

# Whitman and Dickinson – American Masters

## Walt Whitman (May 31, 1819 – March 26, 1892)

- Whitman was an American poet, essayist, journalist, and humanist.
- He was part of the transition between Transcendentalism and realism – incorporating both views in his works.
- He is among the most influential poets in the American canon, often called the father of free verse.
  - Whitman’s use of cadence forms the basis of his **free verse**.
- Whitman’s style:
  - Whitman wrote in a wordy, rambling style that was bold and confident.
  - He saw purpose of his poetry as a message to the future.
  - He rejoices in life and celebrates it in his poetry.
  - Focuses on more concrete, practical matters such as the diversity of people.

## Emily Dickinson (December 10, 1830 – May 15, 1886)

- Dickinson was a private poet who published fewer than a dozen of her nearly 1800 poems during her lifetime.
- Her work was usually altered significantly by the publishers to fit with conventional standards of the time.
- Dickinson’s Style:
  - Dickinson wrote short, terse lyrics. Emily was private and shy, writing for herself. Dickinson’s poems seem to welcome death, as preferable to life.
  - She dwells on more high-end philosophical issues such as immortality.
  - Dickinson’s poems are unique for the era in which she wrote. They contain short lines, use slant rhyme, unconventional capitalization and punctuation, and they typically lack titles.
  - Dickinson’s poetry is noted for its precise language

## Both Whitman and Dickinson:

- Both used nature as a source of inspiration and subject in their poems.
  - Both Whitman and Dickinson make astute observations about the human condition.
  - They both abandoned literary conventions in their poems.
- ❖ Later poets were more open to experimentation because of the influence of Dickinson and Whitman.

## Writing Vocabulary:

- **Cadence** is the rhythm and flow of sound, as in poetry and formal speeches.
- When referring to a poetic technique, the word **catalog** refers to a list of related people, places, or events.
- **Free verse** is poetry written without regular rhyme schemes and meter.
- A **paradox** is a statement that appears to be self – contradictory but reveals truth.
- **Slant rhyme** is created by words that have a close, but imprecise, rhyme.
- **Meter** is a set pattern, clearly defined, with a never changing pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables.
- **Epigram** is a short poem or statement that ends with a witty twist or clever statement.