



Teacher notes

Sonnets

In Key Stage 2, pupils should study the work of William Shakespeare. He was a master wordsmith and his plays contain language that we still use today. These activities explore his sonnets, reading two examples and exploring their themes. Pupils will learn how sonnets are structured and have the opportunity to write their own.

The activities could be taught as part of a unit on Shakespeare, poetry or to celebrate Shakespeare's birthday in April and may be taught over a series of lessons.

English Objectives covered are:

- to increase familiarity with poems from our literary heritage
- to identify and discuss themes in poetry
- to evaluate how authors have used language, considering the impact on the reader
- to draw on reading when planning and writing their own sonnets

This pack includes:

- Sonnet 18 & Sonnet 27
- Exploring themes worksheet
- Shakespeare themed writing paper

Introducing the task

Discuss who William Shakespeare is. Explain that he was born in 1564 and is famous for writing plays and poems. Can the pupils name any of his plays?

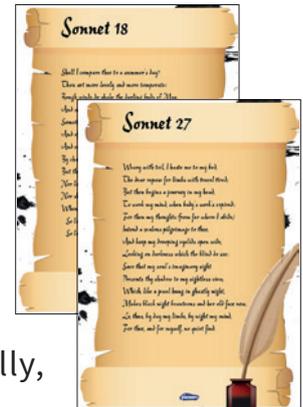
Explain that we will be focusing on some of Shakespeare's sonnets. These are poems and he published a book of 154 sonnets. The poems followed various themes such as: love, hate, beauty, separation and the passing of time.



Activity 1

Read the two **sonnets** included in this pack (Sonnets 18 and 27). Discuss any vocabulary pupils are unsure of, checking understanding of Shakespearean language (hath, thou, thee, nor etc).

Pupils could have time to practise performing these individually,



Activity 2

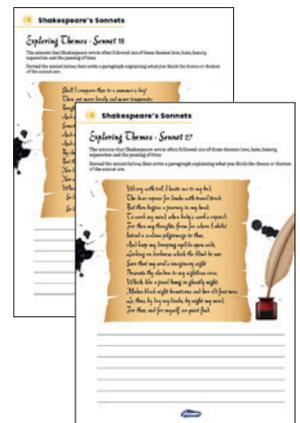
Remind pupils of the main themes of Shakespeare’s sonnets (love, hate, beauty, separation and the passing of time). In pairs or small groups, pupils should complete one of the **exploring themes worksheets** – rereading one of the sonnets and writing a paragraph explaining what they feel the theme is and why. Explain that a sonnet may have more than one theme. Remind them to refer back to the poem, using words or phrases to help explain their thoughts.

Sonnet 18’s themes:

It is generally considered that the theme of this sonnet is eternal love, that does not over time (‘thy eternal summer shall not fade’).

Sonnet 27’s themes:

It is considered to be about love and separation, how the poet’s mind is restless thinking about his love even as he sleeps. Pupils may take it more at its literal level, that he is tired and has gone to bed but that his mind is still racing.



Activity 3

Explore the structure of the sonnets.

Allow pupils time to investigate them in pairs or small groups.



KS2 – Shakespeare

Pose these questions if needed:

- Can they find examples of rhyme? Is there a pattern?
- Is there a set number of lines? Or syllables?
- Is there a rhythm created when reading?

After pupils have had time to explore the structure of the poems, share their thoughts as a class.

Explain that a sonnet is made up of fourteen lines and is divided into four parts, called *quatrains*.

The first three quatrains have four lines in each and the last has two.

It has a set rhyming pattern – the 1st line rhymes with the 3rd, and the 2nd with the 4th. The 5th then rhymes with the 7th and so on. The last two lines in the final quatrain are a rhyming couplet.

Each line has ten syllables and follows a rhythm called *iambic pentameter*. This is when there are ten beats per line, made up of alternating unstressed and stressed syllables. This could be explained as it sounding like a heartbeat (dee DUM, dee DUM, dee DUM).

Allow pupils the opportunity to explore the structure after or during the class discussion.

Challenge:

Pupils will now have the opportunity to write their own sonnets.

Recap the themes that sonnets usually follow: love, hate, beauty, separation and the passing of time.

Invite pupils to choose a theme (or one of their own) and plan and write a sonnet – using the themed paper for their finished piece.

Remind pupils of the structure (number of lines, syllables, rhyme, rhythm) and encourage them to use as many of these as they can in their own sonnets.

