

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Sestina Poem Assignment

**Due 3/4/13 (Wednesday)**

A sestina consists of thirty-nine lines—six stanzas of six lines each and one concluding stanza of three lines (envoi). What makes a sestina so unique is that the words which end the lines in the first stanza are repeated as the end words for each following stanza, and all six appear in the concluding three line stanza—two per line.

If the word at the end of the first line of the first stanza is assigned the letter “a,” the word at the end of the second line the letter “b,” and so on through the sixth line and the letter “f,” the pattern of the stanzas goes as follows:

First Stanza    a-b-c-d-e-f  
Second Stanza  f-a-e-b-d-c  
Third Stanza    c-f-d-a-b-e  
Fourth Stanza  e-c-b-f-a-d  
Fifth Stanza    d-e-a-c-f-b  
Sixth Stanza    b-d-f-e-c-a

First line of Envoi    b-e  
Second line of Envoi  d-c  
Third line of Envoi    f-a

The six words chosen as the end words are crucial to the flow and meaning of the sestina. Do not handicap yourself by choosing words that have singular meanings; instead, pick words that have multiple meanings or words that can be used in metaphors or similes. You’ll be using each word seven times, so you’ll want to have options. It might help to pick a mix of concrete and abstract nouns to give you some freedom.

### **Additional guidelines:**

Make sure your poem is **typed**, using Times New Roman, 12 point font.

Make sure to give your poem a creative title.

Some forms of the sestina dictate exactly how many syllables must be used per line, but modern poets tend to ignore this rule. For our purposes, try to keep the number of syllables per line between 7 and 10 (though feel free to break these boundaries when the poem calls for it).

Look at the example sestina on the back of this sheet if you get stuck or confused.

### **Grading breakdown:**

### **Total points:**

Spelling:

Form:

Title:

Line variation:

## Sestina

September rain falls on the house.  
In the failing light, the old grandmother  
sits in the kitchen with the child  
beside the Little Marvel Stove,  
reading the jokes from the almanac,  
laughing and talking to hide her tears.

She thinks that her equinoctial tears  
and the rain that beats on the roof of the house  
were both foretold by the almanac,  
but only known to a grandmother.  
The iron kettle sings on the stove.  
She cuts some bread and says to the child,

It's time for tea now; but the child  
is watching the teakettle's small hard tears  
dance like mad on the hot black stove,  
the way the rain must dance on the house.  
Tidying up, the old grandmother  
hangs up the clever almanac

on its string. Birdlike, the almanac  
hovers half open above the child,  
hovers above the old grandmother  
and her teacup full of dark brown tears.  
She shivers and says she thinks the house  
feels chilly, and puts more wood in the stove.

It was to be, says the Marvel Stove.  
I know what I know, says the almanac.  
With crayons the child draws a rigid house  
and a winding pathway. Then the child  
puts in a man with buttons like tears  
and shows it proudly to the grandmother.

But secretly, while the grandmother  
busies herself about the stove,  
the little moons fall down like tears  
from between the pages of the almanac  
into the flower bed the child  
has carefully placed in the front of the house.

Time to plant tears, says the almanac.  
The grandmother sings to the marvelous stove  
and the child draws another inscrutable house.

*-Elizabeth Bishop*