

## Shakespeare's Style

### The Sonnet Form and Iambic Pentameter

Shakespeare wrote over 80 sonnets in addition to his plays. In fact, he even added sonnets into his plays. Before we dive into reading an entire play, we will be approaching Shakespeare's style in a smaller poem, called a **sonnet**.

The Shakespearean sonnet always follows the same format. It has 14 lines, with approximately 10 syllables each line. Each line of the sonnet is written in **iambic pentameter**. A line of iambic pentameter consists of 10 syllables, or five iambs of two syllables each. An **iamb** is an "*unstressed*" syllable followed by a "*stressed*" syllable. When written, the "U" symbols mean unstressed, and the "/" indicates a stressed syllable.

To understand the idea of a *stressed* or an *unstressed* syllable, think about the syllables of some common names. The name Christopher can be divided into three syllables: Chris/to/pher. If we place the stress, or the emphasis, on the "Chris" it would look like this:

/    U    U  
Chris / to / pher

If we place the emphasis on the "to" the name would sound odd to our ears, and look like this:

U    /    U  
Chris / to / pher

When analyzing a line of Shakespeare's work, it would look like this:

U    /    U    /    U    /    U    /    U    /  
Let me | not to | the mar | riage of | true minds      (Sonnet 116)

Finally, Shakespearean sonnets always follow the same rhyme scheme: ABABCDCDEFEFGG, ending with the **rhyming couplet**, or two rhyming lines.

Now that the technical terms have been introduced, it is time to put that knowledge to work in a practical setting.

*Directions: Read the sonnet on the next page. This sonnet one of the most famous of Shakespeare's sonnets: Sonnet 18. Read and analyze this sonnet, paying careful attention to the rhyme scheme and the pattern of syllables. Then, using the chart, divide the sonnet into syllables and label its rhyme scheme. The first line has been done for you.*

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