1. **OBJECTIVES FOR LESSON TWO**

In this lesson, we examine the poetic genre of the sonnet. A study of the sonnet form is combined with tasks set to reinforce and extend students’ understanding of the structure of sonnets, the poetic techniques commonly found in sonnets, and the major thematic concerns of sonnets. Students engage in the history of the sonnet genre to learn more about the place of sonnets in the Western literary canon. Students engage in critical analysis of sonnets as a means of judging the value of the text.

The following Australian Curriculum outcomes are addressed in this lesson:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EN 4-1A</th>
<th>responds to and composes texts for understanding, interpretation, critical analysis, imaginative expression and pleasure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EN 4-2A</td>
<td>effectively uses a widening range of processes, skills, strategies and knowledge for responding to and composing texts in different media and technologies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EN 4-3B</td>
<td>uses and describes language forms, features and structures of texts appropriate to a range of purposes, audiences and contexts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EN 4-4B</td>
<td>makes effective language choices to creatively shape meaning with accuracy, clarity and coherence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EN 4-5C</td>
<td>thinks imaginatively, creatively, interpretively and critically about information, ideas and arguments to respond to and compose texts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EN 4-6C</td>
<td>identifies and explains connections between and among texts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EN 4-7D</td>
<td>demonstrates understanding of how texts can express aspects of their broadening world and their relationships within it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EN 4-8D</td>
<td>identifies, considers and appreciates cultural expression in texts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EN 4-9E</td>
<td>uses, reflects on and assesses their individual and collaborative skills for learning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2. INTRODUCTION TO SONNETS

In Lesson 1 we studied two relatively short forms of poetry, the haiku and the limerick. In this lesson, we take things a step further by considering the genre of the sonnet. The most common format of a sonnet is fourteen lines with a definite rhyming scheme.

The sonnet is a poetic form that originated in Italy. The term sonnet derives from the Italian word sonetto, meaning "little song", and by the thirteenth century it signified a poem of fourteen lines that follows a strict rhyme scheme and specific structure. Conventions associated with the sonnet have evolved over its history. One of the best-known sonnet writers in English is William Shakespeare, who wrote 154 sonnets (not including those that appear in his plays).

Elements of an English Sonnet

A Shakespearean, or English, sonnet consists of:

- Fourteen lines written in **IAMBIC PENTAMETER**, in which a pattern of an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable is repeated five times.
- The rhyme scheme in a Shakespearean sonnet is a-b-a-b, c-d-c-d, e-f-e-f, g-g; the last two lines are a rhyming couplet.

Note to Students: Shakespearean Rhyme and Rhythm

**Iamb** - is a term from Ancient Greek to refer to a unit of sound within a poetic meter. An iamb is a metrical foot of two syllables, one short (or unstressed) and one long (or stressed). The iamb is the reverse of the trochee (one stressed, one unstressed)

**Foot** - Two or more syllables that together make up the smallest unit of rhythm in a poem. For example, an iamb is a foot that has two syllables, one unstressed followed by one stressed.

**Iambic pentameter** - Shakespeare’s plays were written mostly in iambic pentameter, which is the most common type of meter in English poetry. It is a basic measure of English poetry, five iambic feet in each line.
3. THE CULTURAL CONNECTION: SONNETS

When English sonnets were introduced by Thomas Wyatt in the early 16th century, his sonnets and those of his contemporary the Earl of Surrey were chiefly translations from the Italian of Petrarch. While Wyatt introduced the sonnet into English, it was Surrey who gave it a **RHYMING METER**, and a structural division into **QUATRAINS** of a kind that now characterises the typical English sonnet.

It is Shakespeare’s sonnet sequence that became the most famous. The sonnet genre is often attributed to the Elizabethan Age and known as Elizabethan sonnets, after Queen Elizabeth I. These sonnets were all essentially inspired by the Italian Petrarchan tradition, and generally expresses the poet's love for some woman. The form is often named after Shakespeare, not because he was the first to write in this form but because he became its most famous practitioner.

**Note to Students: Italian Sonnets**

The Italian Petrarchan sonnet was one of the earliest forms of the sonnet. They consist of iambic pentameter, like the English sonnet, but they are divided into *octaves* (first eight lines) and *sestets* (remaining 6 lines).

