

ProQuest Standards-Based Learning Activity

Investigating Poetic Forms Through Writing: The Sonnet—Teacher Guide

APPROPRIATE FOR: Language Arts, Grades 9-12

TIMELINE: Three class periods

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS STANDARDS ADDRESSED THROUGH THIS LESSON

ELA10RL4 The student employs a variety of writing genres to demonstrate a comprehensive grasp of significant ideas in sophisticated literary works. The student composes essays, narratives, **poems**, or technical documents. The student

- a. Demonstrates awareness of an author's use of stylistic devices for specific effects.
- b. Explains important ideas and viewpoints introduced in a text through accurate and detailed references or allusions to the text and other relevant works.
- c. Identifies and assesses the impact of ambiguities, nuances, and complexities within the text.
- d. Includes a formal works cited or bibliography when applicable.

ELA12W3 The student uses research and technology to support writing. The student

- a. Formulates clear research questions and utilizes appropriate research venues (e.g., library, electronic media, personal interview, survey) to locate and incorporate evidence from primary and secondary sources.
- b. Uses supporting evidence from multiple sources to develop the main ideas within the body of a researched essay, a composition, or a technical document.
- c. Synthesizes information from multiple sources and identifies complexities, discrepancies, and different perspectives found in a variety of media

LEARNING EXPECTATIONS/OBJECTIVES

- Students will investigate a poetic form: sonnets. They will examine what they already know in order to frame their investigations.
- Students will use the Internet to conduct research on sonnets, honing their inquiry and research skills in the process.
- Students will examine a variety of sonnets to discover patterns and to draw conclusions about the specifics of the form. Subsequent research will allow them to test their conclusions.
- Students will apply their research to create sonnets of their own, working both in groups and individually.
- Students will conduct research in groups, discussing, writing about and presenting their ideas to the rest of the class. They will apply their discoveries in discussion, presentation and in written work, both in groups and individually.
- Students will hone their writing process skills, brainstorming writing ideas, creating drafts, discussing drafts and revising their work.

MATERIALS

- Computer(s) with Web access
- Printer and printer paper (optional)
- Sonnet Search sheet handouts (one per group)
- Paper, pens, journals*

* Students can take notes and create drafts, etc., in their journals. If you don't use journals yet in your classroom, this project might be a good way to start! To get your kids started with journals, you only need provide a few minutes free writing time in the beginning of class, a time usually devoted to getting students

focused, taking attendance, etc., anyway. You can also provide guided writing tasks to prepare them for the day's activities. Journals should be a non-threatening forum for students to write freely without concern about grammar, mechanics, etc.

ACTIVITY PROCESS: DIRECTIONS TO THE TEACHER

Description of Activity

Students will work in groups to conduct research on sonnets, examining a variety of sonnets in order to discover the rules of the form. They will also investigate the history of sonnets, sonnet writers and other sonnet-related topics that interest them. They will apply their discoveries to the creation of the first quatrain of a Shakespearean sonnet; after presenting these quatrains, they will work individually to create entire Shakespearean sonnets of their own. A Writer's Celebration with a display of final drafts will culminate the activity.

Background Information/Scenario

Teachers of high school English often feel so overwhelmed by pressure to meet the teaching and learning standards that they can't find the time to provide creative writing opportunities for their students. Others feel that their students aren't skilled enough to examine complex forms or Shakespearean language. But investigations of literary forms will be much more meaningful, much more grounded in critical thinking, when students engage in that investigation as both writers and readers, learning the craft from both sides. This mini-unit provides an in-depth investigation of the sonnet, with assessment tools in both critical analysis and creative writing. With minor modifications in assessment expectations, it can be used with high school students of any grade or skills level. You can also choose to use only the last set of handouts on "Writing a Sonnet" if your students have already studied the form and are ready to begin writing.

This mini-unit follows an inquiry-based model. Students work together with guidance from the classroom teacher, but are responsible for generating a focus for their research, for conducting that research and for applying and presenting their findings. You can use SIRS Knowledge Source to find materials and have your students work from downloaded or printed copies of those materials. Or, if your access to the Web is limited to one or only a few computers, you can modify the group work to work more as a class, with students still guiding the search using the structure in the "Sonnet Search Sheets." Before you begin this mini-unit, you should read through all the student handouts in order to understand the tasks for each day; this way you can be an effective guide.

