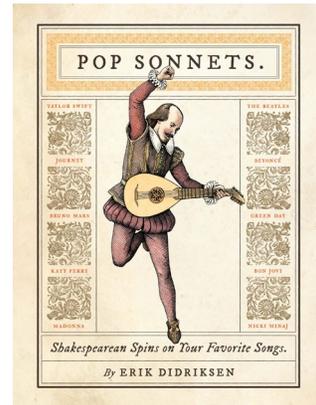


POP SONNETS

By Erik Didriksen



ABOUT THIS BOOK

Erik Didriksen began crafting Shakespearean sonnets based on contemporary pop songs on his Tumblr ([HTTP://WWW.POPSONNET.COM](http://www.popsonnet.com)), and the site exploded in popularity. The book features playful Shakespearean interpretations of a diverse range of pop music, from Chuck Berry's "Johnny B. Goode" to Jay Z's "99 Problems."

A NOTE TO TEACHERS

Erik Didriksen's sonnets are masterfully crafted and cleverly interpreted, and it did not take long for teachers to begin using Didriksen's blog to inspire students to craft their own sonnets based on contemporary songs. With the publication of *Pop Sonnets*, the educational possibilities of Didriksen's poems have been expanded into a complete CCSS-aligned teaching guide. As a teaching tool, *Pop Sonnets* provides a way to engage student interest and scaffold understanding of the sonnet form, poetic devices, vocabulary, and the background of Shakespearean texts. As a supplement to a unit on William Shakespeare, the text will help students access the complexities of Shakespeare's use of language, reinforcing the timelessness and contemporary relevance of his work. Advanced students may wish to examine Didriksen's text as an example of pastiche and reflection of postmodernism.

Pop Sonnets meets the CCSS for Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity.

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.10](#)

By the end of grade 9, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, in the grades 9-10 text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range.

By the end of grade 10, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, at the high end of the grades 9-10 text complexity band independently and proficiently.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY: VOCABULARY ACQUISITION AND USE

Pop Sonnets can be a powerful tool to build vocabulary. High-level vocabulary words from each section of the text are listed below. Students can find many of these words in the text of Shakespeare's plays and sonnets. If you are teaching *Pop Sonnets* as a supplement to the study of a specific play, you may wish to challenge students to find vocabulary words that appear in both texts. Project Gutenberg (WWW.GUTENBERG.ORG) has searchable files of Shakespeare's plays and sonnets.

LANGUAGE: VOCABULARY ACQUISITION AND USE:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.4

Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on *grades 9-10 reading and content*, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies.

SONNETS OF LOVE:

maxim, beau, sow, earnestly, vacate, dalliance, ledger, convey, yearning, breeches, perchance, solemn, profess, twain, prithee, folly, unconstrained, unsurpassed, countenance, rouge, tempered, ephemeral, abide, imperceptible, rend, engrossed, reap, minute, visage, demur, interred, sly, valor, prurient, reciprocation, dismal, hue, forlorn, linger, briskly, bestow, remorse, wistful, incur, visage, conviction, devout, devoid, void, purvey, sage, besmirch, rapport, unprovoked, slander, trouvère, beguile, boorish, taunt, sublime, idyllic, azure, haven, peerage, hail, frippery, ornate, steerage, repute, vestments, esteem, vulgar, bawdy, ruddy, sordid, forego, condescend, ample, unimpeached, entwined, parasol, ravine, strewn, endowed, verdant, genuflect, entreat, amassed, epithet, disclose, rouse, quaff, incessantly, prattle, embark, verily, gait

SONNETS OF DESPAIR:

lulling, portend, mercurial, comrade, winsome, pined, vile, uncouth, stilted, imprudent, obscure, debased, forged, oafish, lout, lofty, courier, rendezvous, procure, warrant, unrefined, confide, monochromatism, steed, cobalt, don, paternal, subdued, churlish, brusque, refute, venerate, strife, grievous, confound, bygone, slake, callous, ceaseless, amorous, tainted, cuckold, spurn, satiate, coffer, lamentation, piteous, histrionic, cholera, melancholy, bleak, maladies, lunacy, abscond, loiter, persist, misdeed, dismay, astray, abate, sate, malice, base, transgressions, marred, implore, estrange, fluctuate, arcane, unveiling, unrequited, sapling, deter, concur, repartee, matrimony, curb, render, domesticated, sentiment, sobriquet, strumpet

