

## Lineage

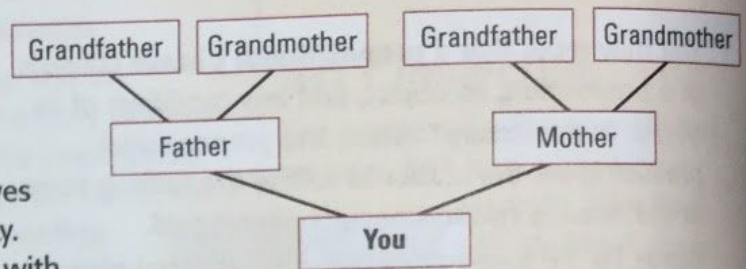
Poetry by  
MARGARET WALKER

## The Courage That My Mother Had

Poetry by  
EDNA ST. VINCENT MILLAY

### Connect to Your Life

**Your Own Tree** How much do you know about your ancestors—the people you are descended from? To explore your lineage, or ancestry, draw a family tree based on the model shown here. Fill in your family members' names where possible, and extend the tree, if you can, with great-grandparents. After completing the diagram, identify the qualities that made these ancestors special in the lives of those younger than they. Then share your thoughts with the rest of the class.



## Build Background

**Family Women** In the poems you are about to read, the speakers describe their ancestors. Although the poets are from different backgrounds, both appreciated the admirable qualities of their own female ancestors. Margaret Walker, who was born in Alabama, grew up listening to stories her grandmother told about her family history during the years of slavery. Edna St. Vincent Millay grew up in Maine. Her mother was a singer and practical nurse who raised her three children alone after divorcing her husband.

## Focus Your Reading

**LITERARY ANALYSIS SOUND DEVICES** Part of the power of poetry comes from the poet's use of sound devices. These include not only **rhyme** and **rhythm** but other techniques as well. **Alliteration** is the repetition of consonant sounds at the beginnings of words, as in the phrase "light lingers." **Repetition** is a repeated use of words or phrases for effect or emphasis, as in the phrase "over and over." **Assonance** is the repetition of vowel sounds within nonrhyming words. *Sea* and *free* are words that rhyme. *Sea* and *heat* are an example of assonance.

Look for examples of these sound devices in the poems you are about to read.

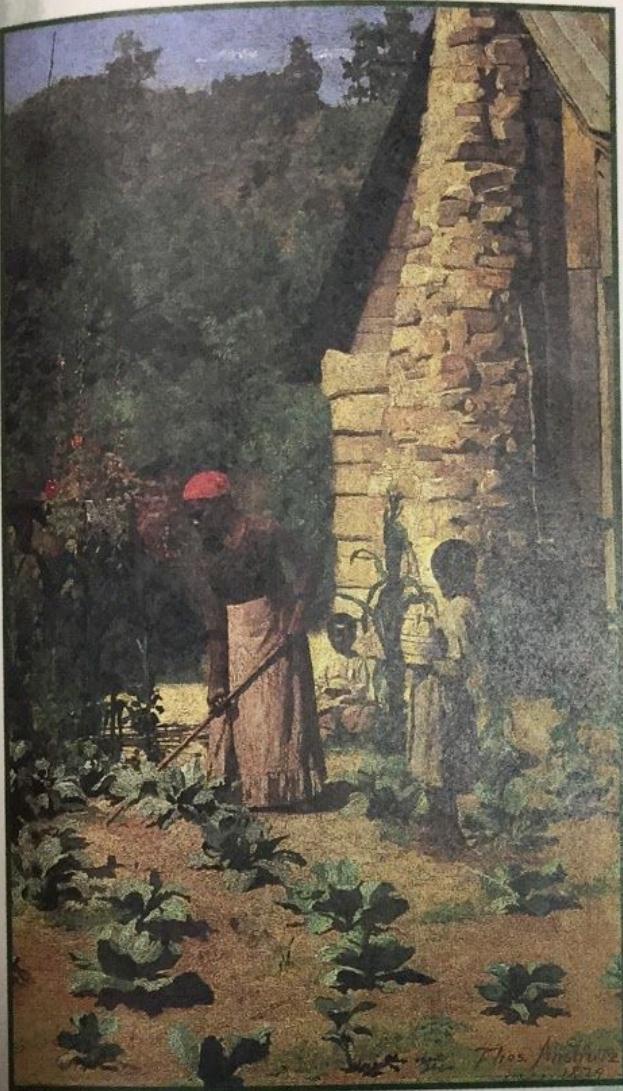
### ACTIVE READING DRAWING CONCLUSIONS ABOUT THE SPEAKER

When you read a story, you **draw conclusions** about its characters. Likewise, when you read a poem whose **speaker** tells his or her thoughts in the **first person**, you try to get an idea of who that person is. You make **inferences** based on what you read, and then you draw some kind of conclusion if you can.