You should also determine groupings for the cooperative learning component of the unit. Select groups to fulfill your goals for heterogeneous or homogenous groupings, for breaking up cliques, for helping students learn how to work with different members of the classroom community, etc. Each group should include at least three and no more than five students. (You can also adapt the unit for students working in pairs.)

Outline of Procedures -- Day One

1. Begin class with a short prewriting task to help your students focus on the lesson to come. If your students are used to working cooperatively, use a guided task related to the lesson, such as, "What makes a poem a poem?" If your students are not yet skilled in cooperative learning, use a writing task to help them think about how to work together effectively, such as, "What happens when you work in a group? What roles do you usually play?" Ask a few students to read their written responses as a way of opening a discussion about the day's tasks.
2. Explain the day's task to your students, adding any specific expectations you have and ask a student to re-explain the task to make sure your expectations are clear. Announce groups and ask students to gather in the groups. After groups have gathered, give each group one set of handouts and make sure they are set up at a computer station with access to the Web. Even if you can offer each student a computer of his/her own, it may be more effective to have members of each group work at just one or two computers. This will ensure that they work together. If students within groups are working at individual computers, make sure that each student has a clear role for contributions to group research.
3. As students work, you should circulate actively, troubleshooting, listening in on discussions to gauge student progress and participating in discussions in order to validate them. Make sure that students

are progressing quickly enough through the research so that they are ready with their conclusions about the rules of sonnets 5-10 minutes before the period ends.

4. Ten or fifteen minutes before the end of the period, ask students to wrap up their investigations and to be ready to present their findings. Then allow 5-10 minutes for groups to present their findings. Generate a list on the board of "Our Ideas for Sonnet Rules." Keep a copy of the rules for each class period to use in the next session.

NOTE: If you have a class period longer than 45-50 minutes, you may be able to do the first two sections of the unit in one day. You could also use Day Two as a homework assignment after Day One if your students all have access to the Web at home.

Outline of Procedures -- Day Two

1. Begin class with a short prewriting task to help your students focus on the lesson to come. "What did you discover yesterday about sonnets? What else do you want to know?" or "Why do you think the sonnet form was developed in the first place? Why has it lasted all these years?" Ask a few students to read their written responses as a way of opening a discussion about the day's tasks. You might want to use the list you generated yesterday to open the activity, asking them to compare that list with what they discover today.
2. Again, you'll need to have read through the student handouts so that you can be a guide for the lesson without being the center of it. Today students will be further investigating sonnets; they'll compare their ideas for the rules with the formal rules they find during research. They'll then have the opportunity to research sonnet history, to read a variety of sonnets, to listen to interviews with modern poets, etc. This part of their research will also require that they include bibliographic information for the resources they use; review the rules for proper citation with them. You can find sources for citation format in SIRS Knowledge Source. Go to the "Browse Topics" area and execute a search using the term *citation*.
3. Explain the day's task to your students, adding any specific expectations you have, and ask a student to re-explain the task to make sure your expectations are clear. Ask students to gather in their groups from yesterday. After groups have gathered, give each group one set of handouts and make sure they are set up at a computer station with access to the Web.
4. As students work, you should circulate actively, troubleshooting, listening in on discussions to gauge student progress and participating in discussions in order to validate them. Make sure that students are progressing quickly enough through the research so that they are ready to share their discoveries ten minutes before the period ends.
5. Fifteen minutes before the end of the period, ask students to wrap up their investigations and to be ready to present their findings. Then allow ten minutes for groups to present their findings. Generate a list on the board of "Our Discoveries About Sonnets." Keep a copy of the discoveries for each class period to use in the next session.