SONGS OF TIME AND MORTALITY:

lavish, wrought, endeavor, woeful, minstrel, guild, destitution,

usurer, prevail, preternatural, embark, decant, steeped, troubadour, yore, clarity, pristine, kin, pluck, adversity, impart, frank, fleeting, impermanent, glazed, musings, doctrine, appraised, depict, derelict, decadent, lament, latent, heed, engulf, seclusion, restrained, domain, cherubim, contradict, ventures, creed, berth, surmount, seraphim, interlaced, absolve, ceaseless, trek, pyre, chaste, perception, razed, unfettered, loon, ascent, hamlet, persistently, undaunted, unfazed, bereft, simpletons, gallant, gait, discourse, comely, debonair

ROGUES, RASCALS, AND WANTON WOMEN:

salve, inscribed, prospects, oracle, cipher, tarnished, uncouth, petticoat, woo, cretins, fanny, derrière, truant, proselytize, zealous, homily, rubbish, ire, unabashed, inhibition, allay, revel, galliard, throng, gavotte, jaunty, unfazed, mirth, indifferent, chaos, felled, cast, adhere, celestial, constancy, remit, remiss, endear, farthings, disperse, delinquent, expire, cower, bard, disenchantment, sloth, persist, stave, stoke, kindling, yearn, provoke, admonished, spurned, enlivening, prognosticate, preposterous, aggrieved, amenable, dissuade, sprightly, whimsy, cavort, motley, conformity, chafe, gruel, assent, portends, harbinger, revelry, demise, flimsy, refrain, berth, gaiety, musky, amatory, lamenting, misspent, buffoon, beseech, belies, strapping, squire, fie, comeliness, fete, aloof, soirée, swelter, combust, missive, tact, unbridled, paramour, auspicious, frolic, exuberance, coronation, stalwart, vicious

BALLADS OF HEROES:

rue, contemptible, spat, mien, wizened, wench, soused, aroused, confinement, confections, discreet, reverent, pinstriped, spheres, proffer, certitude, tally, adage, prominent, repute, unparalleled, marquees, saffron, purge, gruff, constable, conscription, gall, vocation, meager, abode, regent, shroud, broached, brothel, doubloon, wayward, ilk, relent, lapse, stoic, valiant, vengeful, petrifying, agape, recourse, assail, onslaught, forebode, cask, partake, concierge, patron, futile, staidly, besiege, barrister, liege

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY: READING AND ANALYZING POETRY

LANGUAGE: VOCABULARY ACQUISITION AND USE:

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.5](#)

Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.

READING LITERATURE: KEY IDEAS AND DETAILS:

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1](#)

Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of

what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

READING LITERATURE: CRAFT AND STRUCTURE:

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.4](#)

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language evokes a sense of time and place; how it sets a formal or informal tone).

READING LITERATURE: INTEGRATION OF KNOWLEDGE AND IDEAS:

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.7](#)

Analyze the representation of a subject or a key scene in two different artistic mediums, including what is emphasized or absent in each treatment (e.g., Auden's "Musée des Beaux Arts" and Breughel's *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*).

Reading poetry and writing explications of poems requires students to master CCSS standards in both Language and Reading Literature. When analyzing a poem, students should thoughtfully consider each of the following elements, citing specific lines from the text in their analysis: format, rhyme scheme, speaker, audience, tone, sound devices, figurative language, imagery, and theme.

1. Divide the class into five groups and have each group work collaboratively to explicate a poem from one of the five sections of *Pop Sonnets*. Display completed explications on large chart paper and ask students to present them to the class.
2. Have each student create a handbook of poetry terms, using a quote from *Pop Sonnets* to illustrate each term. You can find resources for poetry terms at the end of this guide.
3. Choose one of the poems from *Pop Sonnets* and find the lyrics to the contemporary song that inspired the sonnet. Explicate both the sonnet and the lyrics separately, looking specifically for similarities and differences in content, format, and theme.
4. Choose one of the poems from *Pop Sonnets* and find a Shakespearean sonnet that explores a similar theme. Explicate both sonnets separately, looking specifically for similarities and differences in content, format, and theme.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY: EXPLORING THE USE OF SOURCE MATERIAL

READING LITERATURE: INTEGRATION OF KNOWLEDGE AND IDEAS:

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.9](#)

Analyze how an author draws on and transforms source material in a specific work (e.g., how Shakespeare treats a theme or topic from Ovid or the Bible or how a later author draws on a play by Shakespeare).

