselves. During the turbulent events of nearly a century of American life, Sandburg sought to articulate and affirm the hopes of the average American citizen. "There are poets of streets and struggles, of dust and combat, of violence wanton or justified, of plain folk living close to a hard earth," Sandburg wrote in "Notes for a Preface" in his *Complete Poems*. He was convinced that "When men lose their poetic feeling for ordinary life, and cannot write poetry of ordinary things, their exalted poetry is likely to lose its strength of exaltation."

Sandburg found his subject and his themes in ordinary life. He viewed himself as "one more seeker" in the long procession of humanity. His celebration of the durable human spirit transcends time or place. This uniquely American poet found in the American experience symbols for the universal human experience. "The people take the earth/as a tomb of rest and a cradle of hope," he wrote in *The People, Yes*. "Who else speaks for the Family of Man?/They are in tune and step/with constellations of universal law."



## CARL SANDBURG IN HIS TIME

### Background

This lesson is intended to bring Carl Sandburg into class history discussions and to use his life to reflect the diversity of American history during his life. Sandburg lived in and wrote about an exciting America. During his life from 1878 to 1967, Sandburg saw a changing and growing nation.

### Procedures

1. Ask the class for their definition of a time line; write down several students' definitions on the board. Ask how time lines, which simply sort out the order of events in history, can help us to better understand historic events. Emphasize that time lines do not necessarily have to be major world events like wars or disasters, but can be written about individuals or even the evolution of ideas in our society. Brainstorm with students possible topics that one might include on the time line of a single person. Possible answers might include birth, death, marriage, birth of children, school or athletic awards, honors, accidents, traveling experiences, pets, religion, siblings, jobs, friends, hobbies, etc.
2. Distribute the blank time line to each student. At the top, have each student place his or her birth date and place. At the bottom of the time line have the students write down something like, "Began studying Carl Sandburg" or "Eighth Grade School Year".
3. Individually, have each student fill in on the left side of the sheet at least 10 major events in their own lives that could be a part of their time line. Help those who might have difficulty coming up with enough important milestones. Encourage students to expand beyond 10 events.
4. Challenge the student to include any international, national, or local events that occurred during their lifetimes and briefly describe those on the right side of the time line. Help students with approximate dates of events. Emphasize that the exact dates are not necessary for this assignment.
5. Have the students share their time lines with the class and indicate why they chose to include certain events. Ask students if international, national, or local events affected their time line or that of someone they know. Emphasize

### Subjects

American History  
Literature

### Materials

- American history textbooks
- computer access to web
- overhead projector

### Handouts

- "My Life in My Time" student time line
- "Carl Sandburg in His Time" time line [with left side information only]
- teacher edition of "Carl Sandburg in His Time" time line [with suggested American history events on the right side]

### Teaching Techniques

-  Lecture
-  Writing assignment(s)
-  Handout(s)
-  Class discussion
-  Additional research





the relationship of events in history with the impact on the lives of people who lived during that time. Announce to the students that in the next meeting, they will try a similar activity, but use Carl Sandburg as the subject. Collect the students' time lines and post them in the classroom before the class meets again.

6. Begin the lesson by reviewing what a time line is and how it can be helpful to our understanding of history. Review the last class time line activity.
7. On an overhead projector, show the class Carl Sandburg's time line. Go over each life event in chronological order emphasizing the significant events in his life. Discuss and answer any questions. Divide the students into groups of three. Announce that the oldest student will serve as recorder of information, the youngest will be the reporter to the class, and the middle student will lead the discussion, while they all will research the topic.
8. Tell the students that their task will be to fill the right side of their time lines with important events in American history that correspond with the time in which Carl Sandburg was alive. Remind students of the resources available for them to gather the information. Give the groups time to research and write down their findings. Monitor for problems that may arise.
9. When all groups have concluded, have each group reporter highlight just a portion of the American history time line. The teacher may choose to write in the students' findings on the overhead projector version of the Sandburg time line. Discuss and conclude. As an assessment, the teacher may wish to collect the time line to check for understanding. The teacher may look for the accuracy of the information collected and if the students followed the proper format for the time line.

**Modification**

- For advanced groups of students, this activity could be expanded to include conclusions about how events in Carl Sandburg's life affected his writing. The students could read poems written at the time and hypothesize how events in Sandburg's life and in history may have affected his political, religious, and social views as demonstrated in his writing. The teacher might give an example of this for everyone's benefit, then as students to find similar poem/ event relationships.