**READER'S NOTEBOOK** As you read these two poems, jot down anything you can conclude about the speakers, such as their values, feelings, or sense of identity. Remember that the speaker of a poem is not necessarily the same as the poet.

# Lineage

Margaret Walker



*The Way They Live* (1879), Thomas Pollock Anshutz. Oil on canvas, 24" x 17", The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Morris K. Jesup Fund, 1940 (40.40). Copyright © 1985 The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

A

My grandmothers were strong.  
They followed plows and bent to toil.  
They moved through fields sowing seed.  
They touched earth and grain grew.  
5 They were full of sturdiness and singing.  
My grandmothers were strong.

B

My grandmothers are full of memories  
Smelling of soap and onions and wet clay  
With veins rolling roughly over quick hands  
10 They have many clean words to say.  
My grandmothers were strong.  
Why am I not as they?

## Thinking Through the Literature

1. What image of the speaker's grandmothers does the poem leave in your mind?
2. In line 10 the speaker says, "They have many clean words to say." What do you think this means?
  - the line "Smelling of soap and onions and wet clay"
  - other characteristics of the grandmothers
3. How does the last line affect your interpretation of the poem?

THINK ABOUT

# The Courage That My Mother Had

*Edna St. Vincent Millay*

The courage that my mother had  
Went with her, and is with her still:  
Rock from New England quarried;  
Now granite in a granite hill.

**A**

5 The golden brooch my mother wore  
She left behind for me to wear;  
I have no thing I treasure more:  
Yet, it is something I could spare.

Oh, if instead she'd left to me

10 The thing she took into the grave!—

**B**

That courage like a rock, which she

**C**

Has no more need of, and I have.

can write wills in which they leave personal qualities to their descendants. Choose one of the ancestors from these poems—or one of your own ancestors—and write such a will.

**2. Ancestor Poem** Look over your family tree that you completed in *Connect to Your Life* on page 608. Write a poem about one of your ancestors. Use specific images to help readers see why the person commands your

He/she . . .

## Activities & Explorations

- 1. Musical Settings** Set the two poems to music, either as songs or as dramatic readings with musical backgrounds, and present them to the class. ~ **PERFORMING**
- 2. Art Accompaniment** Create a work of art to accompany each

## Inquiry & Research

**Family Interviews** Interview your parents or grandparents and find out what they know about their parents. What were the parents' lives like? What qualities or values did they pass on? Make a tape-recorded or written family record of what you learn.



### Margaret Walker

1915–1998

#### Other Works

*Prophets for a New Day*  
*How I Wrote Jubilee*  
*This Is My Century: New and Collected Poems*

**Words and Music** Margaret Walker grew up with books. Her father was a well-educated, scholarly Methodist minister, and her mother was a music teacher. Her father shared with her his great love of literature, and her mother played ragtime music and read poetry to her daughter.

**Poetry and History** Early in life, Walker decided to write poetry. She won the Yale University Younger Poets Award in 1942 for her first collection of poems, *For My People*. The title poem portrays the experiences of African Americans and is written in the rhythm of a preacher's sermon. One of Walker's most famous works is a novel, *Jubilee*. It tells the story of her great-grandmother, a slave in Georgia during the time of the Civil War. Walker used the traditional form of the slave narrative to create her historical novel. During the 30 years it took her to write this novel, she also raised four children, taught school, and earned a doctorate.

### Edna St. Vincent Millay

1892–1950

#### Other Works

*Renascence and Other Poems*  
*A Few Figs from Thistles*  
*Collected Sonnets*



**Youthful Rebel** Edna St. Vincent Millay was considered by many to be the voice of the rebellious youth of her time. A Pulitzer Prize-winning poet and a feminist, she reflected in her work many of the social changes that swept through the United States during the first half of the 20th century.

**The Artistic Life** After graduating, Millay became a part of New York City's Greenwich Village scene. From the 1920s through the 1940s, this area's reputation as a center for artists and writers grew. Millay created some of her most successful writing while living there in the early 1920s. Her works often shocked the older generation while voicing the views of her liberated contemporaries during the decade that became known as the Roaring Twenties. In all, Millay wrote more than 20 volumes of poetry, plays, and essays, as well as an opera. She also directed and acted in plays.