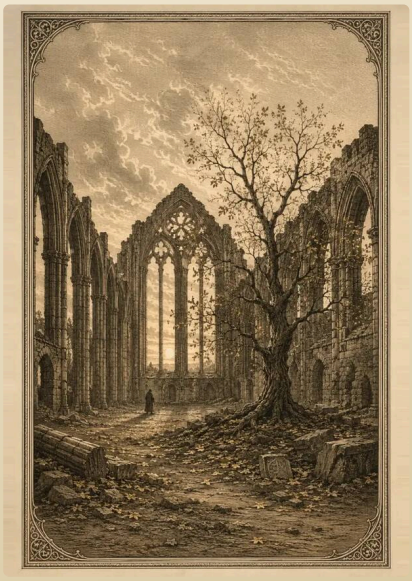
Daily Bard

QUOTATION SHEET

Shakespeare's Sonnets: key quotes and analysis

The 10 The Sonnets quotations worth knowing by heart, each with a plain-English reading, an analysis of its language, space for your notes, and a fill-the-gap test.



How to use this sheet

These are the 10 key quotations from the **Shakespeare's Sonnets study guide**, set out for revision. Part one gives each quotation with a plain-English reading, a short analysis of what the language is doing, and space for your own notes. Part two prints them again with a word missing from each line, so that you can test yourself.

- [ ] Read the quotation aloud twice. Sound helps memory more than staring does.
- [ ] In the note space, name one method (a device, a word choice, a feature of the verse) and the effect it has.
- [ ] Add one link: to a theme, to another moment in the text, or to a point of context.
- [ ] A day later, cover part one and complete part two from memory.

Part one: the quotations

> Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
> Thou art more lovely and more temperate.
>
> SONNET 18 · LINES 1-2

Plain English: Shall I liken you to a summer's day? You are lovelier and milder.

The poem opens with a question about its own method and answers it at once: the comparison will fail because the beloved exceeds it. "Temperate" means mild and even, in weather and in character. The end-stopped lines sound assured. Use this to show Shakespeare examining the convention of comparison even as he uses it.

Your notes:

Links to: _____

> So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,
> So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.
>
> SONNET 18 · LINES 13-14

Plain English: As long as people live and read, this poem will live, and will keep you alive.

The couplet clinches the turn made at line 9. Anaphora ("So long ... So long") and the repeated "this" make the poem point at itself. The monosyllables give the claim the weight of a proof. Notice the condition: immortality depends on readers. Link to the theme of verse against time, and to Sonnet 55.

Your notes:

Links to: _____

> Like to the lark at break of day arising
> From sullen earth, sings hymns at heaven's gate;
>
> SONNET 29 · LINES 11-12

Plain English: My mood, like a lark rising at dawn from the gloomy ground, sings at the gate of heaven.

After eight lines of envy, the simile lifts the poem. Enjambment carries the sense over the line ending so that the syntax rises with the bird. Earlier, heaven was "deaf" to his cries; now he sings hymns at its gate. The contrast of "sullen earth" and "heaven" measures how far thought of the beloved has raised him.

Your notes:

Links to: _____

> Like as the waves make towards the pebbled shore,
> So do our minutes hasten to their end,
>
> SONNET 60 · LINES 1-2

Plain English: Just as waves move towards the stony shore, so our minutes hurry to their end.

An extended simile makes time visible as tide: each wave, like each minute, replaces the one before. “Hasten” gives the minutes a will of their own, and “our” includes the reader. The quatrain’s steady forward movement enacts what it describes. Compare the single dying year, day and fire of Sonnet 73.

Your notes:

Links to: _____

> Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,
> Bare ruined choirs where late the sweet birds sang.
>
> SONNET 73 · LINES 3-4

Plain English: On the branches shivering in the cold: bare, ruined choir stalls where birds sang not long ago.

The metaphor turns leafless branches into a ruined church, which may recall the monasteries dissolved earlier in the century. The crowded stresses of “Bare ruined choirs” slow the line, and “late” insists that the loss is recent. Age is shown as architecture emptied of music: a striking image for a poet to choose for himself.

