



The English-Speaking Union National Shakespeare Competition SONNET LESSON PLANS



Week 1: Getting to Know Shakespearean Sonnets

NOTE: This lesson will take 2 x 50 minute class periods.

- **What's On for Week 1 and Why?**

This first week is all about introductory work. Key goals: introduce students to the format of a Shakespeare sonnet, get the students on their feet and speaking text aloud, and have the students select and begin to explore their own sonnets.

- Students will:

- Work in groups to unscramble a sonnet;
- Present a choral reading of an sonnet;
- Discuss which of the sonnet's qualities helped them to unscramble it;
- Read and discuss Shakespeare's version of the sonnet;
- Identify the characteristics of a Shakespearean sonnet.

- **Which Standards Are Highlighted?**

Common Core English Language Arts:

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-12. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 & 10
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-12. 1
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.9-12. 4, 5 & 6

NCCAS National Theatre Education:

- NCCAS.NSTE.9-12.4

- **What Will You Need?**

- A computer
- A projector
- One scrambled sonnet (enough copies for each group of students)
Note: A scrambled sonnet is one (ex. Sonnet 91) cut up into fourteen lines and scrambled.
- The original sonnet (one copy for each student)
- *Teacher Handbook on the ESU National Shakespeare Competition* (a copy for the teacher)
- *Suggested Sonnets List* (a copy for each student)

Day 1

- **What Will You and Your Students Do?**

Group Activity:

1. Place the students in groups. Give each group a scrambled version of the same sonnet.
2. Have each group read through the lines and put them into what they believe is the correct order of the original sonnet. Then each make a copy of this sonnet for themselves.
3. Ask each group to prepare a choral reading of its version of the sonnet. Inform them that: every person in the group must say at least part of the sonnet out loud, and at least one of the lines should be spoken together by everyone in the group.

Note: Encourage the students to experiment and be creative. They may repeat, echo, and/or whisper lines. They may add movement to their presentation as well.



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- **How Did It Go?**

To assess this lesson plan in your classroom, ask yourself:

1. Did each student participate in unscrambling the sonnet?
2. Did each student begin working on their group's choral reading of the unscrambled sonnet?
3. Were students fully engaged and using their creativity during their preparations?

- **What's for Homework?**

Ask each student to complete the following assignments for the next class:

1. Reread their group's unscrambled version of the sonnet several times (focusing on the lines that have been assigned to them for the group's choral reading).
2. Prepare to deliver their group's choral reading at the next class.

Day 2

- **What Will You and Your Students Do?**

Group Activity:

1. Divide the students up into their groups from last class.
2. Allow each group five minutes to practice its recitation of their unscrambled sonnet.

Full Class Activity:

1. Groups share their sonnets with each other.
Note: If their unscrambled versions aren't 100% true to the original sonnet, that's wonderful; the purpose at this point in the process is discovery and experimentation.
2. Acknowledge one positive aspect of each group's sonnet recitation.
3. Discuss what clues the text gave them and how that helped them unscramble their sonnet.
4. Draw some conclusions as a class about the sonnet format:
 - a. Give each student a copy of the original version of the sonnet.
 - b. Project a copy of that sonnet on the board.
 - c. Ask one or more students to read the sonnet aloud.
 - d. Once you have finished reading the complete sonnet, discuss it together. Ask the students to identify anything that they noticed (a word they don't know, a line they really liked, etc.) Throughout the conversation, add the students' comments to the projected version of the sonnet, so the class can visually follow the annotation process.
Note: Let them guide the discussion first. Then begin to introduce some additional questions, (the ones on the Page 2 of the Sonnet Selection & Preparation section in the *Teacher Handbook*).
 - e. When the discussion begins to wind down, ask the students to draw the discussion to a close by summarizing the content of this sonnet in one sentence.
 - f. Establish as a class a list of key elements of a Shakespearean sonnet (again see Page 2 of the Sonnet Selection & Preparation section in the *Teacher Handbook*).
5. Review the sonnet selection guidelines (found on Page 1 of Sonnet Selection & Preparation section in the *Teacher Handbook*).
6. Pass out copies of the *Suggested Sonnets List*. Note: First be sure to check with your ESU Branch to see if there is a limited group of sonnets from which your students must choose.
7. Provide students with a link to the *Suggested Sonnets Packet* (available online at: www.esuus.org). Note: This resource will be used in tonight's homework.



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- **How Did It Go?**

To assess this lesson plan in your classroom, ask yourself:

1. Did each student creatively present a group version of the sonnet?
2. Did you provide at least one piece of positive feedback on each recitation?
3. Did the students thoughtfully participate in the class discussion of the sonnet?
4. Did the students come up with one clear sentence summary of the sonnet?
5. Did the class develop an effective list of sonnet characteristics?

- **What's for Homework?**

Ask each student to complete the following assignments for next week:

1. Review the *Suggested Sonnets List* and its accompanying *Suggested Sonnets Packet* (available online at www.esuus.org in the Student Resources section).
2. Identify five sonnets that appeal to them (and reflect the guidelines discussed in class).
3. Reread their sonnet choices.
4. Select one of the five sonnets for recitation.
5. Print several copies of this sonnet (and bring to the next class).

NOTE: The student needs several copies of the sonnet for notes. You'll need one for reference and (if necessary) for prompting them during the workshops in upcoming weeks.

6. Begin to explore their sonnet:
 - a. Write the complete sonnet in the middle of a large sheet of paper.
 - b. Annotate the sonnet (in the same way that the class as a whole annotated their sonnet).
 - c. Answer the following questions on their annotated copy:
 1. What is the central idea of the sonnet?
 2. How do the lines break down into an introduction, development of the theme and conclusion?
 3. Is there a turning point in the sonnet?
 4. How do the meaning and delivery of these words differ from my sonnet?
 5. Can I strengthen the contrast?
 6. How should the examples and arguments be emphasized?
 7. How should the tone of the couplet be interpreted? Ironic? Witty? Contradictory?

Note: These questions come from the *Instructions for School Winner* (available online).

7. Memorize the first four lines of their sonnet.