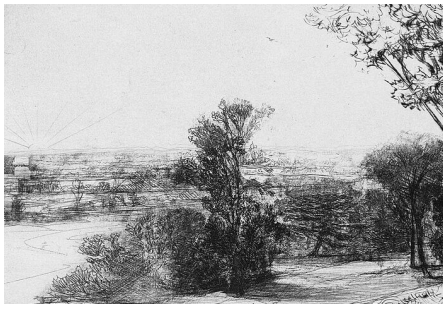
Name _____ Class _____ Date _____



# Sonnet 29

*by William Shakespeare*

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

Sonnet 29 was published in 1609. It may have been written during the early 1590s, when plague closed London's theaters and actors and playwrights lost their income. It is a Shakespearean sonnet (ABAB CDCD EFEF GG); the "volta" (turn) comes at line 9 with "Yet."

## THE POEM

When in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes
I all alone beweep my outcast state,
And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries,
And look upon myself, and curse my fate,
Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,
Featur'd like him, like him with friends possess'd,
Desiring this man's art, and that man's scope,
With what I most enjoy contented least;
Yet in these thoughts my self almost despising,
Haply I think on thee, and then my state,
Like to the lark at break of day arising
From sullen earth, sings hymns at heaven's gate;
For thy sweet love remember'd such wealth brings
That then I scorn to change my state with kings.

## VOCABULARY

**disgrace** — loss of respect or favor

**beweep** — weep over

**outcast** — rejected, cast out

**bootless** — useless

**featur'd** — having good looks

**scope** — range of ability or opportunity

**haply** — by chance

**sullen** — gloomy, dark

**scorn** — refuse with contempt

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How does the speaker feel in the first four lines? Find two actions that show it.

2. In lines 5–8, what does the speaker envy in other people?

3. Where is the turn in the poem? What causes his mood to change?

4. Explain the simile of the lark. Why is it a good image for his change of mood?

5. What does the final couplet say, and how does "state" change meaning across the poem?

## WRITING PROMPT

Write a 14-line poem that begins with a bad day and turns, after the word "Yet," toward someone or something that makes it better.

# Sonnet 29 — Answer Key

1. Lonely, rejected and hopeless: he weeps alone over his “outcast state,” troubles “deaf heaven with my bootless cries,” and curses his fate.
2. Their hope, looks, friends, talent (“this man’s art”) and opportunities (“that man’s scope”); he is unhappy even with what he enjoys most.
3. At line 9, with “Yet.” He happens to think of the person he loves (“Haply I think on thee”).
4. His spirit rises “Like to the lark at break of day arising / From sullen earth,” singing “hymns at heaven’s gate”: the dark earth becomes a bright morning, and despair becomes joy.
5. Remembering this love brings “such wealth” that he would not trade places (“change my state”) with kings. “State” moves from his miserable condition (“outcast state”) to a royal “state” he would refuse.

*Read the full poem online: poetrycatalog.com/sonnet-29-when-in-disgrace-with-fortune-and-mens-eyes-william-shakespeare/*