CARL SANDBURG'S LIFE	YEAR	AMERICAN
	1861-65	
	1865	
	1865-77	
Born in Galesburg IL of Swedish immigrant parents	1878	
He leaves school to work after the 8 <sup>th</sup> grade. Age 13	1891	
Lives as a hobo for four months	1897	
Serves in Puerto Rico in the Spanish American War	1898	
Attends Lombard College; leaves before graduating	1899	
Marries Lilian Steiken	1902	
Daughter Margaret born	1908	
	1911	
<i>Chicago Poems</i> published	1914	
	1916	
Daughter Helga born/ <i>Cornhuskers</i> published/Carl visits Stockholm	1917	
News Correspondent for the <i>Chicago Daily News</i>	1918	
<i>Smoke and Steel</i> published	1919	
	1920	
<i>Slabs of Sunburnt West</i> and <i>Rootabaga Stories</i> published	1921	
Family moves to Harbert, MI	1922	
<i>Lincoln: The Prairie Years</i> published	1925	
<i>American Songbag</i> published	1926	
<i>Good Morning, America</i> published	1927	
	1928	
Sandburg leaves <i>Chicago Daily News</i>	1929	
	1932	
Pulitzer Prize in history for <i>Lincoln: The War Years</i>	1939	



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Works for war effort	1945	
Family pays \$40,000 for a 240 acre farm in Flat Rock, NC	1948	
His only novel <i>Remembrance Rock</i> published	1950	
Pulitzer Prize in Literature for Sandburg's <i>Complete Poems</i>	1954	
Speaks before a joint session of Congress to celebrate Lincoln's 150th birthday	1959	
Works in Hollywood on <i>The Greatest Story Ever Told</i>	1960	
<i>Honey and Salt</i> published	1963	
LB Johnson awards Sandburg the Presidential Medal of Freedom	1964	
Sandburg dies on July 22 at age 89	1967	
	1968	



CARL SANDBURG'S LIFE	YEAR	AMERICAN HISTORY
	1861-65	The Civil War
	1865	Abe Lincoln is Assassinated
	1865-77	The Reconstruction
Born in Galesburg IL. to Swedish immigrant parents	1878	
Leaves school after the 8th grade. Age 13	1891	
Lives as a hobo for four months	1897	
Serves in Puerto Rico in Spanish American War	1898	Spanish American War
Attends Lombard College; leaves before graduating.	1899	
Marries Lilian Steiken	1902	
Daughter Margaret born	1908	Teddy Roosevelt
	1911	
<i>Chicago Poems</i> published	1914	World War I begins in Europe
	1916	
Daughter Helga born/ <i>Cornhuskers</i> published/Sandburg visits Stockholm	1917	USA enters WWI
News Correspondent for the <i>Chicago Daily News</i>	1918	WWI ends
<i>Smoke and Steel</i> published	1919	Woodrow Wilson's League of Nations idea fails in Congress
	1920	Women gain the right to vote
<i>Slabs of Sunburnt West</i> and <i>Rootabaga Stories</i> published	1921	
Family moves to Harbert, MI	1922	Roaring 20's/Age of Machines and Jazz/Harlem Renaissance
<i>Lincoln: The Prairie Years</i> published	1925	
<i>American Songbag</i> published	1926	
<i>Good Morning America</i> published	1927	Charles Lindberg crosses the Atlantic ocean solo
	1928	



Sandburg leaves <i>Chicago Daily News</i>	1929	Economic collapse/Wall St. Stock Market crash
	1932	FDR initiates the New Deal
Pulitzer Prize in history for <i>Lincoln: The War Years</i>	1939	Nazi Germany invades Poland. WWII begins
Works for war effort	1945	WWII ends
Family pays \$40,000 for 240 acre farm in Flat Rock, NC	1948	Suburbs, TV and baby-boomers flourish/Cold War begins
His only novel <i>Remembrance Rock</i> published	1950	Korean War
Pulitzer Prize in Literature for <i>Complete Poems</i>	1954	McCarthy Hearings
Speaks before a joint session of Congress to celebrate Lincoln's 150th birthday	1959	
Works in Hollywood on <i>The Greatest Story Ever Told</i>	1960	American soldiers in Vietnam
<i>Honey and Salt</i> published	1963	JFK Assassinated
LB Johnson awards Sandburg the Presidential Medal of Freedom	1964	Civil Rights and Vietnam escalates
Sandburg dies on July 22 at age 89	1967	
	1968	Congress votes to establish Carl Sandburg Home National Historic Site within the National Park System



<p><b>Subjects</b> American History Literature Art Writing</p>
<p><b>Materials</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <i>Complete Poems</i> by Carl Sandburg or copies of specific poems for each group to use</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> American history textbooks or support materials that emphasize the history of the early to mid-twentieth century</li> </ul>
<p><b>Handouts</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Carl Sandburg time line from previous unit</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Poetry as News</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> poems: “And They Obey”, “I Am the People, the Mob”, and “Muckers”</li> </ul>
<p><b>Teaching Techniques</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> Lecture</li> <li> Writing assignment(s)</li> <li> Handout(s)</li> <li> Class discussion</li> <li> Small group discussion</li> <li> Additional research</li> </ul>

## CARL SANDBURG’S POETRY AS NEWS

### Background

Throughout his writing career, Carl Sandburg’s works reflected the face of America and her experiences. Whether it was war, poverty, civil rights, or immigration, Carl wrote what he chose to observe.

