To Write a Sonnet

‘Why write in sonnet form?’….American poet Aaron Kramer when asked by students why anyone would want to write a sonnet, said, "First, " pressing his wrists together, "you are handcuffed by having to write fourteen lines.”…."Then, " he said, sitting down to press his ankles together, "You are shackled by having to write with a set metre.”…. Leaning forward to crouch into a ball, he declared, "They put you into a sack called rhyme.”….Rising suddenly from the chair to spread his arms, he declared, "But think what a magic act it is if you can set your meaning free!”
Even better was Canadian poet Anne Compton who once observed that sonnets are perfect for “…the arrest of the fleeting moment.” It literally means little song, so the link to lyrics is an easy one…Every breath you take is an interesting kick off to love poetry and rhyme schemes!

Teaching Sequence: Poetry (Sonnet form). Duration: 1 week

Extension into Enterprise Project – rich literacy / numeracy project.

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| Session | Activity |
| Let’s write some poetry | Discuss with class what makes a good / interesting poem.Think about: lay out (stanza, shape) , punctuation (or lack of it), voice, rhyme (or lack of it), subject matter, length. Are there actually any rules?Children are asked to write a poem independently based on something or someone they like (it can’t be anyone in the room!).Children share their poems and peer assess. |
| The original: Sonnet 18 | Introduce the unit’s theme of Sonnets.Sonnet is read. Different versions of the Sonnet and its performance can be watched on YouTube downloads (in rap, rock style or more serious performance)What is the poem about?Patterns are identified.Discuss iambic pentameter and rhythm and rhyming couplets.  |
| Technical stuff: Iambic Pentameter | Re-read the Sonnet and review the rules. Pick out words that need clarifying and the 8 line / 6 line pattern.Children makes a table of syllable division from each line (words with 1, 2, 3 syllables). Create a class translation of the poem. |
| Imitation  | Children read other Sonnets and discuss similarities / differences. (At this point children could write a text comparing Sonnets, with an emphasis on the skills of referring to the texts) As a class a new Sonnet is created. Rhyming dictionaries could be used to assist.  |
| Innovation | Read more Sonnets and discuss patterns, vocabulary etc. Children could review the Sonnets of other children (see attached documents) and assess how successful they have been.Children create their own Sonnet based on what they have learnt. This could be a sonnet spoken by Romeo to Juliet, or 2 characters from a story or historical era, etc to fit your wider Curriculum focus. Sonnets are peer reviewed, edited, improved and celebrated. |
| Extension  | Practise performing Sonnets in different styles. Look into the similarities between rap and iambic pentameter rhythm – plenty of links here to be found on Internet. An ‘MTV’ style video could be created. Art work / illustration could be developed as album covers and an Enterprise scheme set up to market and sell them.  |

This unit was initially created by Wenda Davies of Coastland School – she inspired a class of Year 2 children to create incredible sonnets.

Example of class write (Yr 6):

Class Sonnet (Romeo to Juliet)

Shall I compare thee to an angel white?

Thou art far brighter than the Highest One.

Thou’s complexion be more pure, like the sun,

Sometimes an angel doth fall from the sky,

Bright sparks fall at the darkest hours, but why?

Long repose, in the depths of Devil’s lair,

Everlasting visits are all but fair.

Possession of this death enveloped.

But thou shall not fall from the heavenly height

Though shal’t not fall or ever dim the light.

In my heart, where fierce rays of love reside-

And never shall that love move with the tide.

So long as I can love and care for thee,

An angel of the highest will you be.

Example of child’s work (without rhyming couplets)

Sonnet for Juliet

Shall I compare thee to a snowflake white?

Thou complexion more dainty than cold ice.

Blizzards shake the icicle of winter,

And winter is too short each time of year.

Sometimes too cold the Eye of Light must close,

And often is her pure glistening self dimmed.

And white from white tumbles down to the ground,

New snowflake takes a year to form and grow.

But thy eternal beauty will not melt,

Nor lose your delicate touch of grace.

No weather cold, can change your elegance.

When everything has gone, you still my soul.

So long as I can breathe you’ll stay with me,

When I am gone these lines endure, my love.

By TB

Age 10