



YALE NATIONAL INITIATIVE

to strengthen teaching in public schools®

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

The American Sonnet: Barometer of Change in American History

Guide for Curriculum Unit 11.02.03, published September 2011

by Paul Landshof

The American Sonnet stands as a uniquely resilient and chameleon-like form that has matured, endured, and morphed over two-and-a-half centuries of our existence as a nation. At every juncture, the sonnet has served uniquely through its requirement of compression. Whatever trends or crosscurrents of political conflicts, views, and repercussions may have been in the air, the sonnet crystalizes the state of American culture as few other forms can.

This unit covers the development of the American sonnet as a reflection of the American historical narrative, tracing it from its neo-classical roots in 18th century culture and its imitative character then to its blossoming during the American Renaissance as yet another indication of the growth of a distinct American culture (warts and all) that takes on the challenge of adapting an ostensibly anti-poetical, commercial population to a poetic form. Sonnets in the unit follow the subsequent path through the anxiety and tension of the second Industrial revolution and the compromises and leveling effects of modernity.

The sonnet's reflection of the changing voice of America (as well as its changing face), interjecting minority, immigrant, and feminine tones, topics, and nuance, provides students with an opportunity to determine which significant facts have changed and which remained constant in their contemporary American reality.

(Developed for English III, grade 11; recommended for English Language Arts, grades 11-12)

<https://teachers.yale.edu>

©2023 by the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute, Yale University, All Rights Reserved. Yale National Initiative®, Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute®, On Common Ground®, and League of Teachers Institutes® are registered trademarks of Yale University.

For terms of use visit https://teachers.yale.edu/terms_of_use