Outline of Procedures – Day Three

1. Begin class with a short prewriting task to help your students generate ideas for the sonnets they'll write today. "You can write a poem about anything at all. Describe a few very specific ideas that are on your mind today." Ask a few students to read their written responses as a way of opening a discussion about the day's tasks; explain that they can write a sonnet about everything from an argument with a friend to a football game to the need for world peace.
2. Again, you'll need to have read through the Student Handouts so that you can be a guide for the lesson without being the center of it. Today students will try writing the first quatrain of a Shakespearean sonnet in groups; they'll then be able to use same process to write Shakespearean sonnets of their own. You might want to use the list you generated yesterday to open the activity, asking them to refer to the sonnet rules as they write and to consider the other discoveries they made as they enter the league of sonnet writers.
3. Twenty minutes before the end of the period, ask students to wrap up their investigations and to be ready to present their first quatrains; give them five minutes to prepare. You might have them copy the quatrains onto newsprint so that they can be posted about the room. Then allow five or ten minutes for groups to present their quatrains. Finally, ask students to begin working individually on their own sonnets. Remind them to use the posted quatrains as a guide, or select one to use as the first quatrain of their own sonnets. Most students will probably want to start over again on their own,

using the same process; other students will find it very helpful to have a first quatrain done and ready to serve as a guide for the rest of the poem.

4. If you have a few minutes at the end of the period for students to share their beginnings, ask a few students to read what they've written thus far. This will help you gauge student progress -- and students' needs -- and will help to motivate everyone in the class as they get excited about the act of creation. Ask students to bring a rough draft of their completed sonnets to the next class.

Conclusion/Finished Work

1. Provide time for students to swap rough drafts for critique. They should check each other's work for form and content. Next to each line, the person providing the critique should write the number of syllables in that line and, if you are requiring that they follow a certain meter, they should check that as well. Next, they should offer some responses to the content. You can ask them to respond to some of the following questions in writing.
 - What is the poem about? How did the writer convince you to see the topic his/her way?
 - Did the poet use the Shakespearean Sonnet form? What details really stand out in the poem? What details seem unclear?
 - What kind of figurative language did the poet use? How did those choices contribute to the meaning of the poem? Where did those choices seem to *not* belong to the poem?
 - What did you really like about the poem?
 - What two suggestions do you have for the poet? At least one of your suggestions should be about content.
2. Final drafts should be due a few days after students swap drafts. Make sure that students turn in all drafts, critiques and the final draft. Early drafts need not be tidy or have perfect spelling, grammar, etc., but final drafts should be a final presentation that you can hang up in a display. For more information on drafting and revising, use the **Educators' Resources link** in SIRS Knowledge Source. Scroll down and click the link for **How to Write a Research Paper**, <http://sks.sirs.com/docs/HowtoWriteaResearchPaper.doc>.
3. Your final Writer's Celebration could include a coffeehouse-style reading; you might even ask students to bring in refreshments and set up the room to look like a coffeehouse. Invite parents or other classes or members of the staff to come to the reading. After the reading, hang the final drafts in a display that includes the class-generated lists and research notes about sonnets. (If possible, have students design and create the sonnet display.)

ASSESSMENT

- Use or adapt the Sonnet Mini-Unit Grade sheet on the next page for assessment.
- You should give out this Grade sheet and/or clarify your assessment expectations before the end of the unit, so that students understand what to do as they go.
- It is more effective to copy the Grade sheet as a double-sided handout, so that students have only one sheet of which to keep track.
- You may also want to require that students write a self-assessment, exploring not only what they learned during the unit, but also their experience during the unit, including an evaluation of their own work.

OPTIONAL EXTENDED ENRICHMENT ACTIVITIES

- Using SIRS Knowledge Source, have students conduct research on other poetic forms, such as the sestina. Follow a similar structure, where students read samples and develop ideas about the rules for the form before trying their own hands at writing them.
- Have students pick one sonnet on which to write a literary analysis paper. The paper can focus on how the poet uses the form to create his/her images and his/her message.

SONNET MINI-UNIT PORTFOLIO GRADESHEET

Congratulations on completing your study of one poetic form, the sonnet. Your grade for this project is broken down below.

Component	Score
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Group Work

Everyone in your group will receive the same score for this section. You can't get credit if you weren't present for the group work (unless you can work out alternate arrangements). Your group will be assessed on the quality of the work you did, as illustrated in your notes for each day and in your presentations.

Part 1: Examining Sonnet Samples

Written Work _____ out of _____

Presentations/Participation in Class Discussion _____ out of _____

Part 2: Sonnet Specifics

Written Work _____ out of _____

Presentations/Participation in Class Discussion _____ out of _____

Part 3: Writing a Sonnet

Written Work _____ out of _____

Presentations/Participation in Class Discussion _____ out of _____

Individual Work

Your contributions to the work of your group _____ out of _____

Your Sonnet Writing Process

Rough Draft _____ out of _____

A completed rough draft that shows a real attempt to follow the form will give you an automatic full credit. Spelling, grammar, etc., don't count on rough drafts.

