I AND YOU

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Directed by Mark Ferraro-Hauck
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**Plot Summary (from the Publisher)**

One afternoon, Anthony arrives unexpectedly at classmate Caroline's door bearing a beat-up copy of Walt Whitman's Leaves of Grass, an urgent assignment from their English teacher. Homebound due to illness, Caroline hasn't been to school in months, but she is as quick and sardonic as Anthony is athletic, sensitive, and popular. As these two let down their guards 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 (descriptions from the script)**

**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, does not let a stray “feeling” near the surface.

**Anthony**: a boy, 17. He is neat, poised, mature for his age. African American. He’s an “A” student, a nice guy. He’s not really great around girls. He takes his homework very seriously. When he likes something (jazz music) 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.

**Discussion Questions**

1. Given how the author describes the characters and the publisher describes the play, what presumptions can you make about the work?

2. How were your presumptions supported or surprised after watching the show?
Whitman was born in 1819 in New York and moved throughout the city of Brooklyn for most of his youth.

Whitman only attended public school for 5 years.

Whitman apprenticed at the Long Island Patriot Newspaper at age 10.

Before the age of 25, Whitman worked in over 20 positions as a printer, writer, teacher, speaker, and editor.

The first edition of *Leaves of Grass* was published in 1855 and only contained 12 poems and was less than 100 pages.

Whitman published multiple editions of *Leaves of Grass* throughout his lifetime, the last of which was his 'Deathbed Edition' that was over 500 pages.

Despite being a pacifist, Whitman took a job with the Union Army to be near the army hospital when his brother was injured in the Civil War.

In 1866, Whitman was discharged from his job at the Bureau of Indian Affairs because of his supposedly "obscene" poetry. Some historians suspect the true reason for his dismissal was his homosexuality.

Whitman suffered from depression throughout his life.

In 1873, Whitman suffered a stroke. During his recovery, he worked on a new addition of *Leaves of Grass*.

In 1881, the newest edition was withdrawn after a complaint from the Boston District Attorney. This attempt at suppression led to increased demand for copies of the poem.

Whitman moved to Camden, New Jersey where he continued to write and lecture.

In 1891 Whitman died of pneumonia.
‘POETS to come! orators, singers, musicians to come!
Not to-day is to justify me and answer what I am for,
But you, a new brood, native, athletic, continental, greater than before known,
Arouse! for you must justify me.
I myself but write one or two indicative words for the future,
I but advance a moment only to wheel and hurry back in the darkness.
I am a man who, sauntering along without fully stopping, turns a
casual look upon you and then averts his face,
Leaving it to you to prove and define it,
Expecting the main things from you.’

‘Poets to Come’ from *Leaves of Grass* 1881-82.

**Inspiration**

This excerpt from *Leaves of Grass* has been interpreted by over 100 poets and writers to be an invitation to respond, react, and repudiate Walt Whitman’s work. Notable participants in this ritual include Langston Hughes, Pablo Neruda, and Allen Ginsberg. Lauren Gunderson’s play *I and You* is another example of writers’ continuing fascination with responding to Whitman.

**Criticism**

Although many authors have chosen to celebrate Whitman, not all responses are positive. Many artists have focused on Whitman’s racism, as well as his involvement with the Bureau of Indian Affairs. In April 2019, Timothy McNair, a student at Northwestern University, refused to participate in a choral rendition of one of Whitman’s poems due to Whitman’s racist views. This became a controversy where students and faculty, as well as academics around the country, took sides. Some argued that Whitman’s hope for an egalitarian future absolved him of his racism. Others tried to shift focus to Whitman’s homosexuality and dismissed his racism as an unfortunate product of his time. Poet CaConrad wrote “From Whitman to Walmart” in honor of Timothy McNair and acknowledged that he, a black gay man, had “felt safe and at home in Gay Grandpa’s poems”. CaConrad admitted he had “gotten lost in my younger illusions of this man who was once my hero” and rejects Whitman as simply another racist.

**Conclusion**

Some celebrate Walt Whitman for his sexuality, his views on the promise of America, and his contributions to poetry. Others stand against the legacy of Whitman, his racism, and the celebration of a very flawed man. Remarkably, regardless of whether they stand with or against him, the poet has continued to inspire generation after generation to respond to him.
Objective:
To familiarize students with *I and You* by speaking lines from the play. This activity helps students form questions, gain insight, and build excitement for seeing these lines spoken in the production. This activity serves the students best if completed before they attend the play.

