



 Prestwick House

Free Lesson Plan

TEACHING SHAKESPEARE:

Sonnet 73

That time of year thou may'st in me behold

STRUCTURE AND MEANING

by Douglas Grudzina



Objectives:

- Introduce the structure of the Shakespearean sonnet
- Discover connections between structure and meaning
- Learn to understand metaphoric and connotative meanings, and use these meanings to draw inferences
- Learn to support inferences and non-literal interpretations with textual evidence

Time:

60 Minutes or 1 Class Period

Materials:

Text of Poem (sufficient copies for each student to have one)

Procedures:

1. Distribute copies of the poem.
2. Read the poem aloud or select a volunteer to read the poem aloud.
3. Before discussing meaning, analyze the structure of the poem.

Before we try to determine what the poem means, let's examine its structure.

a. What the most obvious structural feature?

Hopefully most students will notice that the last two lines are indented. If this is not the primary response, keep probing until the class notices this.

If students point out that these last two lines rhyme, skip the next question.

If, in the discussion about the "most obvious feature," students point out the rhyme scheme and the three quatrains, tell them you will indeed be looking at the rhyme scheme and then use their awareness of the rhyme scheme to notice the couplet at the end.

b. What else do you notice about these indented lines?

The two lines rhyme. The poem ends in a couplet.

Since we've noticed the impact of rhyme scheme on structure, look at the main body of the poem.

a. What's the rhyme scheme?

A – B – A – B – C – D – C – D – E – F – E – F

b. **What structural pattern does this rhyme scheme suggest?**

The rhyme scheme seems to break the poem into three groups of four lines each (quatrains):

A – B – A – B

C – D – C – D

E – F – E – F

FIRST QUATRAIN

be-hold

hang

cold

sang

SECOND QUATRAIN

day

west

a-way

rest

THIRD QUATRAIN

fire

lie

ex-pire

by

4. As a transition to your class's discussion of meaning, examine the language of the first quatrain.

What conceit—or elaborate metaphor—does the speaker set up in the first quatrain?

a. **To what is the speaker literally referring in the first three lines: “That time of year .../ When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang / Upon those boughs which shake against the cold...”?**

“That time of year ... [etc.]” is late autumn or maybe early winter.

b. **What symbolic or metaphoric meanings do we often associate with autumn?**

At this point, accept all student responses as equally possible. These are likely to include:

- *harvest—bounty, Thanksgiving-related responses*
 - the culmination or fulfillment of a year's work*
 - the culmination or fulfillment of a lifetime's work*
- *maturity, old age*
- *the approach of death*

c. **What is the speaker suggesting when he says “That time of year thou may'st in me behold when ...”**

He is suggesting that he possesses some of the qualities associated with autumn, probably old age, the approach of death. He is growing old.

5. Assign students, individually or in small groups, to examine either quatrain two or three as we did with the first quatrain.

6. Reconvene the class and discuss quatrains 2 and 3. Reevaluate quatrain 1 in the context of the rest of the poem.

How does the second quatrain advance the conceit introduced in the first four lines?

a. **What is the topic or subject of the second quatrain?**

Late twilight; after sunset; nearly dark

b. **What symbolic or metaphoric meanings are often associated with this?**

Like autumn, the setting sun, twilight, and the approach of night also often suggest old age and the approach of death.

How does the third quatrain advance the conceit of the poem?

a. **What is the topic or subject of the third quatrain?**

The last glowing embers of a dying fire

b. **What symbolic or metaphoric meanings are often associated with this?**

As in the first two quatrains, these embers can represent the end of life, loss of energy and vitality, and the approach of death.

How does your understanding of the second and third quatrains help you to modify or clarify your reading of the first quatrain?

- a. Given the more complete context, which one of the possible metaphoric interpretations of autumn is the one most likely meant by Shakespeare?

Since the other metaphors both point to aging and dying, it is most likely that Shakespeare intends us to understand this reference to autumn as revealing the speaker's age.

7. Now discuss the ending couplet.

To what final point or conclusion does the couplet at the end of the poem arrive?

- a. What does the speaker mean when he says, "This thou perceivest ..."? To what does the word "this" refer?

