



Understanding Shakespeare: "Sonnet 18" Foundation Lesson—High School

Prereading Activity

1. Imagine the perfect summer day. It is early summer with just the perfect mix of comfortable temperature and weather. List the details about that perfect day on the chart that follows. Fill in the chart with images that appeal to the different senses.

Sight	
Touch	
Taste	
Smell	
Hearing	

2. Write a general statement about the overall feeling created by this perfect day.

3. Now think of a person you care about. How are this perfect summer day and this person alike?
How are they different?

Sonnet 18 Analysis

Read the poem aloud. Work through the questions and activities that follow.

Sonnet 18

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, 5
 And often is his gold complexion dimmed;
 And every fair from fair sometime declines,
 By chance or nature's changing course untrimmed.
 But thy eternal summer shall not fade,
 Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st; 10
 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.

Quatrain 1

- line 1 Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
- 2 Thou art more lovely and more temperate:
- 3 Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
- 4 And summer's lease hath all too short a date;

1. What season of the year is dealt with in this sonnet? _____
2. The quatrain contains an analogy that compares _____
to _____
3. Based on images from your prereading chart, explain why this is an effective comparison.

4. What is the denotation of temperate in line 2? How is this word appropriate to describe both a day in summer and a person? _____

5. What is the denotation of darling (line 3) in this context? _____
6. Explain the metaphor in line 4, "summer's lease." _____

7. Paraphrase the first quatrain. _____

Quatrain 2

line 5 Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,
6 And often is his gold complexion dimmed;
7 And every fair from fair sometime declines,
8 By chance or nature's changing course untrimmed.

8. In line 5, what is "the eye of heaven"? _____

9. What is the antecedent of the pronoun his in line 6? _____

10. How could "the eye of heaven" be dimmed? _____

11. How is the sun further personified in line 6? _____

12. Explain two possible meanings of the word fair in line 7. _____

13. For each meaning you identified, explain how something that is fair might "decline."

14. Paraphrase the second quatrain. _____

Quatrain 3

line 9 But thy eternal summer shall not fade,
10 Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st;
11 Nor shall Death brag thou wander'st in his shade,
12 When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st:

15. What word signals a shift in the poem? _____

What word in line 1 is directly related to the word thy in line 9? _____

16. The speaker states that "thy eternal summer shall not fade." Explain this metaphor. _____

17. How is Death personified in line 11? _____

18. Explain the Biblical allusion in line 11.

19. What are possible meanings for the word lines in line 12? Which meaning is most relevant? Explain.

20. Paraphrase the 3rd quatrain. _____

Final Couplet

line 13 So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,
14 So long lives this and this gives life to thee.

21. Paraphrase the final couplet. _____

22. What does the final couplet reveal about the power of a literary work? _____

The theme of a work, in this case a poem, is its implied view of life and human nature. It is the generalization about life at large that the piece leads the reader to see.

23. Fill in the following frame statement for theme.

In _____,	_____
(title)	(author)
_____	_____
(reveals, explores, illustrates, shows, etc. marker verbs)	(key aspect of the theme)
and how it _____	_____
(What does it show us on a universal level?)	

Graphing a Sonnet

Use the sonnet graph on the next page to chart the form of Sonnet 18.

Writing Activities

Review the following definitions:

Rhythm is the varying speed, intensity, elevation, pitch, loudness, and expressiveness of speech.

Meter is the measured, patterned arrangement of syllables, according to stress and length in a poem. For example, the most common meter in English verse is the iamb, an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable. An iamb is a two-syllable foot.

A sonnet is a poem of 14 lines following one of several set rhyme schemes. The two basic classical sonnet types are the Italian (Petrarchan) and the English (Shakespearean). The Italian (Petrarchan) form is marked by its division into the octave and the sestet. The rhyme scheme is *abbaabba cdecde* (or *cdcdcd* or some other variation of two or three rhymes). The English (Shakespearean) sonnet is divided into 3 quatrains and a rhymed couplet. The rhyme scheme is *abab cdcd efef gg*. The meter is commonly iambic pentameter (5 iambs, which is ten syllables, per line).

Writing an Analytical Paragraph: Write a paragraph in which you explain how Shakespeare's use of imagery suggests his attitude about the enduring power of poetry.

Writing a Sonnet: The theme of a sonnet is usually related to an elevated, abstract idea such as love, devotion, patriotism, honor, fidelity, etc. Choose such an idea and write an original sonnet, following one of the patterns identified above (Italian or English). Use the second graph to help organize the meter and rhyme.