Complexities of the Sonnet

Grade Level: Advanced Placement Language or Literature 11-12 grades

Subject/Content: English/Elizabethan or Shakespearean Sonnets

Summary of Lesson: Students will discover and identify how William Shakespeare created complex systems within his sonnets using both words and the structure of the poem.

Focus Questions: What makes William Shakespeare's sonnets "classic." Why do we still study his sonnets? What can we learn from Shakespeare's sonnets?

Database(s): *Student Resources In Context*

Procedures:

1. This lesson should be taught after the students have been exposed to various forms of sonnets. Review with students the basic structural and thematic elements characteristic of Shakespearean sonnets:

   - Fourteen lines

   - Three sets of four lines called quatrains

   - Two lines at the end called a couplet

   - Each line contains ten syllables

   - The sonnet has a formal rhyme scheme of abab, cdcd, efef, gg

   - The first two quatrains set up a problem

   - The third quatrain begins to answer the problem

   - The ending couplet tries to solve the problem

2. Guide students as they access and read "The Sonnets" from *Student Resources In Context*.

   - Mahood, M. M. "The Sonnets." *DISCovering Authors*. Detroit: Gale, 2003. *Student Resources In Context*. Web.

3. Ask students the following questions as you guide them through the passage:

   - What does William Shakespeare create when he links his witty wordplay together with the classic Shakespearean or Elizabethan sonnet form?

   - How does Shakespeare's wordplay when he is detached from the experience he is writing about compare to the wordplay when he is near to the experience?

- Explain the author's comments, "...Shakespeare's most telling imagery is scarcely ever visual..."

- How is Sonnet 49 a "vivid example of wordplay...?"

- What can you conclude regarding Shakespeare's relationship with his friends?

- What is the author's tone towards Shakespeare and his sonnets?

4. Have students read and explicate William Shakespeare's "Sonnet 18." Students can access the sonnet through *Student Resources In Context*. Discuss the poem and the explication of the poem with the students. For a more detailed explication of "Sonnet 18" have the students access "Plot Summary: 'Sonnet 18'" through *Student Resources In Context*.

5. Once the students are comfortable explicating Shakespearean sonnets have them choose a Shakespearean sonnet from *Student Resources In Context* to explicate on their own.

Steps/Activities by student(s):

1. Review elements of the Shakespearean sonnet

- Read "The Sonnets" from *Student Resource Center Gold. (*Mahood, M. M. "The Sonnets." *DISCovering Authors*. Detroit: Gale, 2003. *Student Resources In Context*. Web.)

2. Read and explicate William Shakespeare's "Sonnet 18." For a more detailed explication of "Sonnet 18" access "Plot Summary: 'Sonnet 18'" through *Student Resource Center Gold*. Discuss the poem and the explication of the poem with the class and teacher.

3. Access *Student Resources In Contex*t (or *LitFinder*, if available) and find a Shakespearean sonnet to explicate.

Outcome: Students will study the complexities of William Shakespeare sonnets. They will gain an understanding and appreciation for the structure of the sonnet and the wordplay used. They will develop the skills to explicate Shakespearean sonnets and be less apprehensive reading Shakespeare in the future.

Related Activities: Students write their own sonnet using the attached handout "Writing a Sonnet."

Standard Date: Approved 1998

Content Standard(s) and Performance Indicators:

Performance Indicators:

- At Level 1, the student is able to:
    o Identify the structure of a Shakespearean sonnet
- At Level 2, the student is able to:

- o Identify how William Shakespeare used structure and wordplay to create complexities in his sonnets
- At Level 3, the student is able to:
  - o Explicate a Shakespearean sonnet on their own

Common Core Standards: English Language Arts

- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.4** Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.
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