Critique by Another Writer _____ out of _____

You must have your rough draft examined by another writer. It is your responsibility to make sure your partner examines your rough draft carefully, both to check how well you followed the form and to look how effectively your choice of content, words, etc. works. If your partner doesn't write enough, ask him/her for more!

Final Draft (See comments in each category.)

Changes Made _____ out of _____

Your final draft must show changes made after you wrote the rough draft. These changes should reflect your attempts to make the poem sound more beautiful, be more clear or be closer to the correct sonnet form.

Final Draft Quality _____ out of _____

Your final draft should be the best exhibit of your work that you can create. That means that you should check all spelling, punctuation and grammar, and that your sonnet should be beautifully presented.

Final Draft (See comments in each category.) -- continued

Form

How well did you follow the sonnet form?

_____ out of _____

Changes Made

Your final draft must show changes made after you wrote the rough draft. These changes should reflect your attempts to make the poem sound more beautiful, be more clear or be closer to the correct sonnet form.

_____ out of _____

Content

Beyond being a sonnet, how well did your poem work as a poem? How deeply did you explore your subject? How much thought went into your choice of words, of figurative language, etc.?

_____ out of _____

TOTAL Sonnet Mini-Unit Score

Comments

A Twist at the End: The Sonnet—*Student Guide*

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day? Maybe. That all depends on the sonnet!

Today you'll be working with a team to figure out what exactly a poem needs to have in order to be called a sonnet. You'll examine a whole slew of published sonnets and you'll develop a guide for writing one. And maybe you'll also figure out whether or not you deserve to be compared to a summer's day!

Start by gathering with your team to choose a captain and a note taker for today. The captain will help keep things in order and will make sure everyone has something to do. The note taker will take notes on your team's discussion and discoveries; don't forget to take notes on your discoveries in your own journal.

Before you begin your investigation, take a few moments to discuss with your team what you already know about poetry. You can use the questions below to structure your discussion; but don't look anything up yet! Just figure out what you already know so you'll know what you need to find out. Jot down notes from your discussion on your "Sonnet Search" sheet.

- What makes a poem a poem? What does a poem need to have to be a poem? What must a poem NOT have? What special kinds of poems are there?
- What is rhyme? Offer some examples of rhymes.
- What is rhythm? Offer an example of a line from a song that has a rhythm to which you can tap your feet. Then create a line that doesn't have a rhythm to which you could tap your feet.

Now you're ready to investigate sonnets. As you conduct your investigation, keep in mind what you already know about poetry, about rhythm and about rhyme.

Take your journals, your "Sonnet Search" sheet and yourselves to a computer with access to SIRS Knowledge Source. Type "sonnets" in the Search box,

SONNET SEARCH SHEET -- EXAMINING SONNET SAMPLES

PAGE ONE

List all group members' names here:

Captain's Name:

Note Taker's Name:

1. What does your group already know about poetry, rhyme and rhythm?

2. Ready to begin your bigchalk search?

- Using "Browse Topics," search for *sonnet*. In your search results, you should see a string that looks like this: Poetry > Poetic Forms > Sonnet. Click *Sonnet*.
- Now click *Collections*. Use the Editor's Choice Web links to find five individual sonnets.
- Make sure you take a look at Shakespeare's Sonnet 18, which begins, "Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?"
- In the space below, write down the name of each sonnet you examine, the name of the poet who wrote it and the year in which it was written. Explain what you think the poem is about; offer your thoughts on the way the poem explores that topic. Finally, write down any patterns you notice -- open your mind and examine patterns of words, of lines, of sections and of the whole poem.
- Do this for five sonnets. Try to find sonnets by different authors.

Title and Author	Year	What's the sonnet about?	Your thoughts on the poem's exploration of topic	Patterns

SONNET SEARCH SHEET -- EXAMINING SONNET SAMPLES

PAGE TWO

Title and Author	Year	What's the sonnet about?	Your thoughts on the poem's exploration of topic	Patterns

Explore the patterns in the various sonnets you examined. With your group, develop a list of at least six rules for sonnets. Don't worry about being "right," just make sure that you base your conclusions on actual observations. Write your six rules and how you figured them out in the space below. Be prepared to explain your findings to the class!