Your notes:

Links to: _____

> This thou perceiv'st, which makes thy love more strong,
> To love that well which thou must leave ere long.
>
> SONNET 73 · LINES 13-14

Plain English: You see all this, and it makes you love more strongly what you must soon lose.

The couplet turns from the speaker's decline to the listener's response. It is a statement that works as a plea: he tells the beloved what to feel. "Leave" is ambiguous, meaning lose or abandon. Compare Sonnet 116, where love is strong because it ignores time; here it is strong because it notices time.

Your notes:

Links to: _____

> Love is not love
> Which alters when it alteration finds
> Or bends with the remover to remove.
>
> SONNET 116 · LINES 2-4

Plain English: Love that changes when things change, or leaves when the other person leaves, is not really love.

Shakespeare defines by negation. The repetitions with variation ("alters ... alteration", "remover ... remove") mimic the wavering that true love refuses. The phrase before it, "Admit impediments", echoes the marriage service. Ask why a definition needs so many negatives: the poem may be arguing against someone, or against the speaker's own doubt.

Your notes:

Links to: _____

> Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
> Within his bending sickle's compass come;
>
> SONNET 116 · LINES 9-10

Plain English: Love is not Time's plaything, even though youthful beauty falls within reach of his curved sickle.

Time is personified as a reaper and Love as one who refuses to be his "fool", a jester or dupe. The concession "though" is honest: beauty will be cut down. The hard alliteration of "compass come" closes the line like a blade. Shakespeare separates love from the physical beauty that Petrarchan poetry praised.

Your notes:

Links to: _____

> Th' expense of spirit in a waste of shame
> Is lust in action;
>
> SONNET 129 · LINES 1-2

Plain English: Acting on lust is a spending of vital energy in a shameful waste.

The sonnet opens with its verdict. "Expense" and "waste" are financial terms, making desire a ruinous transaction, and "spirit" carries a bodily as well as a moral sense. The sentence runs on over the line break, and the poem that follows piles up adjectives without pause. The form enacts the compulsion it condemns. Contrast the composure of Sonnet 116.

Your notes:

Links to: _____

> And yet, by heaven, I think my love as rare
> As any she belied with false compare.
>
> SONNET 130 · LINES 13-14

Plain English: And yet I swear my beloved is as precious as any woman misrepresented by false comparisons.

The volta arrives only in the couplet: “And yet” reverses twelve lines of apparent insult. “Belied” means lied about, so the target is revealed as dishonest poetry, not the mistress. “Rare” means precious as well as uncommon. The mild oath “by heaven” sounds like speech, not ceremony. The essential quotation for anti-Petrarchan satire.

Your notes:

Links to: _____

Part two: test yourself

Fill each gap from memory, then check against part one. Mark the ones you missed and come back to them tomorrow.

> Shall I compare thee to a _____ day?
> Thou art more lovely and more _____.
>
> SONNET 18

> So long as men can _____ or eyes can see,
> So long _____ this, and this gives life to thee.
>
> SONNET 18

> Like to the lark at break of day _____
> From sullen earth, sings hymns at _____ gate;
>
> SONNET 29

> Like as the waves make _____ the pebbled shore,
> So do our _____ hasten to their end,
>
> SONNET 60

> Upon those boughs which shake _____ the cold,
> Bare _____ choirs where late the sweet birds sang.
>
> SONNET 73

> This thou _____, which makes thy love more strong,
> To love that well _____ thou must leave ere long.
>
> SONNET 73

> Love is not love
> Which alters when it _____ finds
> Or bends with the _____ to remove.
>
> SONNET 116

> _____ not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
> Within his bending _____ compass come;
>
> SONNET 116

Th' _____ of spirit in a waste of shame
Is lust in _____;

SONNET 129

And yet, by _____, I think my love as rare
As any she belied with false _____.

SONNET 130

Next steps

For more quotations, sorted by theme and analysed: **time**, **love**, **beauty**, **mortality**. Turn three of these quotations into full paragraphs with the **essay planner**, and check your method against the **close reading toolkit**. For a small daily dose of the language, **Daily Bard** shows one passage each morning with a plain-English reading on the back of the leaf.



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