

## Poetry: National Shakespeare Day

You are probably familiar with the name 'Shakespeare' and some of you may even have seen one or two of his plays, or read the stories of the plays. Watch this short video to remind yourself of who he is:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/topics/z7d7gwx/articles/zrxwy9q>

There are many reasons why Shakespeare is still revered and taught today, and not everyone is a fan, but the mark he left on the English language, including many new words and common sayings, is undeniable. His plays contain many famous scenes; one of the most well-known is probably King Henry V stirring up his troops to return to battle. You don't have to understand every word; few people who enjoy Shakespeare are familiar with every piece of Jacobean vocabulary – it's about the overall sense of a piece.

"Once more unto the breach!" from Henry V (speech from 0:40): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VOOZD05KDv4>

However, Shakespeare has since become very well-known for his poetry, in particular his use of a poetry form called the sonnet. This is a poem of 14 lines, split into three 'quatrains' or blocks of 4 lines, followed by a final rhyming couplet. The most famous sonnet is probably number 18 (out of 154). You can hear Mr Coffield read it [here](#). The original text of the sonnet is on the left below, with a line-by-line 'translation' on the right. This sonnet – along with many others – is addressed to someone known the 'fair youth', a young man Shakespeare either greatly admired or was in love with (many historians have tried to find out but we still don't know today who he was or how Shakespeare knew him). Shakespeare uses a lot of metaphor in this sonnet, comparing the youth to the sun, the month of May and a summer's day.

**Q1** 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: 4

**Q2** 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: 8

**Q3** But thy 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: 12

**C** So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,  
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.<sup>[1]</sup> 14

Shall I compare you to a summer's day?  
You are more lovely and more moderate:  
Harsh winds disturb the delicate buds of May,  
And summer doesn't last long enough.  
Sometimes the sun is too hot,  
And its golden face is often dimmed by clouds.  
All beautiful things eventually become less beautiful,  
Either by the experiences of life or by the passing of time.  
But your eternal beauty won't fade,  
Nor lose any of its quality.  
And you will never die,  
As you will live on in my enduring lines of poetry.  
As long as there are people still alive to read poems,  
This sonnet will live, and you will live in it.

Shakespeare's prediction turned out to be correct; this sonnet is one of the most famous poems in the world. Food for thought.

Now it's your turn to write a sonnet. It can be about anything you like, but it could be about your experience of life under lockdown, you could address it to a good friend or someone in our life you care about, you could write about something helping you get through this time (eg. music) or anything you like! The 'rules' and a framework which you can choose to use if you like are on the next page.

## Shakespearean Sonnet Rules

1. 14 lines.
2. 3 sections of 4 lines each (quatrains) and a final couplet.
3. The couplet must rhyme and should ideally be memorable or powerful, summing up the idea or purpose of the poem.
4. The quatrains should have every other line rhyming – look at number 18 above to see this pattern

Off you go!

**IF YOU ARE FEELING LIKE A POETRY MASTER:** Shakespeare uses exactly 10 syllables in every line, in a pattern called 'iambic pentameter', which is where each syllable alternates as stressed or unstressed. Say the sentence 'I'm going to have some fish and chips for tea' out loud, and listen to where the syllables are more pronounced. Red syllables are stressed in the examples below. This pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables gives a poem's lines a natural rhythm. If you want to, you can write your sonnet in this format using iambic pentameter. It's optional, but it will really lift it if you fancy a challenge. .

I'm going to have some fish and chips for tea

Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May

Quatrain 1	
Quatrain 2	
Quatrain 3	
Couplet	