1. Research the characteristics of a Shakespearean sonnet. In what specific ways did Didriksen draw on Shakespearean sonnets when he crafted *Pop Sonnets*? In what specific ways did Didriksen draw on the pop songs that he reimagined? Choose one of Didriksen's sonnets (e.g., Simon and Garfunkel's "Mrs. Robinson") that you think would have been particularly difficult to adapt to an Elizabethan context. How did Didriksen transform the song?
2. One of the characteristics of postmodern literature is the use of pastiche: texts that imitate another work or style. Examine *Pop Sonnets* as an example of pastiche, paying attention not only to the content of the sonnets but also to the introduction, design, and presentation of the book. For another example of pastiche, view the book trailer for *William Shakespeare's The Empire Striketh Back* ([HTTP://TINYURL.COM/OAD6BWS](http://tinyurl.com/OAD6BWS)), also published by Quirk Books.
3. Just as *Pop Sonnets* transforms Shakespeare's sonnets into a contemporary context, filmmakers have also used the work of Shakespeare to inspire modern adaptations. Watch a movie inspired by one of the plays that you have studied and examine the way that the screenwriter drew on and transformed the original work. Some film adaptations to consider include: *O* (2001), based on *Othello*; *The Lion King* (1994), based on *Hamlet*; *10 Things I Hate about You* (1999), based on *The Taming of the Shrew*; *A Thousand Acres* (1997), based on *King Lear*; *She's the Man* (2006), based on *Twelfth Night*; and *West Side Story* (1961), based on *Romeo and Juliet*.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY: ARGUMENTATION PROMPTS

WRITING: TEXT TYPES AND PURPOSES:

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.1](#)

Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

WRITING: RESEARCH TO BUILD AND PRESENT KNOWLEDGE:

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.7](#)

Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

WRITING: PRODUCTION AND DISTRIBUTION OF WRITING:

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.4](#)

Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

1. In the Introduction to *Pop Sonnets* Didriksen mentions several mysteries surrounding Shakespeare. These include: “Did he really compose the works attributed to him? For whom were the ‘Fair Youth’ and ‘Dark Lady’ sonnets written? Was Shakespeare murdered by a rival writer?” Research one of these questions and develop an argument paper that details your answer to the question, citing research to support your theory.
2. Consider the elements that give a work of literature universal appeal and relevance. How well do you think the modern lyrics of the songs in *Pop Sonnets* translate into Shakespearean sonnets? As a class, try to recreate Didriksen’s project in reverse, taking Shakespearean sonnets and transforming them by giving them modern pop lyrics. o the modern songs in *Pop Sonnets* work as Shakespearean sonnets? Do Shakespeare’s sonnets transcend their time period when adapted into modern language?
3. What song do you think Didriksen should adapt next? Compose a persuasive letter to the author making a compelling argument for the inclusion of your selected song as a pop sonnet. Include the elements of the lyrics that you find particularly “Shakespearean.”

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY: INFORMATIVE AND EXPLANATORY PROMPTS

WRITING: TEXT TYPES AND PURPOSES:

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.2](#)

Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

WRITING: RESEARCH TO BUILD AND PRESENT KNOWLEDGE:

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.7](#)

Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.8](#)

Gather relevant information from multiple authoritative print and digital sources, using advanced searches effectively; assess the usefulness of each source in answering the research question; integrate information into the text selectively to maintain the flow of ideas, avoiding plagiarism and following a standard format for citation.

1. In the Introduction to *Pop Sonnets*, Didriksen creates a fanciful backstory for the existence of his sonnets, claiming that they were in fact written by Shakespeare and performed as songs between acts of his plays. While this story is fiction, we know that Shakespeare did incorporate music and song lyrics into many of his plays, including Desdemona's willow song in *Othello*, the Fool's songs in *King Lear*, and Ophelia's mad scene in *Hamlet*. Many of his comedies also contain songs, including the "Sigh No More" song in *Much Ado about Nothing* that recently inspired a modern interpretation by the band Mumford and Sons. Research the role that music plays in one or more of Shakespeare's plays. How does Shakespeare use music to develop character, plot, and/or theme?
2. Many of Shakespeare's sonnets are written to reflect the characteristics of the courtly love tradition. Research courtly love and explain how characteristics of courtly love are reflected in specific poems from *Pop Sonnets*.
3. One of the ideas implied by *Pop Sonnets* is that songwriters are poets and song lyrics are poetry. Choose a modern songwriter and examine their work in the same way that you would study poetry. Include a biography of the songwriter and detailed explanation of at least three of their songs.
4. *Pop Sonnets* imagines contemporary songs in an Elizabethan style. Identify contemporary songs that you think would work as the soundtrack to one of Shakespeare's plays. Using a digital music-streaming service like Spotify, 8 Tracks, or Pandora, create a playlist of modern music for one of Shakespeare's plays or characters. Compose a paragraph explaining why each song was selected and include a quote from the play as support for the

inclusion of each song. You can find links to music streaming sites at the end of the guide.