Materials:
A tennis ball or hacky sack
Slips of paper, cut from Tossing Lines Resource on the next page (2 sets if necessary)

Procedure:
Cut and distribute the slips of paper (see Tossing Lines Resource) to student volunteers. Give students a few minutes, or overnight if appropriate, to memorize or prepare a dramatic reading of their line with no memorization. Have the students form a circle and give one student the ball. After students speak a line, they toss the ball to another student who speaks their assigned line. Students toss the ball throughout the circle until all lines have been heard a few times. Encourage students to speak lines with varying emotions, seeking out the best way to perform the lines.

Optional:
Re-assign lines within the group to other students in the classroom and continue for another round.

Freewriting/Discussion:
1. What can you tell about the setting and time period of this play?
2. What do the lines tell you about who the characters might be and the relationships between them?
3. What might be the central conflict? Which lines support your ideas?
4. Can you predict which themes may be portrayed in this production based on the lines you’ve heard?

To the teacher:
Cut these apart and distribute to students.

I just came here for homework – which I don’t want to do.

Fine. Be impossible. Be anything you want.

My body hates me, my house hates me, and you come with homework.

I am not your Sick Kid Poster and Walt Whitman can bite me.

Everyone thinks I’m delicate and it makes me wanna break glass.

Nice can be fake.

I swear to god if I lose wi-fi? I’d rather lose my nose.

Okay, but the music of the words. It’s epic, right? It churns.

I’m pretty sure I sense a frolic in this thing.

The ending is not the most important part

Feel it for a sec. Then just follow it. Where does it go?

It’s like fix me or kill me already.

Team Yawp for the win

I and this mystery. Here we stand

All my big plans are basically fiction. I don’t look forward to things...actively
**Objective:**
Familiarize yourself the Walt Whitman and I and You by reading the below poem and scene. Try to gain insights about the characters in the play, and into Whitman.

**Materials:**
The below poems and scene.

**Procedure:**
Read the poem and discussion the first prompt below. Then read the scene and see how the characters approach Walt Whitman. *Additional challenge:

> 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.’
> Verse 52 from Leaves of Grass.

**Freewriting/Discussion:**
1. What do you notice about Whitman’s poetry? How is it similar or different from other poems you’ve read?
2. How do each of the characters show how they feel about each other?
3. After reading the small excerpt of Whitman and the scene, where do you agree and disagree with Caroline or Anthony?
4. What do you notice about how the characters select and use words? Can you draw any comparisons or contrasts to the way Whitman writes poetry? Or the way you talk to your friends?
TWO.

(A little bit later that same night.
ANTHONY is up reading while CAROLINE works on the poster.)

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

CAROLINE. Under your boot-soles...

ANTHONY.
"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."

CAROLINE. Filter and fibre...

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

(The end. Pause. ANTHONY waits to hear a reaction...)

CAROLINE. That's the end?

ANTHONY. It's great right?Isn't it great? Didn't you like it? You liked it.

CAROLINE. HoldupWaitJust...gimme a minute...

(She takes a minute to catch up with her feelings...)

It's like...this is going to sound so dumb but, it's like, at the end at least...like he's talking to me.

ANTHONY. It's not dumb. I thought the same thing.

CAROLINE. You did? Ok 'cause that was getting spooky for a minute.

ANTHONY. That's just how good it is.

CAROLINE. Or how creepy.

ANTHONY. No see. When you read it—that feeling is, to me I mean,
it's like he's here, like he's with us here because we're reading it and he's...reborn in us.

CAROLINE. Which is creepy.

ANTHONY. Ok, but the music of the words. It's epic, right? It churns.

CAROLINE. Churns? No. I think it's more—I don't know—happy. I mean he's singing and yawping and I'm pretty sure I sense a frolic in this thing.
To The Teacher:
Below is a list of movements to be used in combination with the following activities from the I and You study guide: Tossing Lines or Scene to Read Aloud.

Procedure:
As a warm-up before reading the scenes or lines, divide students into groups of 3 or 4. Invite one group to stand at the front of the room and call out a few of the movements. Ask students to show these movements (in theatre, we show, not tell). Have students select one movement and incorporate it into their reading of the tossing lines or scene.

Movements:
1. Turn away from the other actor.
2. Take the other actor’s face in your hands.
3. Move toward each other quickly or slowly.
4. Raise a fist and shake it.
5. Stand with feet spread, hands on hips.
6. Cover your face with your hands.
7. Shrug your shoulders.
8. Throw your hands up in the air.
10. Put your hand up to your chin.
11. Point at the other actor.
12. Touch the other actor on the arm or shoulder.
13. Move away quickly or slowly.
14. Cross your arms in front of your chest.
15. Stand with your hands behind your back.
16. Wring your hands.
17. Stand very tall and straight.
18. Cower and fidget.
ANTHONY. Uh, it's totally there. It's right on the page. It's in the—like the—small stuff. The description of the small stuff...look.

