

Poetry Lesson Plans: Sonnet

Grades: 11,12 > College Level

Objective — The student will:

- understand the definition and format of a poem written in the "sonnet" form. understand the meaning and purpose of "extended metaphors" in poetry.
- demonstrate the ability to write a poem using the set, poetical format of a sonnet; the content of the sonnet will provide an extended metaphor.

Hint: Have the students research and read other sonnets before beginning the lesson. Discuss the history and significance of meter and rhythm in poetry. Discuss examples 1 & 2 relative to understanding extended metaphors. Ask students to provide other examples of extended metaphor either in other poems or on their own.

Sonnet

Write a poem which satisfies the following criteria:

1. The poem is exactly fourteen lines in length.
2. Each line contains exactly ten syllables.
3. Although each line has ten syllables,
 - a. the poem does not sound stilted; it should read naturally;
 - b. there should be no obvious extra padding to stretch a given line out to the required length.
 - c. except where you try for special effects, the line-breaks should be at appropriate places, where natural pauses would fall.
4. The poem should be rhythmically homogeneous (uniform), without sounding mechanical or sing-songy.
5. The poem must develop one extended metaphor. For example, "The Silken Tent" compares a woman to a tent.
6. The comparison must:
 - a. not be picked up briefly and dropped; it must be sustained and explored at length. It must form the basis of the poem.
 - b. It must be fresh and surprising, not trite and obvious.
 - c. The comparison must, like the one that forms the basis of "The Silken Tent," have a point to it—a point that is subtle enough to require an extended metaphor:

EXAMPLE 1
Implicit Extended Metaphor

A Summer Night

At the end of the street
a porch light is burning,
showing the way. How simple,
how perfect it seems: the darkness,
the white house like a passage
through summer and into
a snowfield. Night after night,
the lamp comes on at dusk,
the end of the street
stands open and white,
and an old woman sits there
tending the lonely gate.

--Ted Kooser

EXAMPLE 2
Implicit Extended Metaphor

The Death of the Ball Turrent Gunner

From my mother's sleep I fell into the State,
And I hunched in its belly till my wet fur froze.
Six miles from earth, loosed from its dream of life
I woke to black flak and the nightmare fighters.
When I died they washed me out of the turret with a hose.

--Randall Jarrell

EXAMPLE 3
Implicit Extended Metaphor

For the Governor

Heartbeat by heartbeat our governor tours
the state, and before a word and after a word
over the crowd the world speaks to him,
thin as a wire. And he knows inside
each word, too, that anyone says,
another words lurks, and inside that. . .

Sometimes we fear from him: he, or someone,
must act for us all. Across our space
we watch him while the country leans
on him: he bears time's tall demand,
and beyond our state he must think the shore
and beyond that the waves and the miles
and the waves.

--William Stafford

EXAMPLE 4
(a sonnet)

The Silken Tent

She is as in a field, a silken tent
At midday when a sunny summer breeze
Has dried the dew and all its ropes relent,
So that in guys it gently sways at ease,
And its supporting central pole,
That is its pinnacle to heavenward
And signifies the sureness of the soul,
Seems to owe naught to any single cord,
But strictly held by none, is loosely bound
By countless silken ties of love and thought
To everything on earth the compass round,
And only by one's going slightly taut
In the capriciousness of summer air
Is of the slightest bondage made aware.

--Robert Frost

EXAMPLE 5

(a sonnet)

A Lovely Love

Let it be alleys. Let it be a hall
Whose janitor javelins epithet and thought
To cheapen hyacinth darkness that we sought
And played we found, rot, make the petals fall.
Let it be stairways, and splintery box
Where you have thrown me, scraped me with your kiss,
Have honed me, have released me after this
Cavern kindness, smiled away our shocks.
This is the birthright of our lovely love.
In swaddling clothes. Not like that Other one.
Nor lit by any fondling star above.
Nor found by any wise men, either. Run.
People are coming. They must not catch us here
Definitionless in this strict atmosphere.

--Gwendolyn Brooks

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