

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Class: \_\_\_\_\_

# Chicago

By Carl Sandburg  
1914

*Carl Sandburg (1878-1967) was a Swedish-American poet, writer, and editor. In this poem, a speaker describes Chicago. As you read, take notes on how the speaker uses figurative language to describe the city.*

- [1] Hog Butcher for the World,  
Tool Maker, Stacker of Wheat,  
Player with Railroads and the Nation's Freight  
Handler;  
Stormy, husky, brawling,  
[5] 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<sup>1</sup> 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:

- [10] 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,

- [15] 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,

- [20] Laughing even as an ignorant<sup>2</sup> 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.



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1. not limited or controlled  
2. **Ignorant (adjective):** lacking knowledge or information about something

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## Text-Dependent Questions

**Directions:** For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: Which statement describes the main theme of the poem?
  - A. Chicago is not perfect, but it is powerful and impressive in its own way.
  - B. The city has an unconventional beauty that is appreciated by very few.
  - C. Chicago is an unforgiving place that is not for the faint-hearted.
  - D. A city is only as good or bad as the people who live in it.
  
2. PART B: Which detail from the text best supports the answer to Part A?
  - A. "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." (Line 6)
  - B. "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." (Line 8)
  - C. "Come and show me another city with lifted head singing so proud to be alive and coarse and strong and / cunning." (Line 10)
  - D. "Bragging and laughing that under his wrist is the pulse, and under his ribs the heart of the people" (Line 21)
  
3. How do the people who are referred to as "they" in the poem provoke the speaker to further discuss Chicago in lines 6-8?
  - A. They describe Chicago's worst qualities, prompting the speaker to defend the city.
  - B. They voice their distaste for city life, prompting the speaker to highlight the positives of all big cities.
  - C. They discuss the challenges in Chicago, prompting the speaker to explain their unlikely success.
  - D. They list the dangers of living in Chicago, prompting the speaker to defend their decision.
  
4. How are the details described in lines 13-17 important to the poem's meaning?
  - A. They emphasize how much hard work takes place in Chicago.
  - B. They stress how many jobs are available in Chicago.
  - C. They show how enjoyable life in Chicago is.
  - D. They portray Chicago as a new city that still needs developing.

5. How does the poet use personification to describe Chicago?

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## Discussion Questions

**Directions:** *Brainstorm your answers to the following questions in the space provided. Be prepared to share your original ideas in a class discussion.*

1. Consider how the speaker personifies Chicago in order to describe the city. What human characteristics would you give to your home town, school, or neighborhood? Discuss why you would choose these characteristics.
2. In the poem, the speaker addresses some of the dangers in cities. Do you think these dangers are present in cities across America today? Share why you think the risks of the city might or might not outweigh the positive traits identified in the poem.
3. In the context of the poem, what makes Chicago special? Do you think these traits are present in other cities across America? Why or why not?