

Generative Writing Loops Activity Handout #3:

Italian Sonnet



Before you begin the second assignment in writing Italian sonnets, you might have some questions about the sonnet form. This handout is meant to answer those and to give you the knowledge you need to complete the poetic challenge of writing your own sonnets.

How do sonnets work?

There are three main types of sonnets, English, Italian, and Spenserian. English sonnets are often called Shakespearian because Shakespeare wrote so many: He wrote 154 love sonnets alone, and he invented nearly 2,000 words that we use today in our language.

Talk about play in language!

How many lines are in a sonnet?

All sonnets are made up of 14 lines.

How is does one sonnet form differ from another?

They have different rhyme schemes. All sonnets have 14 lines, but the rhyme scheme determines the type of sonnet.

What is a rhyme scheme?

This term refers to the pattern that the rhyming takes in a poem. Italian sonnets follow this rhyme scheme: ABBA, ABBA, CDE, CDE. A refers to one sound, for example the -at in the word cat. All A lines would end in a word that rhymes with this sound. It is interesting to note that the last six lines of the Italian sonnet can be any combination of the C, D, and E sounds.

What is a volta?

The first eight lines of an Italian sonnet usually set up a problem, and the last six lines solve it. The volta, or turn, comes right after the eighth line when the poet “turns” to the task of solving the problem.