"This" refers to the speaker's aging and approaching death as described by the three metaphors in the main body of the poem.

- b. To what does the word "which" refer when he says, "...which makes thy love more strong"?

The word "which" refers to the other person's knowledge that the speaker is old and approaching death.

- c. What is it that makes the other person's "love more strong"?

The knowledge that the two will eventually be parted by the speaker's death makes the other person's love for the speaker more strong.

8. Wrap-up your discussion with a summation of the overall point of the poem and a brief examination of how the structure provides clues to the meaning.

How does an examination of the poem's structure help a reader understand the poem's meaning?

- a. What is the overall point of the poem?

The point of the poem has to do with the fact that the speaker is growing old and approaching death. The person addressed in the poem recognizes this, and the knowledge that the two will soon be parted makes the other person love the speaker even more.

- b. What does the text of the couplet contribute to this overall point?

The couplet addresses how the imminence of growing old and dying as introduced in the main body of the poem affects the quality of love.

- c. How does the structure of the couplet help a reader grasp the overall point?

Indenting these two lines and giving them their own unique rhyme scheme—gives emphasis to these two lines and sets them off from the rest of the poem implying that there will be a change from the body of the poem.

- d. What does the text of the three quatrains contribute to the overall point of the poem?

The quatrains provide the three metaphors that illustrate the speaker's aging that is necessary to understand in order to appreciate the point—that the other person's love has grown stronger.

- e. What does the structure of the three quatrains contribute to the overall point of the poem?

As is the case with the couplet, the three distinct rhyme schemes point out to the reader that each quatrain is a discrete unit and will develop a different aspect of the topic.

- f. What does Shakespeare achieve in three quatrains that he could not achieve in only one?

Each quatrain describes the same issue, the speaker's aging, in familiar but different terms. The multiple expressions of the same idea offer the reader a more complete or clearer understanding of the issue. They also ensure that readers will grasp the point; by emphasizing the metaphor through repetition.

Full Text of Poem:

Sonnet 73

BY WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

That time of year thou may'st in me behold
When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang
Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,
Bare ruin'd choirs, where late the sweet birds sang.
In me thou see'st the twilight of such day,
As after sunset fadeth in the west,
Which by-and-by black night doth take away,
Death's second self, that seals up all in rest.
In me thou see'st the glowing of such fire
That on the ashes of his youth doth lie,
As the death-bed whereon it must expire
Consum'd with that which it was nourish'd by.

This thou perceivest, which makes thy love more strong,
To love that well which thou must leave ere long.



Homework:

Have your students select another Shakespearean sonnet from an online source. Using the techniques discussed in class, write a short paragraph describing what is similar—and what is different—with how the structure of the poem reinforces the meaning of the poem.

Standards:

Common Core State Standards – Reading Literature

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.2

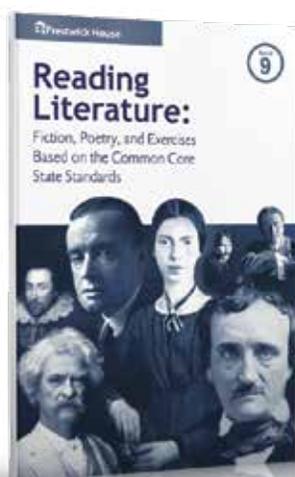
CCSS: ELA-LITERACY.RL 9-10.10

Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills

High School English Language Arts and Reading

110.30 (b) Range of Texts

110.31, 32, 33, 34 (b) Making Complex Inferences

**Sources:**

Public Broadcasting System. “Language Arts: Shakespeare’s Sonnets.” (MayaVision International 2003.) *In Search of Shakespeare*. Web. < <http://www.pbs.org/shakespeare/educators/language/lessonplan.html>>.

Cohen, Ralph Alan. *ShakesFear and How to Cure It*. Clayton, DE.: Publisher: Prestwick House, Inc., 2007. Print.

Moliken, Paul, ed. *Reading Literature: Fiction, Poetry, and Exercises Based on the Common Core State Standards, Level 9*, Clayton, DE: Prestwick House, 2014. Print.



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