

FOLGER SHAKESPEARE LIBRARY

About the Folger Shakespeare Library

The Folger Shakespeare Library houses one of the world's largest and most significant collections of materials pertaining to Shakespeare and the English and Continental Renaissance. The Folger Shakespeare Library editions of Shakespeare's plays are acclaimed throughout the world by educators, students, and general readers. The mission of the Folger Library is to preserve and enhance its collections; to render the collections accessible to scholars for advanced research; and to advance understanding and appreciation of the Library and its collections through interpretive programs for the public.

About the Folger Shakespeare Library's Education Department

*"There is much matter to be heard and learned."
—As You Like It*

Shakespeare's audience spoke of *hearing* a play, rather than of seeing one. The Folger Shakespeare Library's Education department believes in active learning, using a performance-based and language centered approach to teaching Shakespeare. Drawing on the Folger's abundant resources and incorporating opportunities provided by the Web, their activities and workshops present innovative ways to engage children, students, and teachers in Shakespeare's work .

For a complete selection of curriculum plans from the Folger Shakespeare Library Education department, visit www.folger.com

About the Folger Shakespeare Library's Publishing Program

For nearly 70 years, the Folger Shakespeare Library has been the most respected resource for the scholarship and teaching of William Shakespeare. Designed with everyone in mind—from students to general readers—these editions feature:

- Freshly edited text based on the best early printed version of the play
- Modern spelling and punctuation
- Detailed explanatory notes conveniently placed on pages facing the text of the play
- Scene-by-scene plot summaries
- A key to famous lines and phrases
- An introduction to reading Shakespeare's language
- An essay by an outstanding scholar providing a modern perspective on the play
- Illustrations from the Folger Shakespeare Library's vast holdings of rare books
- Biographical and historical essays

To receive a complete list of available titles, e-mail your request to folger.marketing@simonandschuster.com.

The Shakespeare Set Free Workshops

Make meaningful learning fun. Shakespeare Set Free workshops model a fresh approach for teaching Shakespeare in grades 3-12. Based on twenty years of best practices, the Folger method inspires teachers with proven activities that address national and local standards. Schedule a one-day workshop for 20-30 teachers at your school. If you teach in New Jersey, you may be eligible for funding from the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation. Contact the Folger Shakespeare Library at 202-675-0380 or by e-mail at educate@folger.edu for more information.

Turn the page for sample curriculum plans that you can find at <http://www.folger.com>
Additional plans and tools are available on the website.

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The History and Form of the Sonnet

Unit created by Heidi Beehler

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Plays/Scenes Covered

Petrarch's "In Gratitude to Love"

Shakespeare's Sonnet 130

Romeo and Juliet Prologue

Romeo and Juliet 1.5.104-122

What's On for Today and Why?

This unit is a useful lead-in to *Romeo and Juliet*, because it introduces the way Shakespeare plays with the conventions of the Petrarchan sonnet to manipulate the audience's expectations and understanding of the idea of love.

In the sonnets covered in this unit, the form evolves, each sonnet using and developing the conventions exhibited in the previous poem. This evolution helps us understand Romeo's character, and his understanding of love and how it originated.

This unit will take three to five class periods.

What To Do:

1. In a lecture, provide information on the history of the sonnet. (The links below will be helpful as you prepare your lectures for this unit.) Key points to cover:

- Italian form, originating in Italy and reaching its height of popularity with Petrarch
- Petrarch's sonnets to Laura
- Tradition of writing sonnet sequences (also called sonnet cycles)

2. Hand out side-by-side versions of Petrarch's and Shakespeare's sonnets. (See handout attached below.)

3. While reading Petrarch's "In Gratitude to Love," direct students' attention towards Petrarchan conventions:

- Love at first sight
- Unattainability of the object of love; unrequited love
- Lady as ideally beautiful
- Love as idolatry
- Use of oxymorons to describe the suffering of the lover
- Self-reflexivity of the form (poet acknowledging that he is writing a poem)

4. Lecture on the evolution of the sonnet, and its adaptation by Elizabethan sonneteers.

Key points to cover:

- Change in rhyme scheme
- Sonnet cycle tradition continues
- Important sonneteers of the time (Sidney, Spenser, Shakespeare)
- Sonnet tradition in England
- Shakespeare's sonnets (Fair young man, Dark Lady, etc.)

5. Now read Shakespeare's Sonnet 130, "My Mistress' Eyes are Nothing Like the Sun."

Direct students' attention to the following points:

- Rhyme and stanza scheme
- Undoing of Petrarchan notions of beauty
- More realistic attitude towards beauty and love

6. Photocopy several of Shakespeare's sonnets, and cut them up, line by line. Break students into groups, and give each group a cut-up sonnet. Ask them to reassemble the sonnet, using what they know about the structure and rhyme scheme of the form.

