

# Walt Whitman's Life and Accomplishments Essay

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Born in Long Island, New York on May 31, 1819, Walt Whitman was the second of nine children born into a Democratic family (Benka). By eleven, Whitman ended his formal education and sought employment to financially support his family (Benka). He was able to acquire a job as an apprentice on the Long Island Patriot, where he was exposed to the printing trade and was able to discover his own style of writing (Benka). At age fourteen, Whitman was able to expand his knowledge of writing by working under the Patriot's foreman editor William Hartshorne (Hall). These early years in New York would allow Whitman to hone his skills of close observation and to enhance his grasp on language via reading numerous authors (e.g., Sir Walter Scott and James Fenimore Cooper) and watching plays in theaters (Hall).

On July 4, 1855, Whitman published 795 copies of his first edition of Leaves of Grass. To his surprise, the biggest praise for Leaves of Grass came from [Ralph Waldo Emerson](#) in the form of a five page letter (Folsom). Whitman started to get attention from the public and other writers significantly due to Emerson's approval. There was, however, controversy because many critics called the book "obscene" and "trashy" due to the explicit nature of the book (Folsom). Thanks to Leaves of Grass, Whitman is able to define his writing as "al fresco" poetry, which is poetry written outside the normal boundaries of convention and tradition (Hall).

During Whitman's life, the Civil War proved to have the largest impact on his writing. From the outset, Whitman believed the strength of the nation lay not in the leaders but in the hardworking, patriotic citizens (Folsom). Early in the war, he visited and nursed injured working men and women at Broadway H...

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...avily emphasized points of togetherness and individual cooperation.

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