

READING THE SONNET: "A LITTLE SOUND, A LITTLE SONG"

Coordinators: Irene Sax and Mary Smith

We learned it in high school: A sonnet is a poem of fourteen lines in rhymed iambic pentameter. What we didn't learn is that it's also the oldest poetic form in continuous use. In this study group we explore the compelling structure that has inspired poets as far apart in time as Shakespeare and Billy Collins, and in style as John Donne, W.B. Yeats and Edna St. Vincent Millay. As we look at the nearly 1000-year history of the sonnet, we ask how it came to inspire so much human emotion, focusing on the interplay of pattern, argument, and music. Interested students are guided gently through the process of writing a sonnet.

Readings and other Required Materials: Poems to be discussed will be emailed to participants every week.

Irene Sax has coordinated study groups on Food Memoir, Food Poems and The Gastronomical Me. This time she gets to indulge in her non-gustatory passion for reading poetry.

Mary Smith was delighted to be a teacher of high school English and is a lifelong writer of poetry. At IRP she is the co-editor of Voices.

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1. What is sonnet?
2. Italian origins; history
3. Beginnings in England. Wyatt, Spenser, Sidney
4. Shakespeare
5. Donne, Herbert and religion
6. Milton and politics
7. Lets write a sonnet
8. Romantic revival: Wordsworth, Keats, Shelley
9. Victorians: EB Browning, Rossetti
10. Edwardians: Hopkins, Hardy
11. Yeats
12. WW 1
13. Early American moderns: Vincent Millay, Harlem Renaissance