The form of the English sonnet consists of fourteen lines structured as three **QUATRAINS** and a **COUPLET**. The third quatrain generally introduces an unexpected sharp thematic or imagistic "turn," known as the **volta**. In Shakespeare's sonnets, however, the volta usually comes in the couplet, and usually summarises the theme of the poem or introduces a fresh new look at the theme.
4. **SHAKESPEARE’S SONNET XVI**

Let's consider a famous sonnet example from William Shakespeare:

**William Shakespeare Sonnet XVI**

| But wherefore do not you a mightier way | A |
| Make war upon this bloody tyrant, Time? | B |
| And fortify your self in your decay | A |
| With means more blessed than my barren rhyme? | B |
| Now stand you on the top of happy hours, | C |
| And many maiden gardens, yet unset, | D |
| With virtuous wish would bear you living flowers, | C |
| Much liker than your painted counterfeit: | D |
| So should the lines of life that life repair, | E |
| Which this, Time's pencil, or my pupil pen, | F |
| Neither in inward worth nor outward fair, | E |
| Can make you live your self in eyes of men. | F |
| To give away yourself, keeps yourself still, | G |
| And you must live, drawn by your own sweet skill. | G |

**Glossary**

- **Tyrant** (noun) a cruel and oppressive ruler
- **Fortify** (verb) to make something stronger
- **Barren** (adjective) unproductive, e.g. “it was a barren landscape with no vegetables”
- **Counterfeit** (noun) a fraudulent imitation of something else, e.g. “it was a counterfeit statue of Venus”

Discuss what you think this poem is about with the person next to you. Write down your ideas.
The rhyming scheme has been included to the right of the poem and you'll notice that it follows a very strict pattern. We can refer to the last two lines of the sonnet as the **RHYMING COUPLET** (GG). The first four lines also form a self-contained pattern (ABAB); we can refer to these four lines as a **QUATRAIN**. The other self-contained patterns (CDCD) and (EFEF) are also **QUATRAINS**.

**Shakespeare in Translation**

Shakespeare’s language is challenging and it helps to have a translation of Shakespearean English into modern English. Look at the comparison below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shakespeare’s Sonnet XVI</th>
<th>Modern English Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>But wherefore do not you a mightier way Make war upon this bloody tyrant, Time? And fortify your self in your decay With means more blessed than my barren rhyme? Now stand you on the top of happy hours, And many maiden gardens, yet unset, With virtuous wish would bear you living flowers, Much liker than your painted counterfeit: So should the lines of life that life repair, Which this, Time's pencil, or my pupil pen, Neither in inward worth nor outward fair, Can make you live your self in eyes of men. To give away yourself, keeps yourself still, And you must live, drawn by your own sweet skill.</td>
<td>Why don’t you take the stronger path and fight against the evil overlord, Time, and then you can strengthen yourself as you get old in a better way than with my boring poetry? Now you are enjoying the best of life, as lots of young, unmarried ladies want to have babies with you, and those children will resemble you far better than a painting (or poem) that tries to copy your beauty. These children will (metaphorically) repair your wrinkles. Neither Time, which created you as you are, nor my poetry can preserve your inner or outer beauty in the gaze of other men. You can preserve your beauty by having children, and this will mean that your life is lived on your own terms.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Poetic Techniques Found in Sonnets

COUPLet
A couplet is a pair of lines of meter in poetry. It usually consists of two lines that rhyme and have the same meter.

QUATRAIN
A quatrain is a type of stanza, or a complete poem, consisting of four lines. There are twelve possible rhyme schemes, but the most traditional and common are: AAAA, AABB, and ABAB.

ALLITERATION
The repetition of the same or similar consonant sounds often at the beginning of words such as tongue twisters like 'She sells seashells by the seashore'.

ASSONANCE
The repetition or a pattern of similar vowel sounds, as in the tongue twister "Moses supposes his toeses are roses."

METAPHOR
A metaphor is a pattern equating two seemingly unlike objects. An examples of a metaphor is 'drowning in debt'.

SIMILE
A figure of speech in which two things are compared using the word "like" or "as" to draw attention to similarities about two things that are seemingly dissimilar, e.g. "as busy as a bee", "they fought like cats and dogs".
CLASS DISCUSSION:

What is this sonnet about?

_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________

FOCUS QUESTIONS:

1. Find an example of **ALLITERATION** in ‘Sonnet XVI’

_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________

2. Identify a poetic technique in the following example:

   And many maiden gardens, yet unset,
   With virtuous wish would bear you living flowers,

_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________

3. What poetic features make this poem a sonnet? (Aside from the name, of course!)
Poetic or rhythmic meter can be measured in terms of heavily stressed to less stressed syllables. Rhythm is measured in poetic feet. Consider again the note on poetic feet from the last lesson:

Note to Students: Poetic Feet

Two or more syllables make up the smallest unit of rhythm in a poem and the term used to describe these units is ‘foot’. For example, an iamb is a foot that has two syllables, one unstressed followed by one stressed (ta-TUM).

