



SONNETS | FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Shakespeare's language can seem scary, but give it a try! *Go at your own pace, and have fun!*



SHAKESPEARE IN PRISON

DETROIT PUBLIC THEATRE'S SIGNATURE COMMUNITY PROGRAM

This activity pack will be a little bit different. For the first time, we won't be looking at Shakespeare's plays... we'll be looking at his poetry!

These days, we mostly think of Shakespeare as a playwright, but *most people reading Shakespeare during his lifetime would have been reading his poems.* He certainly made more money from each hour spent writing poems. Believe it or not, *poetry was the most popular, profitable form of writing four hundred years ago.* If you were very good at it, poetry was a solid way to pay the bills. And it was way simpler than putting on a play: no stage needed, no big group of actors to worry about, no props, no costumes, no worrying about going over-budget—just words, words words.

Shakespeare wrote two super-long poems, but mostly he wrote (and is famous for) SONNETS...

WORD-NERD SPECIAL!!
"Sonnet" comes from the Italian word sonnetto, which means "little song"!



What the heck is a sonnet??

Glad you asked. An English sonnet is a poem composed of three quatrains and a couplet, rhyming ABABCDCDEFEFGG.

Wait, WHAT? That makes no sense to me at all.

Well, it's got fourteen lines, for starters. Every other line rhymes, until the end, when the final two lines rhyme with each other. Here, I'll show you...

SONNET 91

Some glory in their birth, some in their skill,
Some in their wealth, some in their body's force,
Some in their garments, though new-fangled ill,
Some in their hawks and hounds, some in their horse;
And every humor hath his adjunct pleasure,
Wherein it finds a joy above the rest.
But these particulars are not my measure;
All these I better in one general best.
Thy love is better than high birth to me,
Richer than wealth, prouder than garments' cost,
Of more delight than hawks or horses be;
And having thee, of all men's pride I boast;
Wretched in this alone, that thou mayst take
All this away, and me most wretched make.

Before you read the translation below, really sit with this poem for a minute. Read it a few times. Are there any lines that really speak to you? Or that you really don't like?



Translation of Sonnet 91

Some people are proud of the social status they've inherited; some people of their abilities; some of their wealth; some of how strong they are; some of their clothes, though the clothes are trendy and weird; some are proud of their hawks and hounds; some of their horses; and every individual temperament has its particular pleasure, something the person enjoys above everything else. But I don't measure happiness by any of these things. There's something else that's better than them all. To me, your love is better than high social status, more valuable than wealth, more worth being proud of than expensive clothes, and more enjoyable than hawks or horses. And having you, I have something better than what other men are proud of—except, I'm in bad shape in this one way: You could take all this away from me and make me completely unhappy.

What do the people around you **glory in**? Where do they find a **joy above the rest**? And what about you? Do you **better** those things in **one general best**?

And since Shakespeare brought it up in the final couplet, what's do you risk by having only one thing that makes you happy? Is there any way around that? Is it still worth pursuing that one thing?



SONNET 18

(Sort)

The sonnets have no titles. People refer to them by their number.

Blah blah blah blah blah blah blah **day**? A

Blah blah blah blah blah blah blah **temperate**: B

Blah blah blah blah blah blah blah **May**, A

Blah blah blah blah blah blah blah **date**: B

Blah blah blah blah blah blah blah **shines**, C

Blah blah blah blah blah blah blah **dim'm'd**: D

Blah blah blah blah blah blah blah **declines**, C

Blah blah blah blah blah blah blah **untrim'm'd**: D

Blah blah blah blah blah blah blah **fade**, E

Blah blah blah blah blah blah blah **ow'st**, F

Blah blah blah blah blah blah blah **shade**, E

Blah blah blah blah blah blah blah **grow'st**: F

Blah blah blah blah blah blah blah **see**, G

Blah blah blah blah blah blah blah **thee**. G

A 'day' rhymes with 'May'

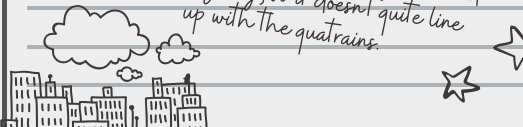
B 'temperate' rhymes with 'date' (Well, sort of. Not every rhyme has to be perfect!)

A group of four lines is called a quatrain

Shakespeare's sonnets have three quatrains, and then ...

The final lines are a couplet! (remember couplets: from a few weeks ago, word-nerds! Two lines that rhyme!)

The couplet is usually indented slightly, so it doesn't quite line up with the quatrains.





