

Guidelines for Leading a Discussion
Fourteen Lines with Rhymes and a Twist: The Art of the Sonnet
Spring 2021

• **Select a sonneteer** who has caught your attention from among the those listed in the course calendar and lead a discussion session of approximately 35 minutes, during which class members should have a chance to share their responses to one or two sonnets by the selected sonneteer. Here, in brief, is the suggested outline:

- (1) Tell us why you selected the sonneteer
- (2) *Briefly* introduce the sonneteer
- (3) *Briefly* preview the sonnet(s)
- (4) Read the sonnet aloud
- (5) Ask questions about the sonnet, based on a question list, below, that you have prepared and shared with the class ahead of time.

Important guidelines for presenting a sonneteer's biography:

- Limit your biographical comments to 5 minutes.
- Include only those details about the sonneteer's life that will help the class appreciate the specific sonnet you have selected.
- *Do not include lists*: no lists of awards, publications, degrees, etc.
- Possibly include a couple of helpful quotes by the sonneteer or insightful quotes by critics or scholars.
- Sources: Use the Resources page of our class website.

Questions to provoke discussion and help us dig into the sonnet. Select those questions that would be most helpful to stimulate discussion about the sonnets you have selected.

- What do you like about this sonneteer or the selected sonnet?
- What type of sonnet is it? Does the sonneteer seem to be working easily within that traditional framework or pushing against it?
- What is the line of argument? Where is the tension and the volta (the twist)? Is it compelling, unusual, humorous, paradoxical, or...?
- What about these other aspects of the sonnet?
 - The subject matter
 - The attitude of the speaker
 - Writing within the prevailing conventions of the era, such as courtly love, romantic love, panegyric, religious devotion, nature, mortality?
- What about these attributes of the sonnet?
 - imagery and word choice
 - meter, rhyme scheme, line endings
 - puns, similes, personification, allusion, paradox, metaphor
 - the tone and impact
- What other sonneteers whom we have read so far seem to compare or contrast to this sonneteer?