

Teaching English Sonnets: An Interactive Approach to the form with Castle to Classrooms VR

Overview of Unit:

- Notes on English sonnet form and content (Google Slides presentation),
- Three sonnets for analysis of form and content as a class (Google Slides presentation),
- Sonnet with text-based questions (housed on the Centering Spenser website) for pairs or individual students,
- Sonnet reconstruction scavenger hunt activity for small groups or pairs (Centering Spenser website--VR enhanced but not required),
- Culminating independent assessment (students compose original sonnets).

Standards will differ depending on teacher focus; however, author's craft & structure and comprehension and analysis of complex texts are inherent in the unit. Comparison of themes between texts is encouraged and can easily be included through classroom discussion based on some of the poems within this unit and/or by supplementing additional poems (same or different authors, same or different type of poem, teacher-supplied or student-found).

Introduction & Guided Practice

Duration: 2-3 class periods depending on level of students, depth of study, and number of sonnets

Provide students with [notes on English Sonnet](#) form and content and engage students with multiple sonnets to help them practice identifying and understanding this type of poem. Link is to sample notes (some slides include speaker notes for consideration).

- Slides 1-7 include a basic definition plus information on form and content. Additional practice may be needed with iambic pentameter. Information on Italian/Petrarchan sonnets may also be added, if the teacher wishes to incorporate more sonnets.
- Slides 8-11 include representative sonnets from William Shakespeare and Edmund Spenser with activities and questions for students to complete as a whole class (with teacher modeling), in small groups, or in pairs. Other sonnets can be supplemented to fit teacher needs or curriculum.
- Slide 12 directs students to the Centering Spenser website for more practice with Spenserian sonnets without the scaffolding of the structure and form activities from slides 9-11.

Independent Practice (pairs or small groups without teacher input)

Duration: 1 class period

Step 1: Organize students into pairs or groups of three.

Sonnet Structure Scavenger Hunt & Reconstruction

Student Roles	Technology Needed
Seeker(s): 1-2 students will search the castle for the objects suggested by the lines in bold to uncover additional clues and reveal additional lines of the poem	VR lab, VR headsets and compatible devices (cell phones), or computer and website
Recorder: 1 student will transcribe the lines the seeker(s) locate(s)	paper and pencil (computer, tablet, etc. discouraged as students may look up the sonnet online) Sentence strips will allow students to rearrange the lines at the end of their hunt, though they can also write on notebook paper, leave space between each line, and cut the lines out at the end of the hunt.
All students in the group will discuss the lines in bold to determine the clues, corresponding objects, and possible locations.	If using VR lab or headsets, students should switch roles ½ way through so each can experience the reconstructed castle

Step 2: Provide students with this line from one of Spenser’s *Amoretti* XLVIII: “Innocent paper whom too cruel hand” on a sentence strip or have them copy onto their own strips of paper. (Note: Do not tell students the sonnet number to discourage them from looking it up). Ask guiding questions to remind students that Spenser was a poet and to get them to consider the nouns in the line to help students visualize Spenser at his writing desk composing a poem.

Step 3: Using a VR lab, classroom sets of VR glasses, or computers, direct students to focus or click on the writing desk in the study at the top of Kilcolman Castle Tower House*. A pop up text box will present all lines of the first quatrain of the poem in incorrect order. The seeker(s) will read the lines to the recorder who will write each line on a separate sentence strip to be properly arranged later (Note: Remind students to keep quatrains separate because the lines are only jumbled within each quatrain. They could use different colored paper or pens to avoid mixing them up). The line in bold will provide a clue that will lead students to another room and object containing the next quatrain, also out of order. Students should discuss the line, focusing on the nouns, pronouns, and verbs to determine the clue to the next object as the whole class did with “innocent paper.” Once they have found the object that corresponds to the clue, they must identify the clue (underline, highlight, etc.) on their sentence strip as evidence of their thinking. Students will repeat this process until they have collected all 3 quatrains and the concluding couplet. Some lines may include more than one possible clue; in such cases, the castle has additional pop ups to redirect students.

*Alternatively, have students locate Spenser’s writing desk on their own. They may successfully locate the correct desk and receive the next lines to move on or locate his work desk instead, which will redirect them. If you allow students to find for themselves, briefly re-address the

whole class and discuss what happened if they located the incorrect desk so all groups will understand that incorrect object choices will give them guiding questions to help locate the correct objects.

