The Shakespearean Sonnet

The Shakespearean sonnet is a type of **lyric poem** with a specific form:

* has 14 lines, three quatrains (four line stanzas) and a couplet (two line stanza)
* the final couplet usually reveals the underlying message of the poem
* The meter, or pattern of stresses or beats, is **iambic pentameter**

M y m i s t r e s s' e y e s a r e n o t h i n g l i k e t h e s u n

* The pattern of rhyming words is:

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| ABAB -First quatrain  CDCD -Second quatrain  EFEF -Third quatrain  GG -Final couplet |

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| **130**  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[[1]](#footnote-1), red and white, 5 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: 10 I grant I never saw a goddess go,  My mistress, when she walks, treads on the ground: And yet by heaven, I think my love as rare, As any she belied with false compare.  dun (adj) a neutral brownish gray to dull grayish brown  reek (v) to smell strongly unpleasant  belie (v) to show to be false; misrepresent; contradict |  |

# Paraphrasing

You are going to look at each section/quatrain/couplet and paraphrase, putting each part of the piece into your own words in the box next to it.

**130**   
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[[2]](#footnote-2), 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:

And yet by heaven, I think my love as rare,  
As any she belied with false compare.

1. To what kinds of things is the speaker of the poem comparing his mistress? Are his comparisons flattering? Why or why not?

2. Shakespeare use **similes** and **metaphors** throughout this poem. List the things to which the speaker of the poem mentions and how they compare to his mistress.

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| Her feature | Compared to... | Metaphor  or simile? | What is the purpose of this  comparison? |
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3. What is the purpose behind Shakespeare’s use of metaphors and similes in the poem?

4. What is the theme, or message of the poem as stated in final couplet? How is it ironic?

1. **damasked**: of the pink color of the damask rose [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)