

Sestet

Definition of Sestet

Sestet originates from the Italian word *sestetto*, which means “sixth.” The famous Italian poet Petrarch was the first to have introduced this poetic form in Italian [sonnet](#). This is the second part of the sonnet, while the first part is called “[octave](#),” and comprises of eight lines. It has six lines, and also refers to a poem of six lines, or a six-lined [stanza](#) in a poem, which can be distinguished from other units by line breaks. Hence, a sestet could also be a complete poem of six lines, or could be a stanza in a poem.

Examples of Sestet in Literature

Example #1: *When I Have Fears that I May Cease to Be* (By John Keats)/

“And when I feel, fair creature of an hour!
That I shall never look upon thee more,
Never have relish in the faery power
Of unreflecting love! — then on the shore
Of the wide world I stand alone, and think
Till Love and Fame to nothingness do sink.”

This sestet is the second part of Keats’ sonnet, *When I Have Fears that I May Cease to Be*, in which he has used classic iambic [pentameter](#). In the first section, the poet has explored his agonizing combination of desires, and then a turn comes in this section, where he reverses his thoughts in entirely surprising and new directions.

Example #2: *A Dream Pang* (by Robert Frost)

“Not far, but near, I stood and saw it all
Behind low boughs the trees let down outside;
And the sweet pang it cost me not to call
And tell you that I saw does still abide,
But 'tis not true that thus I dwelt aloof,
For the wood wakes, and you are here for proof.”

This is also the second part of a sonnet, with a rhyming scheme of CDCDEE. In the sestet, the [speaker](#) solves this uncertainty presented in the previous part, by witnessing his friend's presence in the woods when he says, “and you are here for proof.”

Example #3: *Behind Me Dips Eternity* (by Emily Dickinson)

“Behind Me – dips Eternity –
Before Me – Immortality –
Myself – the Term between – ...
Before the West begin – ”

Usually, poets do not employ straightforward six-line stanzas, or sestets, in their work, other than in a strict form of sonnet. In this example, however, Dickinson opens the poem with a sestet that has the [rhyme](#) scheme of AABCCD.

Example #4: *The New Colossus* (by William Shakespeare)

” ‘Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!’ cries she
With silent lips. ‘Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free...
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!’ “

This is a perfect example of Italian sestet with [rhyme scheme](#) of CDCDCD. This is a stanza break that brings change in the poem by using [dialogue](#) and first person [point of view](#), which is different from octave.

“That murmur, soon replies, ‘God doth not need
Either man’s work or his own gifts; who best
Bear his mild yoke, they serve him best ...
They also serve who only stand and wait.’ “

This is another famous example of Italian sonnet, using second part as a sestet with a rhyme scheme of CDECDE and metrical pattern of [iambic pentameter](#). In the first part, the speaker tries to convey a foolish question and in the second part, a figure named “patience” gives response to that question.

Example #6: *Annabel Lee* (by Edgar Allan Poe)

“It was many and many a year ago,
In a kingdom by the sea,
That a maiden there lived whom you may know
By the name of Annabel Lee;
And this maiden she lived with no other thought
Than to love and be loved by me.”

Most of the stanzas in the given poem are sestets. Again this poet also begins the poem with sestet by using a rhyme scheme of ABABCB.

Function of Sestet

The most fascinating thing about the structure of a sonnet is that the nature of octave is more objective. In other words, it is set to present some [dilemma](#) or a problem. In [contrast](#), the function of sestet is [subjective](#) that answers or gives response to that problem presented in octave, completing the complex world with fourteen lines. In simple words, sestet is a “turn or volta” in a sonnet that resolves the issue presented in the first part, or it provides a new [perspective](#) or a solution to an idea. Therefore, it gives surprise and new direction to the idea expressed in the sonnet.