



# YALE NATIONAL INITIATIVE

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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative  
2014 Volume II: Playing with Poems: Rules, Tools, and Games

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## **The Sestina: Having Fun with Form and Content**

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Students typically approach poetry with trepidation; they feel pressured to interpret it correctly, getting the "right" answer that the teacher wants. Likewise, when they write, they stare at the blank paper, often with little clue of where to start. Poetry seems, from their perspective, to exclude. Some people just get poetry; others don't. Some people can write poetry; others can't.

This unit focuses on the sestina form and the activities within will help students analyze example poems and, as a culminating project, write their own. Students will work collaboratively to discuss poems and to write them, learning how to make observations about the way the sestina form works and ask questions about how that form supports the content of the poems. Specifically, this unit will ask students to think about the way the sestina form uses repetition of words to create a feeling of movement through time and explore an "obsession" of the topic. Along the way, students should ideally realize that poetry, in particular poems with a set structure, are a playground for language, not an intimidating force that is unavailable to them.

(Developed for English I CAS, grade 9; recommended for English, grades 9-12)

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