

# What is a Sonnet?

Understanding the forms,  
meter, rhyme, and other  
aspects of the sonnet.



# Sonnet Form

- A sonnet has 14 lines.
- A sonnet must be written in iambic pentameter
- A sonnet must follow a specific rhyme scheme, depending on the type of sonnet.
- A sonnet can be about any subject, though they are often about love or nature.
- A sonnet introduces a problem or question in the beginning, and a resolution is offered after the turn.



# Iambic Pentameter

- A line of Iambic Pentameter is a line with ten beats.
- An “Iamb” is two beats, or one “foot.”
- “Penta” is five (line has five “feet”).
- “Meter” is the rhythm of the poem.
- A “foot” is made of an unstressed syllable and a stressed syllable (in that order).



# English Sonnet

- An English Sonnet is also called a Shakespearean Sonnet.
- It includes three quatrains (groups of four lines) and a couplet (two lines).
- The rhyme scheme is often abab cdcd efef gg.
- The turn is either after eight lines or ten lines.



# Italian Sonnet

- An Italian Sonnet is also called a Petrarchan Sonnet.
- It includes an octave (eight lines) and a sestet (six lines).
- The rhyme scheme must begin with abbaabba, and can conclude with any variation of c, d, and e (cdecde, cdcdee, etc.).
- The turn must occur between the octave and the sestet.



# What type of sonnet is “What the Sonnet Is”?

- What are the groupings of the lines (how many lines are in each group)?
- What is the rhyme scheme?
- Where is the turn?
- Based on your answers, what kind of sonnet is it?

*Write these questions on your paper and answer them when the sonnet is shown.*



# “What the Sonnet is”

Fourteen small brodered berries on the hem  
Of Circe's mantle, each of magic gold;  
Fourteen of lone Calypso's tears that rolled  
Into the sea, for pearls to come of them;  
Fourteen clear signs of omen in the gem  
With which Medea human fate foretold;  
Fourteen small drops, which Faustus, growing old,  
Craved of the Fiend, to water Life's dry stem.  
It is the pure white diamond Dante brought  
To Beatrice; the sapphire Laura wore  
When Petrarch cut it sparkling out of thought;  
The ruby Shakespeare hewed from his heart's core;  
The dark, deep emerald that Rossetti wrought  
For his own soul, to wear for evermore.  
~Eugene Lee-Hamilton

# What type of sonnet is “What the Sonnet Is”?

**Lines are in an octave (eight lines) and a sestet (six lines).**

Fourteen small broidered berries on the hem  
Of Circe's mantle, each of magic gold;  
Fourteen of lone Calypso's tears that rolled  
Into the sea, for pearls to come of them;  
Fourteen clear signs of omen in the gem  
With which Medea human fate foretold;  
Fourteen small drops, which Faustus, growing old,  
Craved of the Fiend, to water Life's dry stem.  
It is the pure white diamond Dante brought  
To Beatrice; the sapphire Laura wore  
When Petrarch cut it sparkling out of thought;  
The ruby Shakespeare hewed from his heart's core;  
The dark, deep emerald that Rossetti wrought  
For his own soul, to wear for evermore.





# What type of sonnet is “What the Sonnet Is”?

- **Rhyme scheme is abbaabba cdcdcd.**

Fourteen small brodered berries on the hem  
Of Circe's mantle, each of magic gold;  
Fourteen of lone Calypso's tears that rolled  
Into the sea, for pearls to come of them;  
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The dark, deep emerald that Rossetti wrought  
For his own soul, to wear for evermore.



# What type of sonnet is “What the Sonnet Is”?

- The turn in this sonnet is between the octave and the sestet, or after eight lines.
- The period at the end of line eight is a clue that this is the turn, especially because it is one of only two periods in the sonnet.
- Before the turn, the speaker is telling of groups of fourteen; after the turn, he tells of who wrote the sonnets.



What type of sonnet is  
“What the Sonnet Is”?

“What the Sonnet Is” is an  
Italian/Petrarchan Sonnet!

