

I AND YOU

STUDY GUIDE



By Lauren Gunderson

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Plot, Characters, and Setting	pg 3
About the Artists	pg 4
Walt Whitman’s <i>Leaves of Grass</i>	pg 5
Classroom Resources	pg 6

SchoolFest student matinees and the accompanying materials fulfill the following standard objectives:

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.11-12.1 Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.11-12.2 Write informative or explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.11-12.10 Write routinely over extended time frames, including time for research, reflection, and revision, and shorter time frames such as a single sitting or a day or two for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.11-12.1 Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on Grade 11/12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.11-12.4 Present information, findings, and supporting evidence, conveying a clear and distinct perspective, such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning, alternative or opposing perspectives are addressed, and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and a range of formal and informal tasks.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.RL.11-12.1 Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS *cont.*

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.RL.11-12.3 Analyze the impact of the author’s choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.RL.11-12.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful. (Include Shakespeare as well as other authors.)

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.RL.11-12.5 Analyze how an author’s choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text (e.g., the choice of where to begin or end a story, the choice to provide a comedic or tragic resolution) contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.L.11-12.4 Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on Grade 11/12 reading and content, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies.

NATIONAL CORE ARTS STANDARDS

TH.Re7.1 Perceive and analyze artistic work.

TH.Re8.1 Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.

TH.Re9.1 Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work.

TH.Cn10.1 Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art.

TH.Cn11.1 Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding.

PLOT

One afternoon, Anthony arrives unexpectedly at Caroline's door bearing a beat-up copy of Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* and an urgent homework assignment from their English teacher. Even though Caroline hasn't been to school in months, she is as quick and sardonic as Anthony is athletic, sensitive, and popular. As these two let down their guard and share their secrets, this seemingly mundane poetry project unlocks a much deeper mystery that has brought them together. *I and You* is an ode to youth, life, love, and the strange beauty of human connectedness.

CHARACTERS

Anthony: a boy, 17. He is neat, poised, mature for his age. African-American. He's an "A" student, a team player, a nice guy. He's not really great around girls. He takes his homework very seriously. When he likes something he is all in. Throughout the whole play he looks at Caroline like he's trying to figure her out. Like he really needs to know who she is.

Caroline: a girl, 17. She is in comfy clothing, she does not expect company, she is sick but mainly just looks a little weak and frumpy. She doesn't go out. She is cynical, over it, and does not let a stray "feeling" near the surface. White.

Playwright Lauren Gunderson also includes this casting note:

The race of each character can be altered. The only essentiality is that the characters not be the *same* race.

SETTING

Now. In your city (I imagine Atlanta, Georgia). In Caroline's room. A girl's room but not girly. Lots of tech. This is the room of a person with a serious illness, but she tries to limit the look of sickness.



Maisie Williams and Zach Wyatt in *I and You* at Hampstead Theatre, London. Photo: Manual Harlan

ABOUT PLAYWRIGHT LAUREN GUNDERSON

Lauren M. Gunderson is the most produced playwright in America of 2017, the winner of the Lanford Wilson Award, the Steinberg/ATCA New Play Award, and the Otis Guernsey New Voices Award. She is also a finalist for the Susan Smith Blackburn Prize and John Gassner Award for Playwriting and a recipient of the Mellon Foundation’s 3-Year Residency with Marin Theatre Company. She studied Southern Literature and Drama at Emory University and Dramatic Writing at NYU’s Tisch School, where she was a Reynolds Fellow in Social Entrepreneurship. Her work has been commissioned, produced, and developed at companies across the US including South Coast Rep, The Kennedy Center, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, The O’Neill, The Denver Center, San Francisco Playhouse, Marin Theatre, Synchronicity, Berkeley Rep, Shotgun Players, TheatreWorks, Crowded Fire, and more. She co-authored *Miss Bennet: Christmas at Pemberley* with Margot Melcon, which was one of the most produced plays in America in 2017.



Playwright Lauren Gunderson

ABOUT POET WALT WHITMAN

Walt Whitman (1819-1892) is considered one of the most influential American poets and the “father of free verse.” He was born in New York and lived most of his life in New Jersey, and his works reflect early Americana. Whitman began his writing career as a journalist, essayist, and editor of several newspapers; however, this career didn’t last long as Whitman’s more liberal views clashed with the views of the day. Despite beginning his career in more traditional writing styles, his major work *Leaves of Grass* was a departure from his contemporaries. Fellow poet Ralph Waldo Emerson said the collection was “the most extraordinary piece of wit and wisdom” to come from an American poet.



An etching of Walt Whitman as published in the first edition of *Leaves of Grass* in 1855.

The preface to *Leaves of Grass* includes this advice:

“This is what you shall do: Love the earth and sun and the animals, despise riches, give alms to everyone that asks, stand up for the stupid and crazy, devote your income and labor to others, hate tyrants, argue not concerning God, have patience and indulgence toward the people, take off your hat to nothing known or unknown or to any man or number of men, go freely with powerful uneducated persons and with the young and with the mothers of families, read these leaves in the open air every season of every year of your life, re-examine all you have been told at school or church or in any book, dismiss whatever insults your own soul; and your very flesh shall be a great poem...”

