

Shakespeare: Understanding the Sonnet

William Shakespeare is known for his plays, but he also wrote over 150 sonnets. Sonnets are poems with a specific structure. A sonnet is 14 lines long and has a specific rhyme scheme.

Below is one of Shakespeare's sonnets. Read it carefully and answer the questions below.

Sonnet 130

by William Shakespeare

Rhyme Scheme

| | |
|--|-------|
| My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun | _____ |
| Coral is far more red than her lips' red | _____ |
| If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun; | _____ |
| If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head. | _____ |
| I have seen roses damask'd, red and white, | _____ |
| But no such roses see I in her cheeks; | _____ |
| And in some perfumes is there more delight | _____ |
| Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks. | _____ |
| I love to hear her speak, yet well I know | _____ |
| That music hath a far more pleasing sound; | _____ |
| I grant I never saw a goddess go; | _____ |
| My mistress, when she walks, treads on the ground: | _____ |
| And yet, by heaven, I think my love as rare | _____ |
| As any she belied with false compare. | _____ |

Questions: _____

1. What is the rhyme scheme in this sonnet?
2. Give an example of one metaphor or simile in the poem and label it as metaphor or simile.
3. Shakespeare is making fun, or mocking, other poets that exaggerate the beauty of a woman. In light of this, explain the phrase "false compare."
4. Shakespeare uses several examples from nature. What is one?
5. Does Shakespeare admire his lady? Cite a quotation from the text to prove your answer.

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Sonnet 130

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Rhyme Scheme

| | | |
|--|---|-------|
| My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun | A | _____ |
| Coral is far more red than her lips' red | B | _____ |
| If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun; | A | _____ |
| If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head. | B | _____ |
| I have seen roses damask'd, red and white, | C | _____ |
| But no such roses see I in her cheeks; | D | _____ |
| And in some perfumes is there more delight | C | _____ |
| Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks. | D | _____ |
| I love to hear her speak, yet well I know | E | _____ |
| That music hath a far more pleasing sound; | F | _____ |
| I grant I never saw a goddess go; | E | _____ |
| My mistress, when she walks, treads on the ground: | F | _____ |
| And yet, by heaven, I think my love as rare | G | _____ |
| As any she belied with false compare. | G | _____ |

Questions: _____

Student's answers may vary; examples of correct answers:

1. What is the rhyme scheme in this sonnet?
ABABCDCEFEFGG
2. Give an example of one metaphor or simile in the poem and label it as metaphor or simile.
"My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun" - simile
3. Shakespeare is making fun, or mocking, other poets that exaggerate the beauty of a woman. In light of this, explain the phrase "false compare."
An untrue comparison
4. Shakespeare uses several examples from nature. What is one?
Roses
5. Does Shakespeare admire his lady? Cite a quotation from the text to prove your answer.
Yes: "I think my love as rare/As any she belied with false compare."