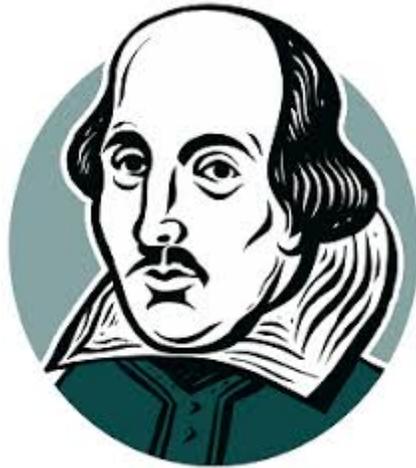


William Shakespeare and Iambic Pentameter



Remember, a **foot** in poetry is sort of like a "word" in prose. It is determined not by letters, but by syllables. Each "foot" contains one stressed syllable in combination with unstressed syllables.

The most common poetic **foot** is known as the **iamb**.

An **iamb** is two syllables, where the first syllable is unstressed and the second syllable is stressed. THINK: da DUM or ta-DAH



For example, the word "today" is an iamb because the stress falls on the second syllable, like this:

- /
today

When a poem is written using iambs, we say that it is **iambic**.

For example, the following line is iambic.

- / - / - / - /
Today I had a ro tten day.

You'll notice that an iamb does not have to be a whole word; it can be made up of syllables from two different words, such as "I had."

One easy way to remember that this kind of foot is called an "iamb" is to think of the words "I am." If you were to say the words "I am" over and over, they would be in iambic. That is, the stresses would fall on the same syllables as in an iambic poem, like this:

- / - / - / - /
I am, I am, I am, I am.

When Shakespeare wrote his sonnets, he used **iambic pentameter**.

Remember, a meter in poetry is like a line in prose.

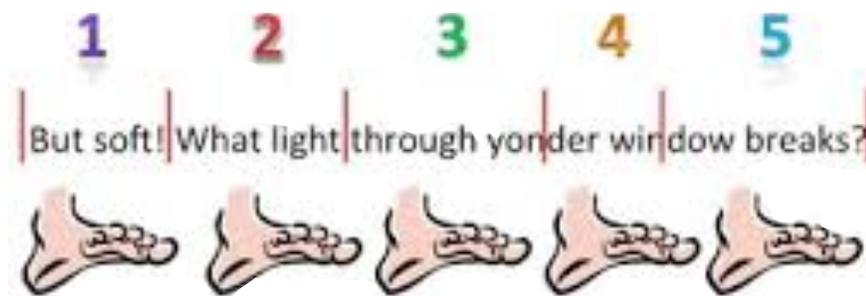
SO THINK...

an iamb is a foot with two syllables (first unstressed, second stressed)

"pent" means? five

and a meter in poetry is? a line

So, Shakespeare wrote poetry that had five iambs per meter (line)



Let's look at the Prologue from Shakespeare's famous play, "Romeo and Juliet" and decide if it is written in iambic pentameter.

Romeo & Juliet: Act 1 Prologue

(Chorus)

Enter Chorus.

CHORUS

Two house holds, both alike in dig nity,
In fair Vero na, where we lay our scene,
From an cient grudge break to new mu tiny,
Where civil blood makes civil hands unclean.
From forth the fatal loins of these two foes
A pair of star-cross'd lovers take their life;
Whose misadventur'd piteous overthrows
Doth with their death bury their parents' strife.
The fearful passage of their death-mark'd love,
And the continuance of their parents' rage,
Which, but their children's end, nought could remove,
Is now the two hours' traffic of our stage;
The which if you with patient ears attend,
What here shall miss, our toil shall strive to mend.

Exit.