

WILL POWER



EXPERIENCE GUIDE

EPISODE SEVEN

ROMEO AND JULIET

SONNETS

Shakespeare was one of the world's greatest poets! His plays were like poems themselves because they were written in verse – meaning they followed rhythmic and rhyming patterns. But Shakespeare also wrote 154 sonnets (not including the ones that are in his plays,) two long narrative poems and few other minor poems.

What is a sonnet?

A sonnet is a poem with 14 lines that has a distinctive rhyming pattern and rhythmic feel. The word “sonnet” comes from the Italian word *sonetto*, meaning *a little sound or song*.

There are several traditional forms of sonnets, but over the years poets have invented their own sonnet forms. The form of the sonnet depends on the pattern of the rhyming words.

Sonnet 18 is one of Shakespeare's most famous sonnets. Notice that it has 14 lines. Look for the pattern of the rhyming words!

Sonnet 18 by William Shakespeare

*Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
Thou art more lovely and more temperate:
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
And summer's lease hath all too short a date:
Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,
And often is his gold complexion dimmed,
And every fair from fair sometime declines,
By Chance, or nature's changing course untrimmed:
But they eternal summer shall not fade,
Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st
Nor shall death brag thou wander'st in his shade,
When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st,
So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see,
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.*

Create your own sonnet form!

Compare the rhyming patterns of two traditional sonnet forms. Notice whether the rhyming pattern forms a **couplet** (two lines,) a **quatrain** (four lines,) a **sestet** (six lines,) or an **octave** (eight lines.)

Then try making your own rhyming pattern... How could you divide up 14 lines into an interesting rhyming pattern?

Lines	Shakespearean	Petrarchan	Invent Your Own!
1	A	A	
2	B	B	
3	A	B	
4	B	A	
5	C	A	
6	D	B	
7	C	B	
8	D	A	
9	E	C	
10	F	D	
11	E	E	
12	F	C	
13	G	D	
14	G	E	

IAMBIC PENTAMETER

Besides having a clear rhyming pattern, sonnets are also recognized for having a rhythmic feel. Traditional sonnets used *iambic pentameter*. Each line has ten syllables, with five “weak-strong” syllable pairs.

Read this line aloud, accenting the bold words and syllables:

Shall **I** com**PARE** thee **TO** a **SUM**mer’s **DAY**?

Notice how this rhythm feels like a heartbeat? (da-DUM da-DUM da-DUM) Iambic Pentameter helps a poem feel natural and flowing because of its predictable pattern.

However, it’s not necessary to read a poem in iambic pentameter with an exaggerated sing-songy rhythm. Just speaking the words naturally will create a flowing rhythm all their own!

But rules are made to be broken! Sometimes Shakespeare would break the iambic pentameter rhythm to draw attention to an important idea. Take this famous line from *Hamlet*:

To **BE** or **NOT** to **BE**. **THAT** is the **QUESTION**

Why do you think he chose to break the rhythm on this particular phrase?

Interesting Tidbit...

Shakespeare wrote his poems between 1593 and 1594. During this time, there was a plague ravaging England and all of the public theaters were closed. So he made the best use of his time by writing poetry!



PPE during the “Black Death”

MODERN SONNETS – HARLEM RENAISSANCE TO HIP HOP

The sonnet form has inspired poets to this very day! Some have written poems that follow the same format that Shakespeare used, but many have invented their own rhyming patterns or explored different rhythmic feelings. Many contemporary Black poets have been inspired by the rhythm and rhyme in sonnets. Here are few to note:

- [Claude McKay](#) (1889-1948) was a Harlem Renaissance poet who wrote about his Jamaican heritage and protested racial and economic inequities.
- [Gwendolyn Brooks](#) (1917-2000) was the first Black author to win the Pulitzer Prize. Her poems addressed political issues, particularly the civil rights movement from the 1960’s forward.
- [Yusef Komunyakaa](#) (b. 1947) wrote “hypersonnets” to honor jazz musician Charlie “Bird” Parker. Although they didn’t have a rhyming pattern, they had 14 lines and used rhythmic qualities of jazz music.
- [Eve Ewing](#) (b. 1986) wrote a sonnet that repeats the same line fourteen times: “I saved some cornbread for you in the skillet on the stove.” The sonnet draws attention to a simple thoughtful act.



Hip-hop artist, writer/poet and historian **Akala** launched [The Hip-hop Shakespeare Company](#) in 2009 to explore the social, cultural and linguistic parallels between Shakespeare’s works and modern hip-hop artists.

“...any songwriter should be engaging with Shakespeare’s work, if you’re interested (a) in lyricism, but (b) in rhythm. Throughout his entire career, he was experimenting with different forms of rhythm.” – Akala, interview with Folger Shakespeare Library

TRY IT YOURSELF

The Prologue for *Romeo and Juliet* is a sonnet that outlines the entire play in 14-lines.

Choose one of your favorite books, movies or tv shows and see if you can summarize the whole plot in a 14-line sonnet of your own! Things to consider:

- Would you follow Shakespeare's rhyming pattern or would you create your own rhyming pattern?
- Would you use iambic pentameter or use rhythms inspired by the world or music around you?

Prologue to *Romeo and Juliet* (Act I, scene i)

*Two households, both alike in dignity
(In fair Verona, where we lay our scene),
From ancient grudge break to new mutiny,
Where civil blood makes civil hands unclean.
From forth the fatal loins of these two foes
A pair of star-crossed lovers take their life;
Whose misadventured piteous overthrows
Doth with their death bury their parents' strife.
The fearful passage of their death-marked love
And the continuance of their parents' rage,
Which, but their children's end, naught could remove,
Is now the two hours' traffic of our stage;
The which, if you with patient ears attend,
What here shall miss, our toil shall strive to mend.*

Notice that prologue includes all the basic W's of storytelling. Read it through and see if you can find:

Who is in the story?

Where does it take place?

What will happen?

When do important events occur?

Why do important events happen?

How do characters feel?

Try to include these details in your own story sonnet!

And don't forget the descriptive words that set the tone. Is your plot suspenseful, funny, romantic? Choose words that give the reader the "feeling" of the story.

W.8.4 Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose and audience.



WILL POWER TEAM:

Crystal Marie Stewart, Actor, video production, curriculum development

Christina Farrell, Curriculum development, stop motion animation

Rob Merritt, Video editing and production

Adam Knight, Riverside Theatre Producing Artistic Director

Irena Sarić, Riverside Theatre Managing Director

ACTORS:

Crystal Marie Stewart: Mercutio (Act 3.1), Juliet (Act 2.2)

Aaron Stonerook: Tybalt (Act 3.1), Romeo (Act 2.2)

Christina Sullivan: Benvolio (Act 3.1)

Ray Vanek: Romeo (Act 3.1)

Kevin Michael Moore, Fight Choreographer

Thank you to the **TCR Costume Department!**