5. Research another poet known for writing sonnets (e.g., Petrarch, John Donne, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Pablo Neruda). How are their sonnets similar to Shakespeare's sonnets? How do they differ? Try writing a pop sonnet in the style of the poet you chose to research.
6. Research Elizabethan music. If the poems in *Pop Sonnets* were set to Elizabethan music and performed, how would they sound? What instruments would be used in performance? As a group project, add historically appropriate music to one of Didriksen's sonnets and create an Elizabethan music video to share with your class.
7. Didriksen's book is separated into five thematic sections. Find examples of Shakespearean passages, characters, and/or sonnets that fit into each of these five thematic categories (e.g., Hamlet's "To be or not to be" monologue would be a Song of Time and Mortality). Using textual evidence, explain how the pieces you select reflect each of the given themes.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY: NARRATIVE PROMPTS

WRITING: TEXT TYPES AND PURPOSES:

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3](#)

Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

SPEAKING AND LISTENING: PRESENTATION OF KNOWLEDGE AND IDEAS:

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.5](#)

Make strategic use of digital media (e.g., textual, graphical, audio, visual, and interactive elements) in presentations to enhance understanding of findings, reasoning, and evidence and to add interest.

1. Didriksen's book began as a Tumblr (<http://www.popsonnet.com/>). If William Shakespeare were living today, what do you think his social media presence would look like? Using Didriksen's Tumblr as inspiration, create a social media platform for Shakespeare. You can base your creation on Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, Pinterest, Facebook, or other sites. Resources for creating fake social media posts are included at the end of this guide.
2. The New York Shakespeare Exchange has undertaken a proj-

ect to create a short film inspired by each of Shakespeare's 154 sonnets. Using this project as inspiration, work with a group to write, film, edit, and present a short film based on a sonnet. An article about the project can be found here: [HTTP://TINYURL.COM/OZQCRXF](http://tinyurl.com/OZQCRXF). (Note to teachers: This project would work with sonnets by Didriksen or Shakespeare.)

3. Using the fictitious backstory of the sonnets from Didriksen's introduction as inspiration, write a short story about the imaginary events that might have inspired Shakespeare to compose a specific sonnet from *Pop Sonnets*.

RESOURCES: ABOUT POETRY

"Learning the Sonnet" from the Poetry Foundation:

[HTTP://TINYURL.COM/PWJKVAW](http://tinyurl.com/PWJKVAW)

Poetry Foundation's Learning Lab:

[HTTP://TINYURL.COM/NR26SH2](http://tinyurl.com/NR26SH2)

Comprehensive Glossary of Poetry Terms:

[HTTP://TINYURL.COM/CZOR47E](http://tinyurl.com/CZOR47E)

Poetry Term Worksheet from the AP Workshop:

[HTTP://TINYURL.COM/PMS2TVX](http://tinyurl.com/PMS2TVX)

"How to Cite Shakespeare" by Dr. Mark Womack:

[HTTP://TINYURL.COM/BQ5UB8C](http://tinyurl.com/BQ5UB8C)

ABOUT *POP SONNETS*

Slate article about *Pop Sonnets*: [HTTP://TINYURL.COM/Q4YLJ3V](http://tinyurl.com/Q4YLJ3V)

NPR article about *Pop Sonnets*: [HTTP://TINYURL.COM/OMD68EZ](http://tinyurl.com/OMD68EZ)

FOR CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

8 Tracks: [HTTP://8TRACKS.COM/](http://8tracks.com/)

Pandora: [HTTP://WWW.PANDORA.COM/](http://www.pandora.com/)

Spotify: [HTTPS://WWW.SPOTIFY.COM/US/](https://www.spotify.com/us/)

Template for creating fake Facebook pages:

[HTTP://TINYURL.COM/MMJRMJL](http://tinyurl.com/MMJRMJL)

Template for creating fake Instagram posts:

[HTTP://TINYURL.COM/NWW8ESW](http://tinyurl.com/NWW8ESW)

Template for creating fake Twitter posts:

[HTTP://TINYURL.COM/CXFPNS6](http://tinyurl.com/CXFPNS6)

Fake Snapchat generator: [HTTP://TINYURL.COM/NKW8Q4Q](http://tinyurl.com/NKW8Q4Q)

ABOUT THIS GUIDE'S
WRITER

Amy Jurskis is the author of a number of teaching guides, including *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* by Rebecca Skloot and *In the Garden of Beasts* by Erik Larson. She holds a B.A. in English from the University of Georgia and a MAT from Agnes Scott College. She currently serves as English Department Head at Oxbridge Academy.