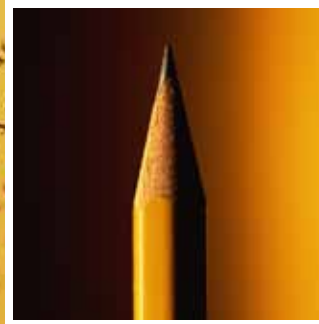


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# 2009 WRITING AWARDS



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# Multi-Genre Project: Shakespearean Sonnets

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## Introduction

The topic of this research project is writing Shakespearean sonnets. I chose this topic because I have always loved poetry, and the sonnet is perhaps the most difficult form of poetry to master. At first I was just going to do sonnets in general, but I quickly realized that I needed to pick either the Petrarchan or the Shakespearean sonnet. I chose the latter because this is the form I was most familiar with.

At first glance, the Shakespearean sonnet simply looks like a short poem with a specific rhyme scheme, but there is so much more that a well-written sonnet requires. It needs a main idea, an argument, supporting details, metaphor, etc. It is enough of a challenge just to grasp these concepts—it is even more difficult to actually implement them in writing. My hope is that this project will assist writers in accomplishing this difficult task. Through the five different genres that I chose to work with, I hope to present both the concrete and abstract requirements of a good sonnet in a way that is both entertaining and understandable. The birth announcement describes what a sonnet is, and the top ten list explains why it is still important. The recipe, poem, and how-to guide are ways to teach sonnet writing in the classroom.



# Shakespearean Sonnets

Rachel Marie Audet  
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## Explanation

A Shakespearean sonnet is a poem composed of fourteen lines written in iambic pentameter. It has three quatrains with a specific rhyme scheme, followed by a couplet at the end. It weighs less than an ounce because it is a short poem usually written on only one sheet of paper. It developed in England in the 1530s when Thomas Wyatt translated Petrarchan, or Italian, sonnets into English and changed the rhyme scheme into the ABAB CDCDEFEFGG form (Harmon and Holman 480). Wyatt is the grandfather because he brought the form to England, but Shakespeare is the father because he perfected it and made it famous. The uncles are the Earl of Surry, George Gascoigne, and Sir Philip Sidney, because they used this form in their poetry as well, but they preceded Shakespeare chronologically (Taylor 18). The announcement has only the first line; the sonnet has just been born and will eventually grow into a full sonnet of 14 lines.



This is to  
announce the birth of the

# Shakespearean Sonnet

*Name:* Shakespearean Sonnet

*Weight:* Less than 1 ounce

*Length:* 14 lines

*Date of Birth:* 1530s

*Father:* William Shakespeare

*Grandfather:* Thomas Wyatt

*Uncles:* Earl of Surry, George Gascoigne, and Sir Philip Sidney



## Explanation

There are many reasons why it is important for students to write sonnets, and this list gives ten of the most important reasons. It starts with the least important, that it teaches writers how to work with literary devices like metaphor and meter. By learning how to work with and manipulate these devices, students can then use them successfully in other writing. The next reason why writing sonnets is important is it essentially allows the writer to be at odds with him/herself, and as Phyllis Levin argues, “It is the beginning of modernism” (qtd. in Biemiller). This allows the writer to learn about modernism and then incorporate this characteristic into his/her own writing. Writing sonnets also forces the writer to create an original thesis, compose an argument, and maintain coherence throughout the poem (Hurley 1-5). If writers can learn to do this in a sonnet, then they can apply it to composing other papers they write.

Writing sonnets is also important because it allows writers to write about whatever they want. Traditionally, sonnets have been about love, but there isn’t a hard rule that says they have to be. Contemporary writers use sonnets to write about anything from “cleaning the garage, taking a final exam, [to] ... dealing with a misbehaving child” (Taylor 18). Students use sonnets to express anything they want. Another reason sonnets are important is they force the writer to fit a lot of information into a tight, specific form. When writers learn how to express themselves even when they are adhering to strict form limitations, they learn how to control language and glean the most they possibly can out of the words. This is what makes great poetry. This point leads into the next, which states that sonnets are rewarding because of their difficulty. They create a sense of pride and accomplishment in the writer once they are completed.

The top four reasons why writing sonnets is important describe the intrinsic rewards that writers will feel after they have written the poem. Many writers believe that the sonnet is the epitome of beauty and art due to its sheer difficulty. When a good sonnet is finished, it champions the beauty of the English language through its use of iambic pentameter. It is also the perfect way to express human emotion, and this is why writers are drawn to it (Bagetta 3). In addition to this, writing sonnets is a way for the writer to connect with the past, showing how traditions crafted several hundred years ago are still relevant and useful today (Timpane and Watts 174). The most important reason on the list is the second one—if writers realize that by writing good sonnets they are placing themselves on the same level as Shakespeare, then they will be more likely to feel a sense of importance.