(He references the book.)

"This is the press of a bashful hand, this the float and odor of hair. This the touch of my lips to yours, this the murmur of yearning."

(They are a little too close. Pause.)

Small stuff.

CAROLINE. Uh huh.

ANTHONY. You see the way he—

CAROLINE. Got it.

(Awkward pause.
Hyper awkward transition. The following is fast.)

Have you ever seen that website Stuff White People Like?

ANTHONY. Uh.

CAROLINE. It's funny.

ANTHONY. What?

CAROLINE. They have this massive list with stuff like NPR and sea salt.

ANTHONY. Uh.

CAROLINE. Which is so true.

ANTHONY. That's great.

CAROLINE. Sea salt.

ANTHONY. You went weird.

CAROLINE. What?

ANTHONY. Just then. That got weird.

CAROLINE. (Covering the awkward:) It did not. How was your day? You had a day, let's talk about it— Take a break— We need a break— Does this have too much glitter? What's your favorite music? Do you play a sport?

ANTHONY. Oh my god, what just happened?

CAROLINE. What sport? Sports are things.

ANTHONY. Basketball. And we are on fast forward right now—chill out.

CAROLINE. (Slower:) Do you. Enjoy. The Basketball.
Objective:
Walt Whitman’s use of pronouns is much discussed in academic circles as well as within I and You. Whitman uses the pronouns ‘you’ 158 times and ‘I’ almost 500 times in Leaves of Grass. Read excerpts from Leaves of Grass and I and You to explore Whitman’s use of pronouns and why they have held such fascination for so many.

Materials:
The below poems and scene.

Procedure:
Read the attached scene. Then examine the excerpts from Leaves of Grass. As a class or in small groups try to identify whom Whitman is writing to in each excerpt.

Freewriting/Discussion:
1. While many (including Caroline and Anthony) speculate on Whitman’s intentions in regards to pronouns, it is equally possible that Whitman, a free-form poet, had no particular motivation, and was merely changing subjects and the pronouns with them. Which side do you agree with? What evidence can you offer to support your belief?

2. Regardless of his intentions, Whitman was unique in his lack of consistency with his pronouns. How do some of your favorite artists use pronouns? How do they address the audience in their work? Would you say that Whitman is still fairly unique in his use of ‘I and ‘you’ or that play with subject and audience has become common in art?
Excerpt 1:

‘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.’

Excerpt 2:

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

Excerpt 3:

‘Tenderly will I use you curling grass, 
It may be you transpire from the breasts of young men, 
It may be if I had known them I would have loved them, 
It may be you are from old people, or from offspring taken soon 
out of their mothers' laps, 
And here you are the mothers' laps. 
This grass is very dark to be from the white heads of old mothers, 
Darker than the colorless beards of old men, 
Dark to come from under the faint red roofs of mouths.’
CAROLINE. We can’t tape me right now, I look like a balloon.

ANTHONY. You look great.

CAROLINE. I do not but thank you for lying.

ANTHONY. Uh. No way. I’m actually really bad at presentations. And you make me nervous.


ANTHONY. It just feels weird.

CAROLINE. But you know this stuff like better than a professor and you’re gonna be awesome and you know you’re so...like...so...

(She approaches him—like she might kiss him—she wants to kiss him—she stops herself—high fives instead, or hits his shoulder, or something not smooth.)

CAROLINE. Super super great.
Like why didn’t I know you until now? That’s...stupid.

ANTHONY. Yeah.

CAROLINE. Life is dumb.
Hey, why don’t...why don’t I do my speech. Or some of it. Or something.

ANTHONY. Yeah, that’s great. That’s a good idea.

CAROLINE. Ok. But, you know, shocker—it won’t be good.

ANTHONY. You’ll be way better than me.

CAROLINE. I really won’t.

ANTHONY. Whatever. I didn’t give you enough time, it’s my fault.

CAROLINE. Let the record show that everything is Anthony’s fault. Ok. Let’s just do this.

(CAROLINE prepares, shakes it out, primps a little as ANTHONY sets up his phone or Caroline’s computer to record her.)

ANTHONY. Yep. Ready when you are.

CAROLINE. I am so ready. Press record. And try to contain your applause.

(He does.)

ANTHONY. Ok.
Go.
(She takes a preparatory breath
Then she goes...)  