<p style="text-align: center;">Original Text from http://spenserians.cath.vt.edu/TextRecord.php?&textsid=32834*</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Jumbled Text Students will see lines with clues in bold</p>
<p>Innocent Paper, whom too cruel hand Did make the matter to avenge her ire; And ere she could thy cause well understand, Did sacrifice unto the greedy fire:</p> <p>Well worthy thou to have found better hire, Than so bad end, for heretics ordained; Yet heresy nor treason didst conspire, But plead thy master's cause, unjustly pained.</p> <p>Whom she, all careless of his grief constrained To utter forth the anguish of his heart; And would not hear, when he to her complained The piteous passion of his dying smart.</p> <p>Yet live forever, though against her will, And speak her good, though she requite it ill.</p>	<p>And ere she could thy cause well understand, Innocent Paper, whom too cruel hand Did sacrifice unto the greedy fire: Did make the matter to avenge her ire;</p> <p>Than so bad end for heretics ordained; Yet heresy nor treason didst conspire, But plead thy master's cause, unjustly pained. Well worthy thou to have found better hire,</p> <p>Whom she, all careless of his grief constrained The piteous passion of his dying smart. And would not hear, when he to her complained To utter forth the anguish of his heart;</p> <p>And speak her good, though she requite it ill. Yet live forever, though against her will,</p>

*The spelling of the Spenser's sonnet has been modernized by Sara Painter, using the open-access, online edition of *Amoretti* provided by the Center for Applied Technologies at Virginia Tech.

Answer Key Chart with Answers to First Clue

(Teachers should complete the sonnet reconstruction based on the clues themselves before presenting to students to make sure they anticipate student difficulties and may wish to fill in the rest of the chart below to create their own keys and additional guiding questions for remaining clues.)

Line including clue	Guiding Questions	Clue(s)	Reasoning/ Explanation	Object(s) & Location(s)
<p>Innocent paper; whom too cruel hand</p>	<p>What are the nouns, pronouns, and verbs in this line? (Answers should include paper and hand.)</p> <p>To whom or what is the poem addressed? (The answer is a piece of paper or “innocent paper,” which invites the teacher to address the use of apostrophe and personification).</p> <p>Who would or what profession would be most likely to address a piece of paper? (Possible answers include a writer or teacher should lead students to this answer.)</p> <p>Where would a writer/Where would a poet put pen/hand to paper? (Answers may vary, but teacher should make sure students end at desk and may need to remind students of the Tower House Study from the Background Quest to lead them to the writing desk in that room where students will uncover the next clue.)</p>	<p>paper and hand</p>	<p>A writer often writes at a desk.</p>	<p>writing desk in Tower House Study (desk in Ground Floor Parlor = redirect because is a work desk instead-- note surrounding objects that suggest this: land map, purse, correspondence/ business papers)</p>
<p>Did sacrifice unto the greedy fire.</p>	<p>What words stand out in this line? Think about nouns, pronouns, and verbs especially.</p> <p>Where did you see something to represent one of these words in the Kilcolman Castle reconstruction?</p>			<p>There are 2 possible correct objects for this word; both give students credit. Two incorrect objects provide redirects.</p>
<p>But plead thy master’s cause, unjustly pained.</p>	<p>Again, consider the main words in this line. (Answers should include the verbs plead and pained and the nouns master and cause.) Which of these can best be represented in an object? Who or what did you see in</p>			<p>Two incorrect objects provide redirects.</p>

	the Kilcolman Castle reconstruction that could represent this word?			
Whom she, all careless of his grief constrained	After identifying the nouns, pronouns, and verbs, students should notice that this line includes more pronouns. Who are the <i>she</i> and <i>he</i> in this line? To whom or what did the previous clue relate? How might grief be represented? Could constrained be easily represented in a physical sense? What if it refers to emotional constraint? What about the woman referenced in the line?			There is 1 incorrect object that provides a redirect.
Yet live forever, though against her will,	Again, consider the nouns, pronouns, and verbs in this line. One can be eliminated because it has already been attached to an object in the castle. What is left that can be represented physically? (Students may need to be directed to consider an adverb attached to a verb for this final clue.)			There are 2 possible correct objects for this word; both give students credit. There are 2 incorrect objects that provide redirects.

Step 4: When pairs or groups have collected all stanzas, they will notify the teacher (in case teacher wants to reward for locating clues first in addition to a separate reward for completing the next step correctly) and then begin to rearrange the lines in the correct order, using their understanding of sonnet structure and rhyme scheme as well as general grammatical rules and reading comprehension skills.

Step 5: Once a pair or group has finished reordering the lines or when all have finished (teacher preference), the first pair or group should begin reading the correctly ordered lines. If they read a line out of place, the teacher should stop them, and direct all groups to continue ordering the lines, calling on the next pair or group that finishes. The teacher may wish to award groups who correctly reconstruct the sonnet first or all who complete it correctly with points, passes, or treats. All pairs or groups should submit their completed work to the teacher for review.

Step 6: Read and discuss the correctly ordered sonnet as a whole.

Optional Culminating Assignment

Duration: TBD by teacher

Students will demonstrate their understanding of sonnets by composing original sonnets based on their understanding of sonnet form and structure. Topics are up to teachers (or students), but

students should employ iambic pentameter, Spenserian or Shakespearean rhyme scheme, and English sonnet stanza progression.

- Enhanced Option: Students can include a minimum of one clue per stanza to objects within the castle.
- If time permits and technology is available: Students can trade sonnets and revisit the castle to locate the objects based on each other's clues.