

## Epigrams

### *Explanation and Worksheet*

**What is an epigram?** An epigram is a short poem with a universal theme. In an epigram, brevity, clarity, and permanence are emphasized. Short epigrams or lines from epigrams are often used as inscriptions on buildings or statues, or as an epitaph for a gravestone. For example, the lines “Rest in soft peace, and, asked, say here doth lie/Ben Jonson his best piece of poetry” is a good epitaph for Jonson’s son. The English poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge wrote the following epigram to define epigrams:

What is an epigram? A dwarfish whole,  
Its body brevity, and wit its soul.

**A. DIRECTIONS: Read each of the excerpts below and circle those that can be considered epigrammatic.**

1. Mary had a little lamb,  
Its fleece was white as snow.
2. Give me a look, give me a face,  
That makes simplicity a grace;
3. Drink to me only with thine eyes.
4. To err is human, to forgive divine.  
(Alexander Pope, Essay on Criticism)
5. What’s in a name? That which we call a rose  
By any other name would smell as sweet.  
(Shakespeare, Romeo and Juliet)

**B. DIRECTIONS: On the lines below, write five short two- or four-line epigrams.**

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