Other common feet in English poetry are:

- trochee (TUM-ta)
- spondee (TUM-TUM)
- pyrrhus (ta-ta)
- anapest (ta-ta-TUM)
- dactyl (TUM-TUM-ta)

Let's examine the first two lines from Sonnet XVI in more detail in order to analyse the poetic meter.

But wherefore do not you a mightier way
A
Make war upon this bloody tyrant, Time?
B

The first thing to do when examining poetic meter is to divide the lines into syllables as shown below:

But / where / fore / do / not / you / a / might / ier / way A
Make / war / u / pon / this / bloo/ dy / ty / rant, / Time? B
The next step is to determine which syllables are stressed (TUM) and which syllables are unstressed (ta).

- **Stressed syllables** are represented by a macron ( - ) above the syllable
- **Unstressed syllables** are represented by a breve ( ˘ ) above the syllable

The stressed and unstressed syllables can be identified by thinking about where you would naturally place the emphasis on the spoken sounds of the words. Try reading the first two lines of *Sonnet XVI* aloud to determine which syllables are stressed and which are unstressed.

The stressed syllables have been marked in **bold** below and the unstressed syllables have been *italicised*:

```
But / where / fore / do / not / you / a / might / ier / way       A
Make / war / u / pon / this / bloo / dy / ty / rant, / Time?   B
```

Now that we have established where the stressed and unstressed syllables are you can see that there is a clear rhythmic pattern:

```
̄ ̅ ̄ ̅ ̄ ̅ ̄ ̅ ̄ ̅ ̄ ̅
```

One foot in this pattern is called an *iamb* which is made up of one unstressed syllable and one stressed syllable ( ˘ - ) (ta-TUM)

There are five *iambs* in each line, so we can called this poetic meter **IAMBIC PENTAMETER**.
POETIC METER EXERCISE

Rewrite the lines below

- First: divide the lines into the syllables
- Second: label each syllable as either stressed (-) or unstressed (̆)

And fortify your self in your decay
With means more blessed than my barren rhyme?

Now stand you on the top of happy hours,
And many maiden gardens, yet unset

With virtuous wish would bear you living flowers,
Much liker than your painted counterfeit:
Listening for Poetic Meter

The performance of a poem is important for determining the rhythmic scheme and revealing the rhyming pattern (or lack thereof). Listen to the performance of sonnet XVI:

MEDIA VIEWING: Shakespeare’s Sonnet no. 16

FOCUS QUESTION:

1. How does listening to the poem performance change your understanding of the poem?
   You may need to listen to the performance a few times to feel the full effect.

Listening to a performance of a poem can reveal elements of the poem that you may miss when you read it in your head. It can be a useful tool when studying poetry to perform the poetry yourself out loud to get a good sense of where the pauses are and to feel the full effects of the punctuation. When you analyse a poem you can also discuss how pauses and punctuation influence the meaning conveyed in the text. In this respect pauses and punctuation can be considered as poetic techniques.
5. THE CULTURAL CONNECTION: MODERN SONNETS

Modern sonnets can come in a wide variety of rhyming schemes (some have none at all!) and poetic meter. This is in part because of the influence of the idea of free verse. Free verse poetry tends to follow the rhythm of natural speech rather than conform to meter patterns or use rhyme.

Free verse poetry has been part of English poetry since the nineteenth century. The American poets Walt Whitman and Emily Dickinson are both known for their use of free verse poems and the popularity of the form has continued through the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century.

Free verse poetry does have some elements of form; it is not simply words on a page. Conventions that are often found in free-verse poetry are lines (free verse uses line breaks to build meaning), so they look like poems rather than regular writing.

What this means for you as a student of modern poetry is that you when you examine the poetic techniques of a modern sonnet like ‘December’ by Kevin Cawley, you will be looking to focus on techniques that relate to structure and figurative devices.

**ENJAMBMENT**
A line which has no pause or final punctuation and continues uninterrupted into the next line. Enjambment creates surprise as we tend to pause a little at the end of a poetic line even if there is no punctuation there to guide us. In this way enjambment subverts reader expectation.

**VISUAL IMAGERY**
Imagery is language that evokes the senses (sight, hearing, taste, smell, and touch). Visual imagery specifically refers to imagery which stimulates the sense of sight.

