SONNET

Sonnet 18

by **William Shakespeare**

Read with a Purpose

Read to discover how the speaker feels about trying to describe his beloved's beauty.

Build Background

In the Northern Hemisphere, summer begins on June 21, the day of the summer solstice. Shakespeare probably used the word *summer* in Sonnet 18 to mean "spring and summer," as evidenced by his reference to the "buds of May."

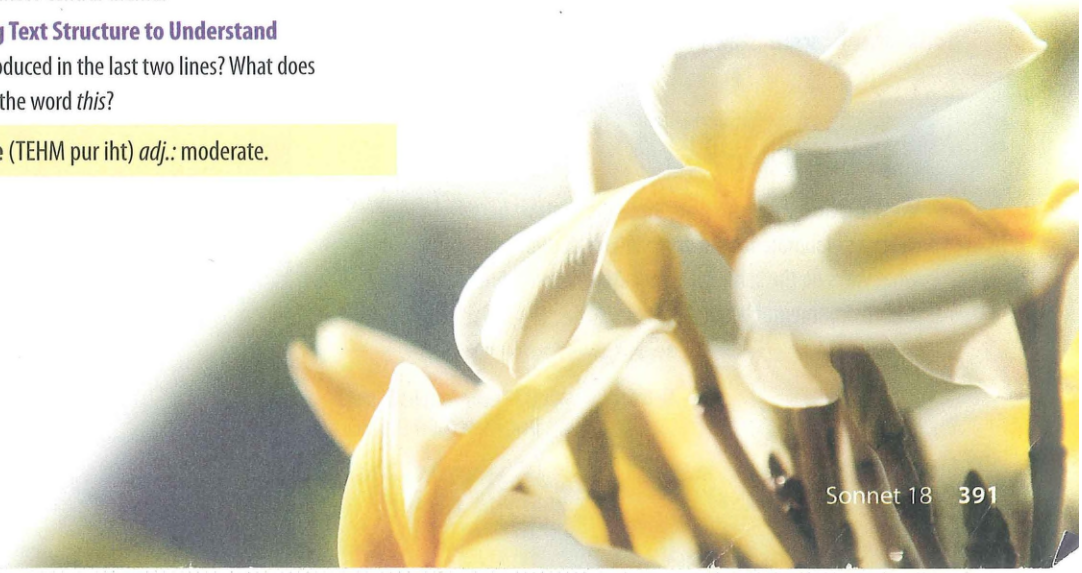
Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
Thou art more lovely and more temperate.
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
And summer's lease hath all too short a date.
Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,
And often is his gold complexion dimmed;
And every fair from fair sometime declines,
By chance, or nature's changing course untrimmed.
But thy eternal summer shall not fade, (A)
Nor lose possession of that fair thou owest,
Nor shall Death brag thou wander'st in his shade
When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st.
So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see,
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee. (B)

Summer (1895), by Walter Crane.

(A) **Literary Focus** **Shakespearean Sonnets** How does the ninth line provide a different view of the sonnet's central theme?

(B) **Reading Focus** **Using Text Structure to Understand Meaning** What new idea is introduced in the last two lines? What does Shakespeare mean when he uses the word *this*?

Vocabulary **temperate** (TEHM pur iht) *adj.*: moderate.



SONNET

Sonnet 29

by **William Shakespeare**

Read with a Purpose

Read this sonnet to discover how Shakespeare's speaker motivates himself when he feels unworthy.

Build Background

Even famous writers have their bad days. In this sonnet, the speaker describes a time when he feels depressed, jealous, and frustrated. He goes on to tell how he regains his confidence and creativity.

When, in disgrace with Fortune and men's eyes,
I all alone beweep my outcast state,
And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless° cries,
And look upon myself and curse my fate, A
Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,
Featured like him, like him° with friends possessed,
Desiring this man's art,° and that man's scope,°
With what I most enjoy contented least;
Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising,
Haply° I think on thee, and then my state,
Like to the lark° at break of day arising
From sullen earth, sings hymns at heaven's gate;
For thy sweet love remembered such wealth brings
That then I scorn to change my state with kings. B

3. **bootless:** useless; futile.

5–6. **one . . . him . . . him:** three men whom the speaker envies.

7. **art:** literary ability. **scope:** power.

10. **haply:** by chance.

A **Literary Focus** **Shakespearean Sonnets** What problems does the speaker describe in the first quatrain?

B **Reading Focus** **Using Text Structure to Understand Meaning** What prompts a change in the speaker's mood? Where in the sonnet does this shift take place?

Vocabulary **scorn** (skawrn) *v.*: refuse; reject by showing contempt.

