

Romeo and Juliet

Sonnets in Romeo and Juliet

In addition to writing plays, Shakespeare is known for writing a very popular type of poem called a 'sonnet'. Shakespearean sonnets are short poems, often about love, that have a very distinct shape. They usually consist of 14 lines in total, which are subdivided into three short stanzas of four lines (we call these quatrains), plus a final rhyming couplet, which are two lines that share a rhyme.

Here is an example of end rhyme (from Shakespeare's Sonnet XVI):

But wherefore do not you a mightier way	A
Make war upon this bloody tyrant, Time?	B
And fortify yourself in your decay	A
With means more blessed than my barren rhyme?	B

Although a play, *Romeo and Juliet* includes examples of these poems. However, they are often hidden within the dialogue.

Using an excerpt from Act I, scene 5 of *Romeo and Juliet*, can you find the rhyme scheme that Shakespearean sonnets follow? Label lines that end with the same rhyme with the same letter.

ROMEO:	If I profane with my unworhiest hand	___
	This holy shrine, the gentle fine is this:	___
	My lips, two blushing pilgrims, ready stand	___
	To smooth that rough touch with a tender kiss.	___
JULIET:	Good pilgrim, you do wrong your hand too much,	___
	Which mannerly devotion shows in this;	___
	For saints have hands that pilgrims' hands do touch,	___
	And palm to palm is holy palmers' kiss.	___
ROMEO:	Have not saints lips, and holy palmers too?	___
JULIET:	Ay, pilgrim, lips that they must use in prayer.	___
ROMEO:	O, then, dear saint, let lips do what hands do;	___
	They pray, grant thou, lest faith turn to despair.	___
JULIET:	Saints do not move, though grant for prayers' sake.	___
ROMEO:	Then move not, while my prayer's effect I take.	___
	[They kiss]	



Why do you think Shakespeare chose to hide a sonnet in the first lines Romeo and Juliet ever speak to each other in the play?



How does the fact that Romeo and Juliet share a poem with each other influence our understanding of these two characters?

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VOCABULARY

- quatrain (n) – a group of four lines of poetry, a type of stanza
couplet (n) – two lines of poetry that often rhyme, a type of stanza
mighty (adj) – possessing great or impressive strength
to fortify (v) – to provide defence or protection
barren (adj) – showing no results or achievements
to profane (v) – to treat someone with disrespect
shrine (n) – a sacred place, a place of worship
fine (n) – money paid as a punishment
mannerly (adj) – behaving politely, showing good manners
palm (n) – part of the hand between the wrist and fingers
palmer (n) – a type of pilgrim, esp. one returning from Jerusalem with a palm leaf
to grant (v) – to allow or to give