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You can respond to these in any way you choose:

Write

ACT IT OUT

Talk about it

Draw

THINK ABOUT IT

UP TO YOU!



Sonnet 40



Take all my loves, my love; yea, take them all.
 What hast thou then more than thou hadst before?
 No love, my love, that thou mayst true love call.
 All mine was thine before thou hadst this more.
 Then if for my love thou my love receivest,
 I cannot blame thee, for my love thou usest.
 But yet be blamed, if thou thyself deceivest
 By wilful taste of what thyself refusest.
 I do forgive thy robb'ry, gentle thief,
 Although thou steal thee all my poverty;
 And yet love knows it is a greater grief
 To bear love's wrong than hate's known injury.
 Lascivious grace, in whom all ill well shows,
 Kill me with spites; yet we must not be foes.

What a tongue-twister!!



This sonnet really wants to be spoken out loud, but it's a real pain to say these words! What sounds trip you up as you read it? How do the words "want" to be said? Why did Shakespeare write it this way?

SONNET 40 TRANSLATION

Take all my loves, my love—yes, take them all: Take my love for you, take away your love for me, and take a lover from me. What do you have now that you didn't have before? My love, you haven't acquired true love, because my true love was yours to begin with, before you took this extra from me. If, instead of accepting my love, you make love to the person, love, I can't blame you, because you're only taking advantage of my love. But, you should be blamed if you deceive yourself by taking from one person what you won't take from another... if you willingly love this other person while refusing to love me. I forgive you for stealing from me, gentle thief, although you're taking the little I have. And yet every lover knows that it hurts more to be injured by a lover than by an enemy, temptation, who are gracious even when giving in to lust, you in whom everything bad looks good—even if you kill me with injuries, let's not become enemies.

POETRY is different from drama in many ways.

A poem doesn't need to have characters or a plot. Nothing needs to "happen." Shakespeare used his poems to express feelings or ideas, free from the requirements of putting on a play.

BUT! That shouldn't stop us from thinking about how to do sonnets on stage; after all, Shakespeare was a playwright at heart!

- Pretend you're performing this sonnet as an audition piece (alone on stage, speaking to the audience). How would you do it?
- Pretend this is part of a scene you're directing. How would you direct the actor? Is the speech funny? Sad? Serious? Pathetic? Are we supposed to sympathize with the speaker? Does the speaker mean what they say?

And how does the other person react to this speech?

Shakespeare's sonnets were published all together in 1609. The numbers we use are just the order in which the poems appeared in the book.



Not every sonnet is about romantic love. This one is just about missing someone. No one knows who this poem was written for. Some people think it was Shakespeare's wife, who lived two days' travel away. Some think it was Shakespeare's son, Hamnet, who died in the plague. Or maybe someone else hired him to write it. (That was really common). Who knows?!

SONNET 97

How like a winter hath my absence been
 From thee, the pleasure of the fleeting year!
 What freezings have I felt, what dark days seen!
 What old December's bareness everywhere!
 And yet this time removed was summer's time,
 The teeming autumn big with rich increase,
 Bearing the wanton burthen of the prime,
 Like widowed wombs after their lords' decease.
 Yet this abundant issue seemed to me
 But hope of orphans, and unfathered fruit.
 For summer and his pleasures wait on thee,
 And thou away, the very birds are mute.
 Or if they sing, 'tis with so dull a cheer
 That leaves look pale, dreading the winter's near.

fleeting
passing quickly

teeming
full of life

wanton
burthen of the prime
the huge fruits and vegetables of peak harvest time

issue
can refer to anything that gets made through a natural process harvested food, children, etc.)

This simple poem has some beautiful imagery. Pick an image and expand on it. Draw it, write about it, or just close your eyes and visualize it.

Now it's your turn!

There are only three "rules" for writing an English sonnet:

- 14 lines
- Rhyme pattern: ABAB CDCD EFEF GG (see the other page if you're confused!)
- Each line should have about the same number of syllables ("beats").

That's it! Now try writing your own sonnet!

NERD ALERT! NERD ALERT! NERD ALERT!

- Shakespeare liked to write sonnets with ten syllables or so per line, but he wasn't strict about it. (And you don't have to be, either!)
- He also liked to base his poems on a particular rhythm: da-DUM, da-DUM, da-DUM, da-DUM, da-DUM, da-DUM. Like a heartbeat. But he changed it up a lot. (And you can, too!) (More on this theme in a future pack! Stay tuned!)

