

## Sonnet 138: Choral Reading and Discussion

Sonnet 138, accessible and witty, is usually a favorite with students as it is about love, trust, male-female relationships, and (obliquely) sex.

When my love swears that she is made of truth  
I do believe her though I know she lies,  
That she might think me some untutored youth,  
Unlearnèd in the world's false subtleties. 4  
Thus vainly thinking that she thinks me young,  
Although she knows my days are past the best,  
Simply I credit her false-speaking tongue;  
On both sides thus is simple truth suppressed. 8  
But wherefore says she not she is unjust?  
And wherefore say not I that I am old?  
O, love's best habit is in seeming trust,  
And age in love loves not to have years told. 12  
Therefore I lie with her and she with me,  
And in our faults by lies we flattered be.

1. Divide the class into four groups and have students read each quatrain and the couplet chorally aloud.
2. Ask students what is going on in the poem. To whom do they imagine the poet is speaking? How would they describe the relationship between the two lovers?
3. Check with students to make sure they understand the meaning/sense of "untutored" "vainly," "simply," "credit," "unjust" – all the words that we still use but which have other meanings now. Have them look them up online or in a class dictionary. They should have no trouble getting the pun in the couplet.
4. Discuss: How does the wit and humor in this sonnet compared to that in Sonnet 130? Are there differences in tone? In what ways can both be said to be "Anti-Petrarchan"?
5. Sonnets 127-152 are often referred to as the "Dark Lady" sonnets. Ask students to write responses to the following questions in their journals: Do you think that Sonnets 130 and 138 are about the same woman? Why or why not? Share these responses.

This resource cites the Folger Digital Text of Sonnet 138, which can be found for free at [www.folgerdigitaltexts.org](http://www.folgerdigitaltexts.org)