### Top Ten List: Writing Sonnets

10. **It gives you practice with literary devices such as meter, structure, metaphor, and rhyme.**
9. **Even in its old age, it’s really quite modern. According to Phyllis Levin, “The sonnet is so contemporary—the self is at odds with itself. It’s the beginning of modernism.”**
8. **It teaches you how to compose an argument, create a thesis, and maintain coherence.**
7. **It encourages you to write about love, but you don’t have to. You can write about how much you dislike something if that better suits your wishes. Embrace the freedom you have in choosing what to write about.**
6. **It forces you to pack a lot of information into a short, specific form. You need imagination and persistence to make it work—the marks of a great poet!**
5. **It is one of the most challenging forms of poetry, and therefore it is one of the most rewarding to accomplish!**
4. **It is viewed by many as being poetry’s epitome of art and beauty.**
3. **It’s the perfect way to express human emotion—tell others how you feel!**
2. **It allows you to connect with the past through one of the earliest forms of poetry in English—a form that is still relevant in today’s world.**
1. **It puts you on the same level as Shakespeare and other poetic greats—how cool is that?**



## Explanation

This recipe explains what is required in a sonnet and provides instructions for how students can go about writing the poem. It would be important for the students to have a strong knowledge of many different literary and poetic devices, such as metaphor, iambic pentameter, quatrain, etc. If students know what these are and how to create them, then this recipe should be an easy and fun way to teach them how to put all of these things together. This helps to teach sonnets, because it gives writers a step-by-step list instead of just telling them what the requirements are. Many writers would easily get overwhelmed with just the list of ingredients; the recipe provides instruction and guides the writer along. The teacher could hand out a copy of this sonnet to all the students and the entire class could spend several days working on it, until each student has completed his/her own sonnet. It is not necessary that writers follow this exact recipe every time they write a sonnet, as everyone approaches the writing process differently. It is helpful for beginning writers, however, especially at the high school level.

### A Savory Shakespearean Sonnet Recipe

Prep: As long as you need

Bake: About an hour at a time

Let Stand: A day or two if you get frustrated

Servings: 1 perfected and original Shakespearean sonnet

Preheat your mind to get your creative juices flowing.



You will need:

-14 lines

-3 quatrains

-1 couplet

-1 ABA BCDCDEFEGG rhyme scheme

-1 unique argument

-1 heaping cup of concentration

-1 brainstorming session (add more to desired taste)

-1 pen or pencil (with sharpener)

-several sheets of paper

-a hint of metaphor

-a dash of grace

-a sprinkle of a love theme (recommended)

-iambic pentameter

1. Begin by taking the heaping cup of concentration and sprinkle it over your workspace. This will prevent any distractions or frustrations from sticking in your mind. Keep this handy through-out, and re-apply generously whenever necessary.

2. Take the paper, pen or pencil, and brainstorming session, and begin writing whatever comes to mind. Be careful not to let anything chill too long—make sure to get your thoughts onto the paper so that they can stew and gel together. Once an idea emerges, you are ready to begin writing the sonnet. Don't worry if a desired idea doesn't come on the first try; add as many brainstorming sessions as you need and keep working them until they reach your preferred tenderness.

3. Now take 1 unique argument and stir this into your idea that you've already made. This is very important so make sure you do it carefully. If you don't add enough, your sonnet will be bland and plain. Too much, however, and it will be too overpowering. Add just the right amount to bring out its exceptional flavor.

4. Next, you may sprinkle your concoction with a love theme. This step can be skipped, but it will give your sonnet a more traditional taste if you choose to include it.

5. Now you are ready to begin crafting the sonnet. Take the 14 lines and mix them thoroughly with the iambic pentameter. The iambi pentameter should be spread evenly throughout all the lines—if there are any lumps, the sonnet won't flow properly.

6. It is recommended that you sprinkle some more concentration on your work area at this point, to prevent frustrations from setting in.

7. At this point, take the ABA BCDCDEFEGG rhyme scheme and apply one letter to each line. This will ensure that the correct lines rhyme properly when your sonnet is finished.

8. Take a hint of metaphor and lace this into your mix. You may insert it anywhere you wish to suit your needs.

9. Now you are ready for your 3 quatrains to be added. These will help give your argument the proper texture and shape that it requires. Make sure to only apply these to the first 12 lines.

10. Every line has been given the proper shape now except for the final two. Take your couplet and crack it open here. Also make sure that this part is mixed well with the argument, because this is the part where it should be most flavorful.

11. Finally, add a dash of grace to your sonnet. This helps to give it an elegant look that pleases the eye and tempts others to sample it.