Analyzing Visuals

Viewing and Interpreting Note the contrast between the subject's elaborate formal dress and his natural surroundings. In what ways do the sonnets of Shakespeare comment on natural and environmental beauty?

Sir Brooke Boothby (1781), by Joseph Wright of Derby. Tate Gallery, London.

SONNET

Sonnet 30

by **William Shakespeare**

Read with a Purpose

Read this sonnet to understand how the speaker overcomes feelings of loss and regret.

Build Background

Shakespeare begins this sonnet with a strikingly original metaphor. Periods of quiet meditation are called **sessions,** as though they were court trials in which one's thoughts come to the bar of justice to hear their cases tried. (*Sessions* is a British legal term that refers to minor court cases.)

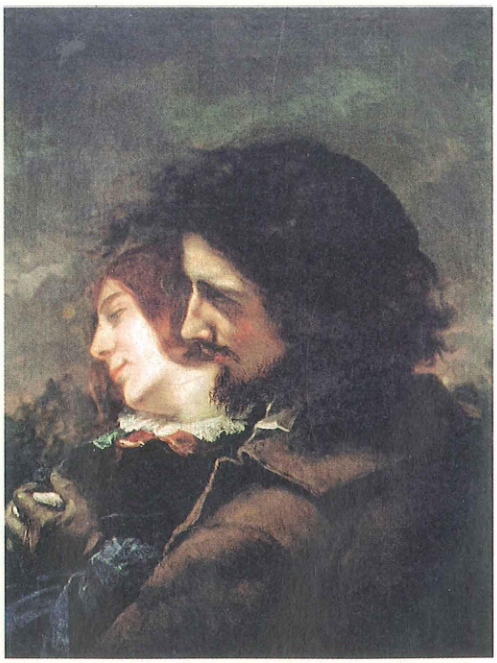
When to the sessions of sweet silent thought
I summon up remembrance of things past,
I sigh the lack of many a thing I sought,
And with old woes new wail° my dear time's waste.°
Then can I drown an eye (unused to flow)
For precious friends hid in death's dateless° night,
And weep afresh love's long since canceled woe,
And moan th' expense° of many a vanished sight.°
Then can I grieve at grievances foregone, A
And heavily from woe to woe tell° o'er
The sad account of fore° bemoanèd moan,
Which I new pay as if not paid before.
But if the while I think on thee, dear friend,
All losses are restored and sorrows end. B

4. **new wail:** again lament. **my . . . waste:** the damage that time has done to things dear to me.
6. **dateless:** endless.
8. **expense:** loss. **vanished sight:** things gone, such as dead friends.
10. **tell:** count.
11. **fore:** already.

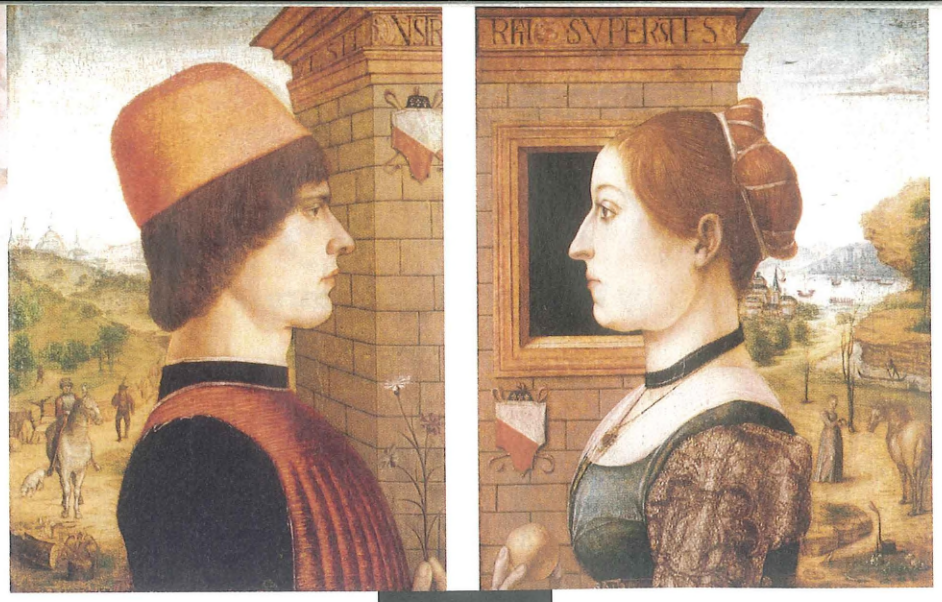
A **Literary Focus** **Shakespearean Sonnets** What sorrows trouble the speaker in the second quatrain?

B **Reading Focus** **Using Text Structure to Understand Meaning** How does the speaker's attitude change in the final couplet?

