

Name _____

Class _____

Date _____

Sonnet 18

by William Shakespeare

Grades 9–12 · Common Core RL.9–10.4, RL.9–10.2, RL.9–10.5

Sonnet 18 was published in 1609 in Shakespeare's collection of 154 sonnets. It is a Shakespearean (English) sonnet: 14 lines of iambic pentameter, three quatrains and a closing couplet, rhymed ABAB CDCD EFEF GG. The turn (volta) comes at line 9: "But thy eternal summer shall not fade."



THE POEM

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
Thou art more lovely and more temperate:
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
And summer's lease hath all too short a date:
5 Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,
And often is his gold complexion dimm'd,
And every fair from fair sometime declines,
By chance, or nature's changing course untrimm'd:
But thy eternal summer shall not fade,
10 Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st,
Nor shall death brag thou wander'st in his shade,
When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st,
So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see,
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

VOCABULARY

temperate — mild, even, not extreme**lease** — a period of time something is rented or allowed**untrimm'd** — stripped of ornament; also, a sail not adjusted**fair** — beauty; a beautiful thing**ow'st** — own, possess**eternal lines** — the lines of this poem, which will last forever

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In lines 1–8, what faults does the speaker find with a summer's day?

2. What changes at line 9? How does the argument turn?

3. What does “eternal lines” (line 12) refer to?

4. Read the final couplet. What does the speaker claim the poem can do that summer cannot?

5. Is the poem more about the beloved or about the power of poetry? Support your answer with a line.

WRITING PROMPT

Write a 14-line poem (or a free-verse poem of about 14 lines) comparing someone or something you admire to a season, and explain why they are better than it.

Sonnet 18 — Answer Key

1. Summer is too short (“summer’s lease hath all too short a date”), can be too hot (“Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines”), is shaken by rough winds and fades, as all beautiful things do.
2. “But” turns from summer’s flaws to the beloved’s “eternal summer,” which will not fade or be claimed by Death.
3. The lines of the poem itself; the beloved will grow into eternity through this verse.
4. “So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see, / So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.” The poem preserves the beloved forever, while summer passes.
5. Accept supported answers; many readers argue it is equally about poetry’s power to make beauty last.

Read the full poem online: poetrycatalog.com/sonnet-18-shall-i-compare-thee-to-a-summers-day-william-shakespeare/