

READING SONNETS (Or most poetry, actually):
SOME GENERAL STEPS TO FOLLOW

- 1) **VOCABULARY:** make sure you understand all the vocabulary in the poem and look up any words you don't know. Remember that words change their meaning and connotation over time so look them up in a dictionary that explains these changes, and pay special attention to how the words are used in context.
- 2) **IDENTIFY THE TYPE OF SONNET:** remember that each type of sonnet has a distinct way of organizing information. Knowing the type you are dealing with will allow you to make inferences about the relationship of **FORM** to **CONTENT**.
- 3) **DESCRIPTION** or the “**WHAT**” **STAGE:** make a “map” or description of the steps of the poem's argument and be sure you know what it is saying in a general, literal sense.
- 4) **ANALYSIS** or the “**SO WHAT**” **STAGE:** look at the **RELATIONSHIPS** among the various parts of the poem and between its **FORM** and **CONTENT**. Always ask yourself: “What is the *relationship* between....”
- 5) **SUMMARIZE** and **GENERALIZE:** explain how all of the relationships relate to one another and how they illuminate the underlying values and ideas that shape the poem. This is where you talk about the **SIGNIFICANCE** of the poem.