7. Play *When Love Speaks*, a CD recording of actors' and musicians' interpretations of Shakespeare's sonnets (available through <http://www.whenlovespeaks.com/>). Make copies of liner notes for students to follow along, if you like.

8. Provide handout of 1.5.104–122 (attached below). Romeo's and Juliet's lines are indicated in different fonts. (Romeo speaks first.)

- Why have Romeo and Juliet's first lines together formed a sonnet? What does this evoke for the audience or reader?
- What traditions appear in this sonnet?
- What do we learn about the characters from their lines? Which traditions do they use? Do they ever stray from these traditions?

9. As you read *Romeo and Juliet*, draw your students' attention to language that is influenced Petrarchan conventions (for example, Romeo's use of oxymorons in 1.1.181–187). How does Romeo's language change after he meets Juliet?

Suggested extended activities:

- Write a sonnet in either the Petrarchan or Shakespearean form, using at least three of the conventions used by the sonneteer.
- Research another sonneteer and present information to the class.
- Research another Shakespearean sonnet and explain it to the class.
- Memorize and perform a dramatic reading of one of the sonnets.

What You Need:

The Folger Shakespeare Library edition of *Romeo and Juliet* (ISBN: 0-7434-7711-1)

CD: *When Love Speaks*

Handouts (attached)

Links with background information on sonnets (below)

Links:

[Shakespeare's Sonnets](http://www.folger.edu/template.cfm?cid=926) (http://www.folger.edu/template.cfm?cid=926)

[Juliet Trumps Laura \(Shakespeare and Petrarch\)](http://www.pbs.org/shakespeare/educators/language/casestudy3.html)

(http://www.pbs.org/shakespeare/educators/language/casestudy3.html)

[A Guide to the Sonnet](http://www.utm.edu/departments/english/everett/sonnet.htm) (http://www.utm.edu/departments/english/everett/sonnet.htm)

[Francesco Petrarch](http://petrarch.petersadlon.com/) (http://petrarch.petersadlon.com/)

[Elizabethan Sonneteers](http://www.sonnets.org/eliz.htm) (http://www.sonnets.org/eliz.htm)

[Definition of sonnet sequence](http://web.cn.edu/kwheeler/lit_terms_S.html#sonnet_sequence_anchor)

(http://web.cn.edu/kwheeler/lit_terms_S.html#sonnet_sequence_anchor)

How Did It Go?

Were students able to apply what they learned about the traditions of the form to their reading of *Romeo and Juliet*? Did their understanding inform their interpretation of Romeo's character? Did the student work demonstrate mastery of the material?



Petrarch's Sonnet XLVII
"In Gratitude to Love"
(Trans. Wrangham)

*Blest be the day, and blest the month, the year,
The spring, the hour, the very moment blest,
The lovely scene, the spot, where first oppressed
I sunk, of two bright eyes the prisoner:
And blest the first soft pang, to me most dear,
Which thrilled my heart, when Love became its guest;
And blest the bow, the shafts which pierced my breast.
And even the wounds, which bosomed thence I bear.
Blest too the strains which, poured through glad and grove,
Have made the woodlands echo with her name;
The sighs, the tears, the languishment, the love:
And blest these sonnets, sources of my fame;
And blest the thought—Oh! Never to remove!
Which turns to her alone, from her alone which came.*

Shakespeare's Sonnet 130
"My Mistress' Eyes are Nothing Like the Sun"

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun;
Coral is far more red than her lips' red;
If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;
If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.
I have seen roses damasked, red and white,
But no such roses see I in her cheeks;
And in some perfume is there more delight
Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks.
I love to hear her speak, yet well I know
That music hath a far more pleasing sound.
I grant I never saw a goddess go;
My mistress, when she walks, treads on the ground.
And yet, by heaven, I think my love as rare
As any she belied with false compare.



Romeo and Juliet 1.5.104–122

*If I profane with my unworhiest hand
This holy shrine, the gentle sin is this:
My lips, two blushing pilgrims, ready stand
To smooth that rough touch with tender kiss.*

Good pilgrim, you do wrong your hand too much,
Which mannerly devotion shows in this;
For saints have hand that pilgrims' hands do touch,
And palm to palm is holy palmers' kiss.

Have not saints lips, and holy palmers too?

Ay, pilgrim, lips that they must use in prayer.

*O then, dear saint, let lips do what hands do.
They pray: grant thou, lest faith turn to despair.*

Saints do not move, though grant for prayers' sake.

*Then move not while my prayer's effect I take. [He kisses her]
Thus from my lips, by thine, my sin is purged.*

Then have my lips the sin that they have took.

*Sin from my lips? O trespass sweetly urged!
Give me my sin again. [He kisses her]*

You kiss by th' book.

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(as of January 2005)

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