

## Lesson Plan: Write your own Sonnet!

*Ginevra de'Benci is the perfect embodiment of the Petrarchian sonnet tradition and Neoplatonic philosophy. Her story illustrates and humanizes what that poetry was all about. This lesson plan is designed to help students better understand Petrarchan sonnets by writing their own poetry.*

During the Renaissance, a popular form of writing was the **Petrarchan (or Italian) Sonnet**. Countless writers have imitated this form of poetry—and now you can too! Since a Petrarchan sonnet follows a specific set of guidelines, you can use these guidelines to assist you in creating a poem.

**Length:** A Petrarchan sonnet is always 14 lines long. No more, no less.

**Iambic Pentameter:** It sounds complicated, but Iambic Pentameter just describes the rhythm of those 14 lines. An **iamb** is a pair of syllables. The first syllable is unstressed or de-emphasized, and the second syllable is stressed or emphasized. Many words are already iambs, meaning that you emphasize the second syllable: “aRISE,” “emPLOY,” “deSTROY,” “exIST.” If you try to switch the emphasis, it will sound strange—trust your ear to help you figure out if a word is iambic or not! **Pentameter** just means that each line contains 5 iambs. So **Iambic Pentameter** describes a poem where each line has 5 iambs (following the pattern unstressed-stressed). Here is a famous example of iambic pentameter, from Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*:

**But soft! What light through yonder window breaks?**

If you count the syllables, there are 10. If you emphasize the second syllable of every word, you will notice that there are 5 perfect iambs:

But SOFT what LIGHT through YONder WINdow BREAKS?

If this is confusing, there is one simple way to memorize the rhythm of the **iambic pentameter**: it’s the rhythm of your heartbeat.

**Rhyme Scheme:** A poem has a rhyme scheme when the final syllable of a line rhymes with certain other final syllables of other lines. The first eight lines of a Petrarchan Sonnet follow the rhyme scheme ABBA ABBA (the As represent one rhyme, and the Bs represent another). There are several options for the final six lines of a Petrarchan sonnet, but the most common rhyme schemes are CDECDE or CDCDCD. For example, take this sonnet by Petrarch himself—a perfect example of Platonic love poetry:

In what bright realm, what sphere of radiant thought (A)  
Did Nature find the model whence she drew (B)

That delicate dazzling image where we view (B)  
Here on this earth what she in heaven wrought (A)  
What fountain-haunting nymph, what dryad, sought (A)  
In groves, such golden tresses ever threw (B)  
Upon the gust? What heart such virtues knew?—(B)  
Though her chief virtue with my death is fraught. (A)  
He looks in vain for heavenly beauty, he (C)  
Who never looked upon her perfect eyes, (D)  
The vivid blue orbs turning brilliantly – (C)  
He does not know how Love yields and denies; (D)  
He only knows, who knows how sweetly she (C)  
Can talk and laugh, the sweetness of her sighs. (D)

If you are stumped while writing a poem, try to come up with a set of rhyming words you want to end your lines with, and see if that can inspire the rest of the line!

**Conflict and resolution:** The first eight lines, or octave, tend to introduce a problem or theme. The last six lines, or sestet, tend to resolve the problem or change the theme.

## WRITE YOUR OWN PETRARCHAN SONNET!

Just like Ginevra de'Benci, you can be a poet! Use the rules on this sheet to create a sonnet. Inspired by *Da Vinci's Tiger*, create a poem that features or is about a tiger! If you need some inspiration to get started, pull from the word/image bank below.

### WORD/IMAGE BANK

Roar	Tail	Lithe
Beast	Grass	Beauty
Stripes	Tree	Sinews
Teeth	Fly	Fiery
Pounce	Fight	Rage
Prowl	Protect	Race
Chase	Watch	Crawl
Fear	Wild	Creep
Eye	Power	Silent
Woods	Stride	Dangerous
Cat	Silent	Spy
Prey	Velvet	Jungle
Forest	Green	Orange
Night	Gold	Amber
Stare	Trail	Twitch
Leap	Spirit	Growl
Glow	Climb	Prowl
Bare	Stealth	Dusky
Rip	Stalk	Stealth
Listen	Sleek	Purr
Whisker	Painted	Hunt
Paw	Hidden	Game
Claw	Shadow	Gnash
Scare	Rippling	Slash