Sandburg was called “The Poet of the People” because he spoke of the American experience through his poetry. His epic poem *The People, Yes* gives testament to Sandburg’s desire to become the voice for the people. He passionately championed for those who did not have words or power to speak for themselves.

Throughout his other works of poetry, one can find a reflection of history. This activity will challenge students to find the stories behind the poetry and to find the poetry behind the stories.

### Procedures

1. Divide the class into groups of three. Explain to the class that they will be working in small groups and attempting to show the relationship between two of Carl Sandburg’s poems and American history. Use the handout of poems for students to research. Each of the poems has a direct relationship with a major historic event or movement.
2. After each group has their two poems, explain that each group is expected to simply rewrite the poem as if it were a news story about a historic event. The groups may use their history books to help them clarify and expand upon the information they decipher in the poems. Allow the students time to write their stories and monitor their progress.
3. When all the students are finished, have the groups share their news articles aloud with the class. Discuss the results of the student research. Emphasize the relationship of events in history with the impact on the lives of people who lived during that time. Stress to the students that poetry was Sandburg’s method of writing how he felt about war, poverty, labor unions, and the common person. Collect the students’ news articles and post them in the classroom.





## AND THEY OBEY

Smash down the cities.  
 Knock the walls to pieces.  
 Break the factories and cathedrals, warehouses and homes  
 Into loose piles of stone and lumber and black burnt wood:  
 You are the soldiers and we command you.

Build up the cities.  
 Set up the walls again.  
 Put together once more the factories and cathedrals, warehouses and homes  
 Into buildings for life and labor:  
 You are workmen and citizens all: We command you.

## I AM THE PEOPLE, THE MOB

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.

## MUCKERS

Twenty men stand watching the muckers.  
 Stabbing the sides of the ditch  
 Where clay gleams yellow,  
 Driving the blades of their shovels  
 Deeper and deeper for the new gas mains,  
 Wiping sweat off their faces  
 With red bandanas.

The muckers work on...pausing...to pull  
 Their boots out of suckholes where they slosh.

Of the twenty looking on  
 Ten murmur, "O, it's a hell of a job,"  
 Ten others, "Jesus, I wish I had the job."



## THE COMMON PERSON AS A HERO

### Background

Heroes are an important part of people's lives. It is this person, male or female "admired for their achievements and noble qualities," as Merriam Webster's *Collegiate Dictionary* notes, who can steer others in a similar path. Carl Sandburg expressed his admiration throughout his life for the nobility and contribution of the common person. His poems about ordinary workers abound.

Many people, however, worry that heroes are in short supply today. Instead of recognizing the good works and noble qualities of people, many people put figures in a "hero" position based simply on their extravagant lifestyle and paycheck they receive.

This lesson will focus on who a hero is. Have heroes changed over the years? And, if so, why? Can't the common worker still be among the lists of heroes, even today?

### Procedures

1. A teacher-initiated discussion of "Who is a hero?" can elicit responses from the class which can be recorded in chart form. Remind students a "hero" can be male or female.
2. After this initial brainstorming, the students can take time to reflect and write a few paragraphs about who their hero is. It is recommended that students who struggle be allowed to write about why they don't have a hero, since that is telling as well.
3. Voluntary sharing time of some of the student writings can lead to another discussion about the importance of heroes.
4. Again, a chart could be compiled looking at "Reasons why we need heroes" and "Reasons why we don't need heroes."
5. It is at this point that the teacher can lead the group through a comparison and contrasting of the suggested heroes. Is economic status a thread that makes a person worthy of heroic status? Do the heroes suggested by the students demonstrate a nobility or are they limited to a fine-tuned athletic prowess only?
6. It is useful to allow students to work up a Venn diagram following the discussion to show the different aspects

### Subjects

Language Arts  
Reading

### Handout

- "The People, Yes" excerpt

### Teaching Techniques

-  Lecture
-  Writing assignment(s)
-  Class discussion
-  Small group discussion
-  Internet search
-  Additional research





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THE PEOPLE, YES  
(14)

The people is Everyman, everybody.  
Everybody is you and me and all others.  
What everybody says is what we all say.  
    And what is it we all say?

Where did we get these languages?  
Why is your baby-talk deep in your blood?  
What is the cling of the tongue  
To what it heard with its mothers-milk?

