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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative  
2011 Volume II: Love and Politics in the Sonnet

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## **Lyric Poetry: The Sonnet**

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In the 1947 article "Those Who Make Poems," Chicago poet Carl Sandburg challenged the status quo of poetry: "recently a poet was quoted as saying he would as soon play tennis without a net as to write free verse...The poet without imagination or folly enough to play tennis by serving and returning the ball over an invisible net may see himself as highly disciplined." The poet he referred to was Robert Frost, a serial practitioner of iambic pentameter. Like a highly skilled tennis player, Frost adhered to the conventions of traditional line and meter, proving his game on the international court by winning four Pulitzer Prizes for Poetry in his lifetime. Frost makes a good point, there is something to be said for those who adhere to the rules, but I would argue there is also something to be said about the deliberate choice to selectively challenge the convention. That is what this unit sets out to do — challenge conventional poetic form while taking it seriously before turning away from it. Most of the present unit is actually concerned with taking form seriously, but the turn to free verse will still be the point of the exercise.

(Developed for AP Literature and Composition, grade 12; recommended for AP Literature and Composition, World Literature, and British Literature, grades 11- 12)

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