**REPETITION**
The return of a word or phrase from a previous place in the text. Repetition can be used to suggest order or to create emphasis on a particular idea.
6. **ANALYSIS IN PRACTICE: DECEMBER**

Consider the sonnet below and using your understanding of poetic techniques and poetic meter answer the focus questions.

**DECEMBER** By Kevin Cawley

I doubt that doubt has done me any harm.
The difficulty comes when people draw
dubious conclusions from their doubts.

We've had some rain but very little snow.
I doubt the weather forecast every morning.
And yet one day I wake up and a white

renewal covers every rusty heap
from Maine to Minnesota. After lunch
I criticise the prospects for tomorrow.

Unmitigated by my skepticism
the science of meteorology develops;
its history continues unabashed.

The vagaries of an individual day
never undo the wisdom of its doctrine.

**Glossary**

*Maine* is a state in the northeastern United States

*Minnesota* is a state in north Midwest United States

*Unmitigated* (adjective) absolute, unqualified, e.g. “the holiday was an unmitigated disaster”.

*Meteorology* (noun) the branch of science concerned with atmospheric phenomena, especially as a means of forecasting the weather.

*Vagaries* (noun plural) an unexpected and inexplicable change in a situation or in someone’s behaviour, e.g. “try to avoid the vagaries of fashion”.

*Doctrine* (noun) a set of beliefs held by a group, e.g. “It was a matter of Christian doctrine”.
FOCUS QUESTIONS:

1. What is this sonnet is about? Provide evidence from the sonnet to support your answer.

_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________

2. Does the sonnet ‘December’ have a rhyming scheme? What is the effect of this?

_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________

3. Identify a poetic technique that appears in each of the following examples:

The difficulty comes when people draw
dubious conclusions from their doubts.

_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________

And yet one day I wake up and a white
renewal covers every rusty heap
from Maine to Minnesota.
4. What are the major themes in this sonnet? Construct a mind- or concept-map below illustrating the themes

**December in Maine and Minnesota**

These images may help inspire you
### 7. LESSON 2 HOMEWORK

#### YEAR 8 CRITICAL WRITING MARKING CRITERIA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Band 5-6 13-15 marks</th>
<th>Band 4-5 10-12 marks</th>
<th>Band 3-4 6-9 marks</th>
<th>Band 1-2 1-5 marks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Answering the question</strong></td>
<td>5 Has weaved the question into the essay, consistently referring back to it.</td>
<td>4 Has clearly considered the question but tended to lose focus at times.</td>
<td>3 Has attempted to answer the question. May have provided a summary of everything they know on the subject.</td>
<td>1 Paid no attention to the question or to related topics. Discussion is irrelevant to the question.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Originality</strong></td>
<td>4 Interesting and original ideas which are well articulated.</td>
<td>3 Original thinking is there but the explanation of the ideas may not be clear.</td>
<td>2 Attempt at original thinking but ideas may be underdeveloped or rely heavily on classwork.</td>
<td>1 No evidence of original thinking and has lifted phrases from classroom discussions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Use of language</strong></td>
<td>3 Consistently good sentence structure, word choices, with only minor grammatical or spelling errors.</td>
<td>2 Sentences are mostly well-formed, with occasional grammatical slips, spelling mistakes and poor word choices.</td>
<td>1 Some sentences were well-formed and show a developing grasp on grammar, spelling and appropriate word choice.</td>
<td>0 Poor grammar, sentence structure, spelling and word choices throughout the response.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Structure</strong></td>
<td>3 A strong structure which is maintained throughout the response. Shows understanding of paragraph structure.</td>
<td>2 A good attempt to structure with an introduction, body and conclusion, there may be tangents in any of these.</td>
<td>1 Some attempt to structure.</td>
<td>0 No structure.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Note to Students: How to Submit Homework
Submit your homework online through Matrix LMS!

Accepted file types for online submission:
.docx .doc
.one (onenote) .txt

HOMEWORK TASK

Choose ONE of the following questions and write your answer.

Aim for 300 words.

1. How have poetic techniques enhanced your understanding of the meaning of Keven Cawley's 'December'?

   OR

2. How have poetic techniques enhanced your understanding of the meaning of Shakespeare's 'Sonnet XVI'?

In your response:

- Use an Introduction – Body – Conclusion structure for your extended response.
- Aim for 300 words.
- Remember to proof-read your work. Correct spelling and grammar = higher marks!