Now that you've finished your sonnet, let it stand for a day or two and then re-taste it. You may find that some additional ingredients are needed to add some flare, and feel free to add some things. Just make sure that the essential ingredients in the original recipe are present. When you're finished, you are ready to serve a perfected and original Shakespearean sonnet.



## Explanation

This genre teaches students how to write poetry as a genre through the use of a sonnet. It is a wonderful teaching tool because students learn through modeling examples, and this not only gives them a poem so they can see what a sonnet looks like, but it also describes the difficulties writers have and the accomplishment they feel when they complete the task. If the teacher reads this, students will be able to relate to the speaker of this poem. The speaker is feeling frustrated and stifled in the beginning due to writer's block. There are simply too many rules for the writer to abide by and he/she feels overwhelmed. This changes, however, as the writer begins to feel inspired and empowered to form ideas and thoughts that he/she supports in the poem. The final couplet describes how the process of writing a sonnet is difficult, but the outcome is well worth it. The title contributes to the overall meaning as well, by showing that the process was difficult and arduous, but the writer persevered in the end and was able to create the sonnet.

This poem would be an excellent tool for teachers to use in the classroom. They could give a copy to all the students and use it to show them how a Shakespearean sonnet should be written. This gives the students a visual guide as the teacher goes over things such as rhyme scheme, quatrains, couplets, etc. It can even be used to show how the sonnet must be arguing or persuading about something.

Sonnets typically have a turn in the 3rd quatrain, and this example shows that when the storm causes a flood, that brings empowerment rather than despair (Biemiller). This would also be a useful

way to teach  
s t u d e n t s  
how to scan  
a poem and  
identify the  
meter. They  
can scan this  
poem and  
learn that son-  
nets are writ-  
ten in iambic  
pentameter,  
which means  
they have  
five feet in  
each line,  
and each foot  
consists of  
an unstressed  
syllable fol-  
lowed by a  
stressed syl-  
lable. When  
reading it  
out loud, it is  
helpful to say  
it to a beat:  
d u h - D U H -  
d u h - D U H -  
d u h - D U H -  
d u h - D U H -  
d u h - D U H  
(Timpane and  
Watts 172).  
The poem can  
be scanned as  
follows:

### *To Suffer a Sonnet*

*Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?  
You make me sweat with anxious writer's block,  
As if the sun were roasting me in May.  
And just as summer heat will scorch a rock,  
My mind feels stifled by constraints of form,  
For how can I abide by all these rules?  
I want to run as though they bring a storm  
Of couplets, quatrains, and poetic tools.  
But when it breaks and floods, I do not sink;  
And calming breezes beckon me to write,  
Encouraging my mind to take and drink  
Until my rhymes in harmony unite.  
Although it brings a challenge hard to hold,  
A sonnet, when completed, shines like gold.*

*~Inspired by Shakespeare's Sonnet 18~*

### To Suffer a Sonnet

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?  
You make me sweat with anxious writer's block,  
As if the sun were roasting me in May.  
And just as summer heat will scorch a rock,

My mind feels stifled by constraints of form,  
For how can I abide by all these rules?  
I want to run as though they bring a storm  
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But when it breaks and floods, I do not sink;  
And calming breezes beckon me to write,  
Encouraging my mind to take and drink  
Until my rhymes in harmony unite.

Although it brings a challenge hard to hold,  
A sonnet, when completed, shines like gold.

This genre is the perfect example of how form equals content in literature.

### Explanation

The final genre is a How-To manual to writing Shakespearean sonnets, developed in Powerpoint (the manual is available online at <[www.svsu.edu/writingprogram/braun-awards.html](http://www.svsu.edu/writingprogram/braun-awards.html)>). Instead of being in book form, it is in digital form so that it can simply be loaded onto a disk and given to students or shown in class. The first half of the guide examines Shakespeare's Sonnet 73 and breaks it up into four different parts: the first three quatrains, and then the couplet. This allows students to study it in four distinct parts and it shows them how each part contributes to the whole. It also interprets each section so that students can learn how Shakespeare uses metaphor. Next, one slide gives basic information such as the meter and length of the sonnet. Only one slide is designated to this, because this guide's focus is on the more abstract concepts in a sonnet, which are stating an argument, building on it, and incorporating a metaphor.

Using the second half of the How-To guide, students write their own sonnet. The process begins by encouraging them to think of an idea and a metaphor that they can work into a poem. Each slide after that focuses on one of the four main sections and includes a template so the writers can see how the lines should be formed. Once each section is finished, they can be combined to form the complete sonnet, as shown in one of the final slides.

My thanks to Dr. Cavanaugh, as her worksheet on writing sonnets includes a similar template that I adapted for my own use in this guide.

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