-Walt Whitman

Leaves of Grass, a book of poetry by Walt Whitman, was first published in 1855, and Whitman continued to edit and add to the book until his death. The original printing contained 12 poems; by Whitman's death in 1892, the book contained over 400 poems. *Leaves of Grass* is both Whitman's Transcendentalist celebration of the body, mind, and material world and a reflection on a turbulent time in America's history. Later editions included ruminations on the Civil War and poems that mourned the death of Abraham Lincoln.

In *I and You*, Anthony arrives at Caroline's house to work on a group project centered on Whitman's poem "Song of Myself." In the 1867 edition of *Leaves of Grass*, "Song of Myself" is divided into 52 sections; the first and last passages are printed below. Their assignment is to analyze the use of the pronouns "I" and "You" in this poem.

Song of Myself

by Walt Whitman

1

I Celebrate myself, and sing myself,
And what I assume you shall assume,
For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to
you.

I loafe and invite my soul,
I lean and loafe at my ease observing a spear of
summer grass.

My tongue, every atom of my blood, form'd from
this soil, this air,

Born here of parents born here from parents the
same, and their parents the same,
I, now thirty-seven years old in perfect health begin,
Hoping to cease not till death.

Creeds and schools in abeyance,
Retiring back a while sufficed at what they are, but
never forgotten,
I harbor for good or bad, I permit to speak at every
hazard,
Nature without check with original energy.

52

The spotted hawk swoops by and accuses me, he
complains of my gab and my loitering.
I too am not a bit tamed, I too am untranslatable,
I sound my barbaric yawp over the roofs of the
world.

The last scud of day holds back for me,
It flings my likeness after the rest and true as any on
the shadow'd wilds,
It coaxes me to the vapor and the dusk.

I depart as air, I shake my white locks at the runaway
sun,
I effuse my flesh in eddies, and drift it in lacy jags.

I bequeath myself to the dirt to grow from the grass I
love,
If you want me again look for me under your boot-
soles.

You will hardly know who I am or what I mean,
But I shall be good health to you nevertheless,
And filter and fibre your blood.

Failing to fetch me at first keep encouraged,
Missing me one place search another,
I stop somewhere waiting for you.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

PRE-SHOW QUESTIONS

1. In *I and You*, Anthony comes to Caroline's house to work on a group project. Have you ever worked on a group project with another student you didn't really know? What did you learn about your fellow student? Did you end up being friends with your partner?
2. *I and You* is a two-hander, or play with two actors. Have you ever seen a play with just two actors, or a play with one setting? How do you think a play with such stripped down elements might be different from other plays you have experienced?

POST-SHOW QUESTIONS

1. **Spoiler alert!** Knowing what you know now about the twist ending of *I and You*, what moments of foreshadowing can you identify in the play? Playwright Lauren Gunderson has said that the events of the play correspond with the stages of Caroline's surgery. At what moment do you think the transplant was complete?
2. *I and You* was presented on ASF's Octagon Stage, which is a three-quarter round and much smaller than many theatres. How do you think that the proximity of the actors and other audience members affected your understanding of the play? In what way did the scenic and technical design impact the production?

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

1. **On Your Feet:** Music plays an integral role in introducing the audience to Anthony and Caroline; their musical interests reveal key characteristics of their personalities. In the play, Anthony and Caroline take turns listening to each other's favorite music. When Anthony plays a favorite song he asks Caroline, "What do you hear?...in the music what do you hear? Or see — what do you see when you close your eyes." Complete this exercise on your feet! Every student in the class should submit a favorite song; a mix of music with and without lyrics would be best. Play each song without introduction and ask students to first listen to the music with their eyes closed. Share Anthony's question with the class: what do they "see" and "hear" in the music? When they're ready, students can begin to move as if they are inhabiting the space suggested in their mind's eye. Coach students to move beyond where the music was made, or where they would listen to the music. Once movement has been established, ask students one at a time to share where they are and what they're doing there. Are others in agreement, or do students have very different ideas? Ask students to identify the kind of person who might listen to this music. What can we infer about a person who loves this song? Which student do you believe submitted this song?
2. **At Your Seat:** Anthony and Caroline are working on a project analyzing the use of pronouns "I" and "You" in Walt Whitman's poem "Song of Myself." Anthony clarifies that "It's about what he means when he says 'I' or 'you' or 'we.'" The meanings shift during the poem. And I think we're supposed to track it." In pairs, complete the same project. Analyze the use of pronouns in "Song of Myself": do you agree with Anthony and Caroline's analysis? Present your findings to your class on a poster board, just like the pair in *I and You*. How can you visually showcase your findings? Do you agree with Anthony that "Walt Whitman is amazing, which like all of humanity agrees on?"