They cross on the ether now.  
They travel on high frequencies  
Over the border-lines and barriers  
Of mountain ranges and oceans.  
When shall we all speak the same language?  
And do we want to have all the same language?  
Are we learning a few great signs and passwords?

Why should Everyman be lost for words?  
The questions are put every day in every tongue:  
    “Where you from Stranger?  
    Where were you born?  
    Got any money?  
    What do you work at?  
    Where’s your passport?  
    Who are your people?”

Over the ether crash the languages.  
    And the people listen.  
As on the plain of Howdeehow they listen.  
    They want to hear.  
They will be told when the next war is ready.  
The long wars and the short wars will come on the air,  
How many got killed and how the war ended  
And who got what and the price paid  
And how there were tombs for the Unknown Soldier,  
    The boy nobody knows the name of,  
The boy whose great fame is that of the masses,

The millions of names too many to write on a tomb,  
The heroes, the cannonfodder, the living targets,  
The mutilated and sacred dead,  
The people, yes.

Two countries with two flags  
are nevertheless one land, one blood, one people—  
    can this be so?  
And the earth belongs to the family of man?  
    can this be so?

The first world war came and its cost was laid on the people.  
The second world war—the third—what will be the cost?  
And will it repay the people for what they pay?



<p><b>Subjects</b> Language Arts Reading Geography Social Studies</p>
<p><b>Materials</b> <input type="checkbox"/> City maps if the focus is on the town. If lesson is expanded to other areas, suitable maps should also be available.</p>
<p><b>Handout</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Vocabulary list <input type="checkbox"/> poem “Chicago”</p>
<p><b>Teaching Techniques</b></p> <p> Lecture</p> <p> Writing assignment(s)</p> <p> Handout(s)</p> <p> Class discussion</p> <p> Additional research</p>

## TOWNS AS HEROES

### Background

Heroes can be found outside the realm of people. One of Carl Sandburg’s most famous works that continues to speak its timelessness is “Chicago.”

Sandburg has worked magic in describing the reality of the city. And, even though there are good and bad aspects to the bustling life of the “Hog Butcher for the World,” in the end, Sandburg lets his reader know that he considers Chicago to be a “hero” among cities in the United States.

### Procedures

1. Have students silently read Sandburg’s “Chicago.” Then the teacher can read it to the class.
2. Have students jot down ideas of what they think the poem is saying and mark particular words or phrases that add to the sensory detail of the work. What was Chicago going through during this time period? From what could it be recovering?
3. The class is ready to discuss what they might consider heroic about their hometown or a town they have visited. Knowing the history of the town will be important in understanding how the town/city could possibly be a hero.
4. Give the parameters of the writing assignment. Have students research the town or city that will serve as the subject of their writing. A class-produced questionnaire might be useful to all. Contact the tourism office, the Chamber of Commerce or the historical society.
5. Have students compose a poem about the heroic, yet realistic, aspects of a city.

### Modifications

- An artistic extension of the lesson could be for the student to draw or create a cityscape to highlight his/her writing.
- Can a town by itself be heroic? What is the common thread found when listening to each others’ stories of heroic towns?



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## CHICAGO

Hog Butcher for the World,  
Tool Maker, Stacker of Wheat,  
Player with Railroads and the Nation's Freight Handler;  
Stormy, husky, brawling,  
City of the Big Shoulders:

They tell me you are wicked and I believe them, for I have seen  
your painted women under the gas lamps luring the farm boys.  
And they tell me you are crooked and I answer: Yes, it is true I  
have seen the gunman kill and go free to kill again.  
And they tell me you are brutal and my reply is: On the faces of  
women and children I have seen the marks of wanton hunger.  
And having answered so I turn once more to those who sneer at  
this my city, and I give them back the sneer and say to them:  
Come and show me another city with lifted head singing so proud  
to be alive and coarse and strong and cunning.  
Flinging magnetic curses amid the toil of piling job on job, here is a  
tall bold slugger set vivid against the little soft cities;  
Fierce as a dog with tongue lapping for action, cunning as a savage  
pitted against the wilderness,  
Bareheaded,  
Shoveling,  
Wrecking,  
Planning,  
Building, breaking, rebuilding,  
Under the smoke, dust all over his mouth, laughing with  
white teeth,  
Under the terrible burden of destiny laughing as a young man  
laughs,  
Laughing even as an ignorant fighter laughs who has never lost  
a battle,  
Bragging and laughing that under his wrist is the pulse, and under  
his ribs the heart of the people,  
Laughing!  
Laughing the stormy, husky, brawling laughter of Youth, half-naked,  
sweating, proud to be Hog Butcher, Tool Maker, Stacker of  
Wheat, Player with Railroads and Freight Handler to the Nation.