Vocabulary **summon** (SUHM uhn) *v.*: call.



The Happy Lovers (1844), by Gustav Courbet. Musée des Beaux-Arts, Lyon, France.



Members of the Gozzadini family, Emilian School (15th century). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Robert Lehman Collection, 1975.1.96.

SONNET

Sonnet 116

by **William Shakespeare**

Read with a Purpose

Read to discover the speaker's feelings about the constancy of love.

Build Background

In this sonnet, Shakespeare asserts that true love is firm against all "impediments." *Impediments* is a word taken from the wedding ceremony of the Church of England: "If any of you know cause or just impediment why these persons should not be joined together . . ."

Let me not to the marriage of true minds
Admit impediments. Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove. Ⓐ
Oh no! It is an ever-fixèd mark°
That looks on tempests and is never shaken.
It is the star to every wandering bark,°
Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.°
Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
Within his bending sickle's compass° come.
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
But bears it out° even to the edge of doom.
If this be error and upon me proved,
I never writ, nor no man ever loved. Ⓑ

5. **mark:** seamark; a prominent object onshore that serves as a guide to sailors.
7. **bark:** boat.
8. **height be taken:** altitude measured to determine a ship's position.
10. **compass:** range; reach.
12. **bears it out:** survives.

Ⓐ **Reading Focus** **Using Text Structure to Understand Meaning** What argument, or thesis, does Shakespeare establish in the first quatrain?

Ⓑ **Literary Focus** **Shakespearean Sonnets** What does the speaker conclude in the final couplet?

Vocabulary **impediments** (ihm PEHD uh muhnts) *n. pl.:* obstacles; obstructions.

SONNET

Sonnet 130

by **William Shakespeare**

Read with a Purpose

Read this sonnet to see how and why the speaker shuns describing his mistress in unconventional ways.

Build Background

In this sonnet, Shakespeare ridicules the fashionable, exaggerated metaphors some of his fellow poets were using to describe the women they loved: "Your eyes are suns that set me on fire, your cheeks are roses, your breasts are white as snow." These overwrought metaphors, known as **conceits,** are traceable to Petrarch, but by 1600 they had become tiresome or laughable due to excessive use. Note that in Renaissance usage, the word *mistress* simply meant "girlfriend."

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun,
Coral is far more red than her lips' red.
If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun,°
If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.
I have seen roses damasked,° red and white,
But no such roses see I in her cheeks.
And in some perfumes is there more delight
Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks,
I love to hear her speak, yet well I know
That music hath a far more pleasing sound.
I grant I never saw a goddess go,
My mistress, when she walks, treads on the ground. A
And yet, by Heaven, I think my love as rare
As any she belied° with false compare. B

3. **dun:** dull, grayish brown.

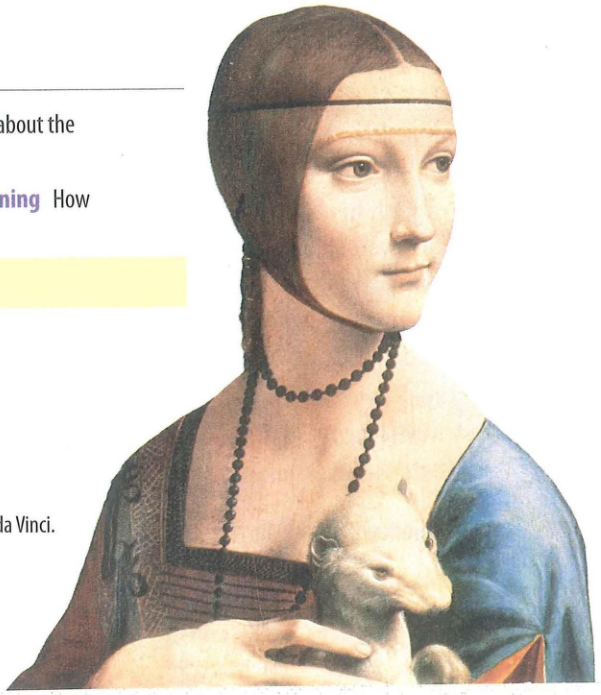
5. **damasked:** marked or streaked in two colors.

14. **belied:** misrepresented.

A **Literary Focus** **Shakespearean Sonnets** What is unusual about the speaker's description of his beloved in this sonnet?

B **Reading Focus** **Using Text Structure to Understand Meaning** How does the final couplet clarify the speaker's attitude toward his mistress?

Vocabulary **reeks** (reeks) *v.:* has a strong, bad smell.



The Lady with the Ermine (1496), by Leonardo da Vinci. Czartoryski Museum, Crakow, Poland.