Walt Whitman's free verse poetry

Walt Whitman's free verse poetry style flouted traditional meter and rhyme and gained him the label, "the father of free verse." The voice in his works is said to breathe the new American spirit of broad open lands and enterprising, hard-working people. From the 1855 edition of Leaves of Grass, Song of Myself has emerged as Whitman's best-known and most-discussed long poem. Commentary about it often focuses on Whitman's commitment to Emerson's poetics and transcendental values: the poet as bard for a new nation, speaking of the whole of human experience in a voice drawn from that nation's own vernacular and affirming the wisdom and divinity of nature and the "deathless" unity of all living things. In reading with Transcendentalism in mind, however, we need to recognize the range and experimentation which distinguish this poem as a poem, rather than as a predictable implementation of Emerson's tenets.1. Read lines 101 through 139 as a single unit; then read lines 140 through 192 in the same way. Is there a tonal difference between these sections? By what logic, or by what sequence of perceptions, does the latter section follow the former? What has been resolved, or at least granted approval, which allows Whitman to tour American experience in lines 140 through 192?2. Lines 257 through 325 affirm that a vast variety of Americans, of all races and creeds, are understood and empathized with by the "I, Walt Whitman" who speaks in this poem. Describe this "I," and comment on the risks that are taken in making such affirmations.3. In lines 381 through 435, Whitman favors shorter lines; in lines 714 through 796, he moves back to very long ones. What connections do you sense between line length, subject, and mood in Song of Myself? 4. At various points in the poem, Whitman chides himself for saying too much, tarrying too long, or digressing from some greater subject. When he enacts departure at the end of Song of Myself, where is he going? How does this urge to move, to speak, and to stop speaking create tension, or even suspense, within the poem? (With work cited)