CAROLINE. Hi. This is Caroline. And I'm going to give a brief presentation on Whitman's use of the pronoun "You" in his poem "Song of Myself." Which is from Leaves of Grass. Which you know. Ok. The poem begins:

"For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you."

"You" is the reader in this case. Like—us. He's talking to us, which is cool. Ok.

But only a few pages later, "you" changes to mean his own soul. Or the soul of the speaker. It says:

"I believe in you my soul."

Then. Just a little further on, the "you" becomes personal again—like he's talking to a friend.

"This hour I tell things in confidence,
I might not tell everybody, but I will tell you."

But soon the "you" changes again—this time into the earth itself:

"Smile O voluptuous cool-breath'd earth!
Prodigal, you have given me love."

Whitman's "you" started out as the reader, then became his own soul, then a friend, then the entire planet. Finally. In the last passage he uses "you" to mean all of us:

"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."

Whitman ends his poem exactly where he started it. By speaking directly to the "you" of the entire world, a "you" that even death can't stop. The last line reads:

"Missing me one place search another,
I stop somewhere waiting for you."

Because somewhere, even unseen, unnamed we wait for each other. Because together we are, to quote page 30, "deathless." Because you is very much...we.

(Pause. She's done. Pause.
He heard exactly what he wanted to hear.
He's close to her. She wants him to kiss her so bad...)  

ANTHONY. That was... You just like made that up right now. That was amazing. You really get this, like, really.
Objective:
To deepen student's engagement with the play through reflective writing prompts.

Procedure:
Write a short essay or give a presentation based on the prompts.

Prompt #1:
*I and You* relies heavily on music as well as poetry in it’s story-telling. Caroline & Anthony defined themselves by the music they listen to. Is there a genre or musical artist who defines you? Can you pick a song that you would use to introduce yourself? How does this make you unique? Focus on how the artist uses story, images, repetition, and theme to create the lyrics. How do these elements come together and speak to you?

Prompt #2:
*I and You* and *Leaves of Grass* explore the natural process of life and death. Whitman wrote *Leaves of Grass* from his twenties until his death, and his deteriorating health and eventual death became more prominent subjects in his poetry as he aged. Whitman was a transcendentalist and believed that every part of life, including death and ailments, were wonderous and deserving of praise. In *I and You*, Caroline has a very different view of death. She personifies her sickness, and the very real threat of death it brings into her life, as a bully or adversary that prevents her from simply being a teenager. Have has the previous year changed your views on illness and death? Are you more closely aligned with Whitman or with Caroline? Can you find the merits of each view?

Prompt #3:
At the beginning of *I & You* Caroline & Anthony are hesitant to be their authentic selves around each other, leading to snap judgments, lies, alienation, & hurt feelings. How do you present yourself to others? How do you think others perceive you? How would you describe your authentic self-likes & dislikes, aesthetics, traits, quirks, views & beliefs? How does this differ from the self you present? Is it easy or hard to be vulnerable with others? How do you show people your authentic self?
1. Caroline & Anthony connect over their mutual love and interest in Walt Whitman’s writing. Have you ever bonded with someone over a shared love of a song, Tik-Tok video, movie, or sports team? Describe how a shared interest can bring people together though they might disagree on other issues.

2. How do the pronouns you use give you power? Why do pronouns matter in the world? How can you share power with others around pronouns?

3. Have you ever had a friendship with someone who was radically different from yourself? What were the differences? What are the places you find common ground?

4. Why do think I & You matters right now in light of COVID-19 & the continued fights for antiracism? Describe how moments from the play connects to images, moments, or themes from current events.

5. Describe the ways you see Anthony and Caroline demonstrate perseverance in the play. What tactics did they use to get through a difficult time?

6. Caroline & Anthony defined themselves by the music they listen to. Is there a genre or musical artist who defines you? Talk about why. How does this make you unique?
7. Have you ever come across something and thought "That is SO ME!" What was it (book, movie, character, song, animal, meme, sticker, TikTok?) Tell the story of why you instantly connected with it! Have you shared it with others- do they connect with it as well or agree it represents you perfectly?

8. In the post-show notes, the playwright Lauren Gunderson describes how Caroline’s Bedroom is a metaphor for the play, as well as how the relationship between Caroline and Anthony can be seen as a metaphor for the larger story arc of Caroline undergoing transplant surgery. Can you think of other real-life metaphors you’ve experienced? Or has there been a metaphor from a book or movie that really blew your mind when you realized it? Describe the metaphor!
WE BELIEVE

Young people are artists, makers, and doers. They need to belong and to contribute to their world. When young people make art together, they change themselves and the world around them for the better.

WE DO

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