

## TRAIT FOCUS: IDEAS

## Lesson Objective

Students freewrite to explore unexpected details and questions on a topic.

## Choosing a Unique Perspective

It always helps to remind students at the beginning of every new writing assignment that prewriting is one of the most important stages in the writing process. Not only do writers select and narrow a topic, but they also decide what angle or perspective to take on the subject.

For nonfiction pieces like essays and research papers, it is easy to restate old facts and expected information on a topic (e.g. “rainforests” usually lends itself to a discussion of deforestation). It is therefore important for writers to strategize ways to bring a fresh take to the topic, especially if the topic is one familiar to the reader. Taking extra time in the prewriting stage to question the topic from every angle—especially the unexpected angles—enables the writer to utilize ideas that take the topic in a new direction. Doing so can mean the difference between crafting something original and rehashing something old.

The poem “Sonnet 130” by William Shakespeare is an excellent mentor text that turns the conventions of the traditional love letter on its ear. Integrate the following Literature/Writing Connection lesson into your discussion of the poem as a way of instructing your students on striving for an unexpected perspective in their writing.

## Story Overview

Shakespeare’s sonnet is an anti-love, love letter that still holds a bit of tenderness for the subject. It ridicules the exaggerated metaphors other poets use to describe their love interests. This mistress does not have eyes like the sun, or skin like creamy milk, or cheeks like roses. Even so: “I think my love as rare As any she belied with false compare.”

## Expect the Unexpected

1. As part of your writing curriculum on prewriting, gathering details, and choosing a strategy for tackling the topic, remind your writers that prewriting is vital for planning out their overall writing project. It’s a good idea to explore a number of different angles to the topic and choose one that not only inspires them to write but will also be informative and engaging to the reader.
2. Start the lesson with a discussion in which you list the worst, most clichéd conventions found in love poetry. Have them use this list to write a short love letter to someone of fictional perfection. It’s OK to be as garish and sentimental as they wish.
3. Read “Sonnet 130” to the class. Hold a general discussion on the poet’s fresh take on the love sonnet. Is the mistress unattractive? What details poke fun at the conventions of love poetry? Why is the couplet at the end important to understanding the poet’s message?
4. Highlight the fact that, at the time, most love poetry utilized exaggerated metaphors called *conceits*, while “Sonnet 130” took a fresh and original—and quite effective—take on calling someone beautiful.
5. Have your students freewrite for 10 to 15 minutes on the following writing prompt: *Take the general topic of Global Warming and narrow it to a manageable focus. As you work, strive for unexpected details and ideas. What questions have you never asked yourself about this topic? What might your reader not know?*
6. Call on some students to share their ideas. Ask them about their thought processes as they worked. Do the answers to the questions seem to inspire a fresh take on the subject? Would they hold the reader’s attention and make him or her want to keep reading?
7. Extend the lesson by having your students write out their topic ideas into a full writing assignment.