



This in-class activity was developed in conjunction with Lightbox interviews with [Carl Phillips](#) and [Kim Addonizio](#). For more information, please see www.lightboxpoetry.com.

Modern Love

In her interview, Kim Addonizio writes, “I’m usually not thinking about any tradition when I write...Sometimes I will draw on tradition, though, or play with it. Some of my newer work has been involved with Shakespeare’s sonnets.” In this in-class activity, we’ll reflect on the forms and functions of traditional love poetry, and consider how Kim Addonizio’s work “plays” with these structures and ideas.

Part I

As a class, discuss your ideas about what love poems look like, sound like, and say. What do you associate with the love poem? What qualities should a love poem have? What poems, songs, or other works of literature are you drawing on when you think about these assumptions? Make a list of these ideas on the board so you can refer to them for the rest of this activity.

Part II

Read one or more of these classic love poems: “[The Passionate Shepherd to His Love](#)” by Christopher Marlowe; “[Sonnet 130](#)” by Shakespeare; “[To His Coy Mistress](#)” by Andrew Marvell; “[To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time](#)” by Robert Herrick; “[The Flea](#)” by John Donne.

After looking at some of these poems, try to deduce some aspects of the tradition of love poetry in English. What do these poems have in common? What similar strategies do they use? How do these poems function as arguments, addresses, descriptions of the beloved, or make broader claims about the nature of love?

As a class, do you want to change or alter some of your ideas from your initial discussion? Do you want to add any new qualities that you believe love poems share?

Part III

Now, let’s turn to two contemporary love poems by Kim Addonizio: “[What Do Women Want?](#)” and “[First Poem for You](#).” What do these poems have in common with the pieces you read in Part II? Do they employ similar strategies? Where do they diverge?

In what ways do you think these poems “play” with the tradition? Do you see these poems as a critique, transformation, or imitation of the love poems that preceded them? Based on your work today, would you say that the fundamental nature of the love poem has changed or remained the same over time?