

## Lineage

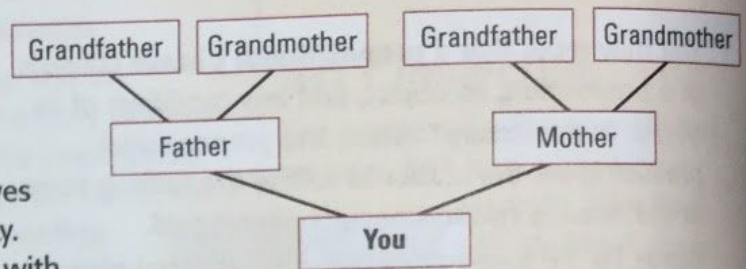
Poetry by  
MARGARET WALKER

## 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.

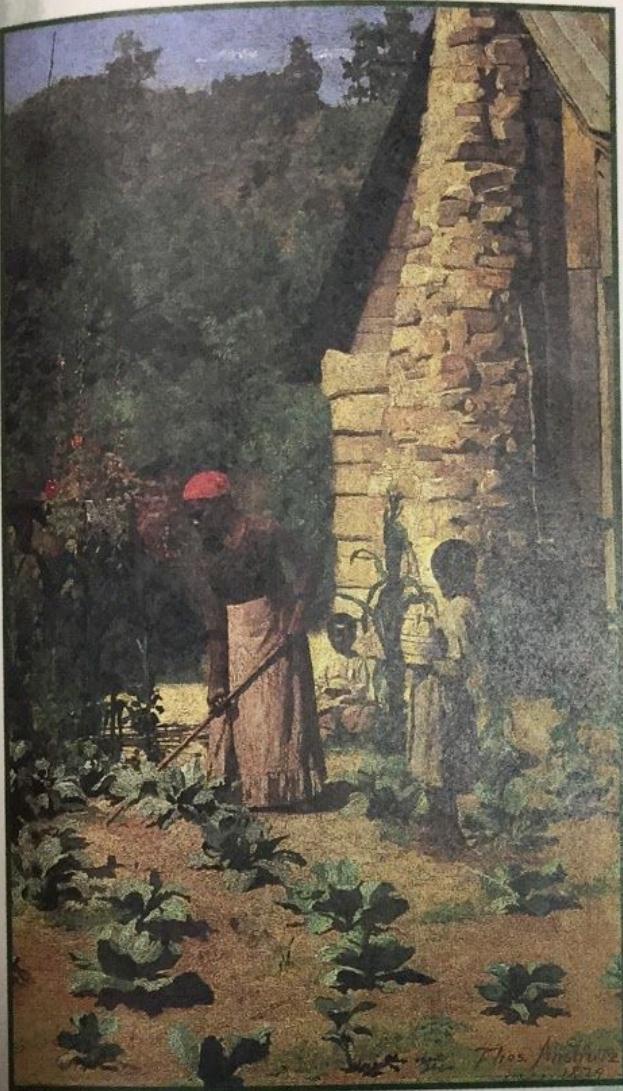
### ACTIVE READING DRAWING CONCLUSIONS ABOUT THE SPEAKER

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" × 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.