SONNET SEARCH SHEET -- SONNET SPECIFICS

PAGE ONE

List all group members here:

Now that you've familiarized yourselves with sonnets, you can look up a more formal definition.

Return to SIRS Knowledge Source; this time, you may want to conduct your search using "Search" or "Reference Desk." You might also find what you need using the "Browse Topics" search. There are two major kinds of sonnets, each type with its own form -- Shakespearean and Petrarchan. You should find out the rules for each of them and note them below.

	Shakespearean Sonnet	Petrarchan Sonnet
Number of Lines		
Rhyme Scheme		
Names of Sections		
Other Rules		

SONNET SEARCH SHEET -- SONNET SPECIFICS

PAGE TWO

Investigate sonnets a bit further. Using the "Search" tool, look for radio and video resources that can shed more light on sonnets and on modern poets writing them. You can listen to audio files or read the text of interviews. Examine other types of resources as well. You may also want to investigate sonnets using the "Browse Topics" search tool. In the space below, describe what you discovered during your investigation. Include the complete bibliographic information for each source you discuss!

Type of Resource	Bibliographic Information, incl. title, author, date, etc.)	What did you learn about sonnets and sonnet writers from this resource?

Now that you're a sonnet expert, you're ready to try writing a sonnet of your own. You'll start with your group, writing the first stanza of a Shakespearean sonnet. The guide provided on the "Writing a Sonnet" page will help you through the process. You will be asked to share your stanza with the class; afterwards, you'll work individually to write a Shakespearean sonnet of your own. You can use the same process you used to write with your team when you start your own sonnet. You can also use the first stanza from your group work to begin your own sonnet; just make sure the last ten lines are your own!

WRITING A SONNET

PAGE ONE

1. As a group, pick out a topic for your sonnet. In the space below, explain what your sonnet will be about.

2. The first two lines of your Shakespearean Sonnet are easy to write because they don't have to rhyme. In the space below, try out a few ideas for first lines, using ideas from everyone in the group.

FIRST LINE IDEAS:

3. The next line doesn't have a fixed rhyme yet; in the space below, try out a few ideas for the second line, using ideas from everyone in the group.

SECOND LINE IDEAS:

4. Now count the syllables in each line. Does each one have ten syllables? If you have too many, which words could be cut out? If you have too few, what words could you add? Consider adding adjectives, including colors, to help expand the line and make it more interesting. (If you are required to write in iambic pentameter, where every other syllable is stressed, now is the time to fix that up too.) Write a revision of your first two lines in the space below, making sure you have the right number of syllables and the right emphasis on syllables.

LINES ONE & TWO, EDITED:

WRITING A SONNET

PAGE TWO

5. The next two lines (lines three and four) will need to rhyme with those that you already wrote; the third line must rhyme with the first line and the fourth line must rhyme with the second. In the space below, write down all the words you can think of that rhyme with the last word in each of your first two lines.

Words that rhyme with the last word of the FIRST line:	Words that rhyme With the last word of the SECOND line:

To begin creating your third line, read your first two lines aloud, saying, "Da" for the first nine syllables and inserting one of the rhyming words from the chart above for the last syllable. For example, if the rhyming word was, "shine," you'd say, "Da da, da da, da da, da da, da line." In the space below, write down ideas for your third line.

Now repeat the process for the fourth line, trying some of the rhyming words from the chart above (words that rhymed with the last word on the second line) for the end of the line. In the space below, write down ideas for your fourth line.

Rewrite your first four lines, or *quatrain*, in the space below.

WRITING A SONNET

PAGE THREE

Look over the quatrain. Make sure all the lines have ten syllables; if your required to use iambic pentameter, check that too. Finally, read your first quatrain aloud a couple of times and consider any changes that you might make to make it clearer, more beautiful or simply more interesting. In the space below, offer two changes you could make. Then explain why you are or are not going to make those changes.

Change	Why We Will/Won't Make the Change for the Final Draft

Write the final version of the first quatrain of your Shakespearean sonnet in the space below. Practice it a few times so that you're ready to share it with the class!