

Name _____

Sonnets

William Shakespeare, The Bard, wrote 154 sonnets. The majority of the sonnets (sonnets 1-126) are addressed to a young man, a Mr. W. H. (believed to be Henry Wriothesley, The earl of Southampton). In the first of these sonnets, Shakespeare encourages the man to marry. His persuasion follows a pattern. First, Shakespeare flatters the young man and proclaims his love and admiration for him. Then he insists that he should marry and have children so that his beauty and legacy will continue.

Sonnet: A 14-line poem usually written in **iambic pentameter** and with any several traditional rhyme schemes. A sonnet usually consists of two parts: an eight-line section (**the octet**) followed by a six-line section (**a sestet**). The Shakespearean sonnet rhyme scheme is ABAB CDCD EFEF GG. Sonnets use **figurative language, metaphors, similes, and imagery** to convey a message, which is usually more directly said in the last two lines of a sonnet.

Sonnets Step-by-Step

1. Understand meter. Each syllable in a word is either stressed (hard) or unstressed (soft) based on the pronunciation of the letters. Stressed syllables are marked with a / over the letters; unstressed are marked with a u. Mark the following syllables as stressed or unstressed after pronouncing them aloud.

a. to day

b. un wind

c. flow er

d. let ter

e. caf e ter i a

f. ka boom

g. col lapse

h. tent a tive

2. Understand iambic measure. An iambic foot contains two syllables, the first unstressed and the second stressed. Iambic measure is often called the heartbeat meter because of its similarity of the rhythm of the human heart. Note the following terms with an iambic rhythm:

a. Phoenix

b. forbid

c. anew

c. in turn

d. repair

e. heaven

Write six iambic feet below:

3. Understand iambic pentameter. Iambic pentameter (five-measure) is a line of five iambic feet. The line has a total of ten syllables repeating the pattern of “unstressed, stressed” five times. Identify the iambic pentameter below using / for stressed and u for unstressed, then write and mark two lines below.

a. The child who wants shall cry when not in need.

b. Often, a pet’s soft whine outcries the son’s

c. _____

d. _____

4. Understand rhyme schemes and structure. A sonnet has 14 lines. The last six are the **sestet**. The sestet holds the last two lines, which are a **couplet**; the last word in each of the couplet’s lines rhyme with each other. There is a rhyme scheme through the entire poem. See Shakespeare’s Sonnet #18 for example:

1. Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?	A
2. Thou art more lovely and more temperate:	B
3. Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,	A
4. And summer's lease hath all too short a date:	B
5. Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,	C
6. And often is his gold complexion dimm'd;	D
7. And every fair from fair sometime declines,	C
8. By chance or nature's changing course untrimm'd;	D
9. But thy eternal summer shall not fade	E
10. Nor lose possession of that fair thou owest;	F
11. Nor shall Death brag thou wander'st in his shade,	E
12. When in eternal lines to time thou growest:	F
13. So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,	G
14. So long lives this and this gives life to thee.	G

In the **octet** of the sonnet above, Shakespeare begins comparing his subject to a summer day, an event associated with positive connotations. However, the remaining images in the sestet reveal how a summer’s day is not always beautiful; it may be windy, it’s dated and will end eventually, it may be too hot, and it's not stable because nature may take away fair skies.

In the sestet, lines 9 through 14, returns the focus of the poem’s subject: their loveliness will always be ready, not even diminished as they grow old. The couplet bluntly states that the speaker gets life, enjoyment, from the subject’s loveliness.

Now mark the rhyme scheme in the following Shakespearean sonnet and identify the octet, sestet, and couplet. What is being said in each?

Sonnet 23

1. As an unperfect actor on the stage
2. Who with his fear is put besides his part,
3. Or some fierce thing replete with too much rage,
4. Whose strength's abundance weakens his own heart.
5. So I, for fear of trust, forget to say
6. The perfect ceremony of love's rite,
7. And in mine own love's strength seem to decay,
8. O'ercharged with burden of mine own love's might.
9. O, let my books be then the eloquence
10. And dumb presagers of my speaking breast,
11. Who plead for love and look for recompense
12. More than that tongue that more hath more express'd.
13. O, learn to read what silent love hath writ:
14. To hear with eyes belongs to love's fine wit.

Translate Shakespeare's language:

What is being said or shown in the octet?

What is being said in the sestet?

- 5. Your turn.** Write a rough draft. Choose a message you'd like to deliver to someone through a sonnet. Using iambic pentameter and the Shakespearean rhyme scheme, write a 14-line poem. Make sure to end the octet with the end of a sentence and contain the couplet to a sentence. **In addition to following the correct form, you must also include a minimum of one simile, one metaphor, and alliteration.**

Ideas:

- Tell a friend how special they are to you.
- Tell someone about a mistake.
- Ask someone for permission for something.
- Ask for forgiveness.
- Give encouragement.
- Write about the feelings your hobby (sports, acting, singing, etc.) gives you.
- Write about your pet.

Write your rough draft:

Title _____

- | | |
|-----------|----|
| 1. _____ | A. |
| 2. _____ | B. |
| 3. _____ | A. |
| 4. _____ | B. |
| 5. _____ | C. |
| 6. _____ | D. |
| 7. _____ | C. |
| 8. _____ | D. |
| 9. _____ | E. |
| 10. _____ | F. |
| 11. _____ | E. |
| 12. _____ | F. |
| 13. _____ | G. |
| 14. _____ | G. |

6. Revise and check for syllable count, rhyme scheme, simile, metaphor, alliteration, spelling and mechanics. Type your sonnet in MLA format.