

KEY STAGE	AGE
EYFS	3-5
KS1	5-7
KS2	7-11
KS3	11-14
KS4	14-16 ✓
KS5	16-18

#### AT A GLANCE

- JOHN KEATS
- SONNETS
- FEELINGS & EMOTION
- LOVE POETRY
- EXPERIENCE

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**POETRYCLASS: FRESH IDEAS FOR POETRY LEARNING FROM THE POETRY SOCIETY**  
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# 'BRIGHT STAR' BY JOHN KEATS

BY NICHOLAS ROE



## Keats and 'Bright Star'

The great English Romantic poet John Keats created some of the best-loved poems in the tradition – 'Ode to a Nightingale', 'The Eve of St. Agnes', and the sonnet 'Bright Star'. Born in the City of London in October 1795, Keats's greatest poetry dates from the years 1818-1820, before his tragically early death from tuberculosis in Rome, aged twenty-five, in February 1821.

As a poet Keats was attracted to the compact forms of lyric, sonnets, odes, and drawn as well to the more expansive possibilities of narrative and epic poetry. His 'Bright Star' sonnet is often said to be about his beloved Fanny Brawne, although exactly when and why the sonnet was written is unknown. There are several different versions of this poem; the version given here was headed 'Sonnet 1819', but that does not necessarily mean it was written then.

Formally it is a Shakespearean sonnet, composed of three quatrains (or four-line verses) rhyming ABAB, and a final rhyming couplet to give the total of fourteen lines. Like many of Keats's poems, 'Bright Star' contrasts ideas of beauty and transience, pleasure and suffering,

solitude and intimacy, eternity and mortal fears of ceasing to be.

## Teaching the poem

★ Start by reading the poem aloud, or having a student do so. Investigate the poem more deeply using the approaches below, working as a class or in small groups.

★ Read the poem closely and list any words and images that sound strange or unfamiliar to you. What do they contribute to the poem?

★ Read the poem out loud again, listening closely. What kinds of sounds does the poem make?

★ From your reading of the poem, what kinds of occasion or experience do you think it might have arisen from?

★ What does the fourteen-line sonnet form contribute to 'Bright Star'? Can you imagine a different form for the poem – for example, a short story?

★ Is 'Bright Star' a love poem? If it is, why does the poet have so much to say about himself?

★ Some books print slightly different versions of this poem. Why do you think that is? Look at some variations and see which you prefer.

★ Take the title 'Bright Star!' and write your own poem on that subject, keeping to fourteen lines.

## Further reading

For more information about Keats's life, take a look at the biography, *John Keats: A New Life*, by Nicholas Roe (Yale University Press, 2012).

## ***BRIGHT STAR***

Bright Star! Would I were steadfast as thou art!  
Not in lone splendour hung amid the night;  
Not watching, with eternal lids apart,  
Like Nature's devout sleepless Eremite,  
The morning waters at their priestlike task  
Of pure ablution round earth's human shores;  
Or, gazing on the new soft fallen mask  
Of snow upon the mountains and the moors:—  
No;—yet still steadfast, still unchangeable,  
Cheek-pillow'd on my Love's white ripening breast,  
To touch, for ever, its warm sink and swell,  
Awake, for ever, in a sweet unrest;  
To hear, to feel her tender taken breath,  
Half passionless, and so swoon on to death.

**JOHN KEATS**



John Keats was born in the City of London on 31 October 1795. From 1818 to 1820 he lived in Hampstead, where he fell in love with Fanny Brawne, the girl who lived next door. The 2009 movie *Bright Star* (cert PG), about their relationship, is named after this poem.