

starter:  
r:

Consider the idea of symbolism and note down your ideas about the tree:

What could the leaves  
symbolise?

The branches?

The buds?

The vines?

The trunk?

The roots?



LO:

- ✓ Understand and interpret sonnet 29
- ✓ Explore and analyse EBB's use of language, form and structure
- ✓ Consider different interpretations for sonnet 29
- ✓ Explore how the Victorian context influences EBB's writing

# Elizabeth Barrett-Browning Fact Sheet:

Born in 1806 (Victorian Era) & died 1861 (aged 55)

Thoughtful, intelligent & fascinating writer

Had a social conscience and was an opponent of slavery and child labour.

EBB was a child prodigy.

Married Robert Browning (another famous Victorian poet) although EBB was more successful than her husband and very nearly became a Poet Laureate.

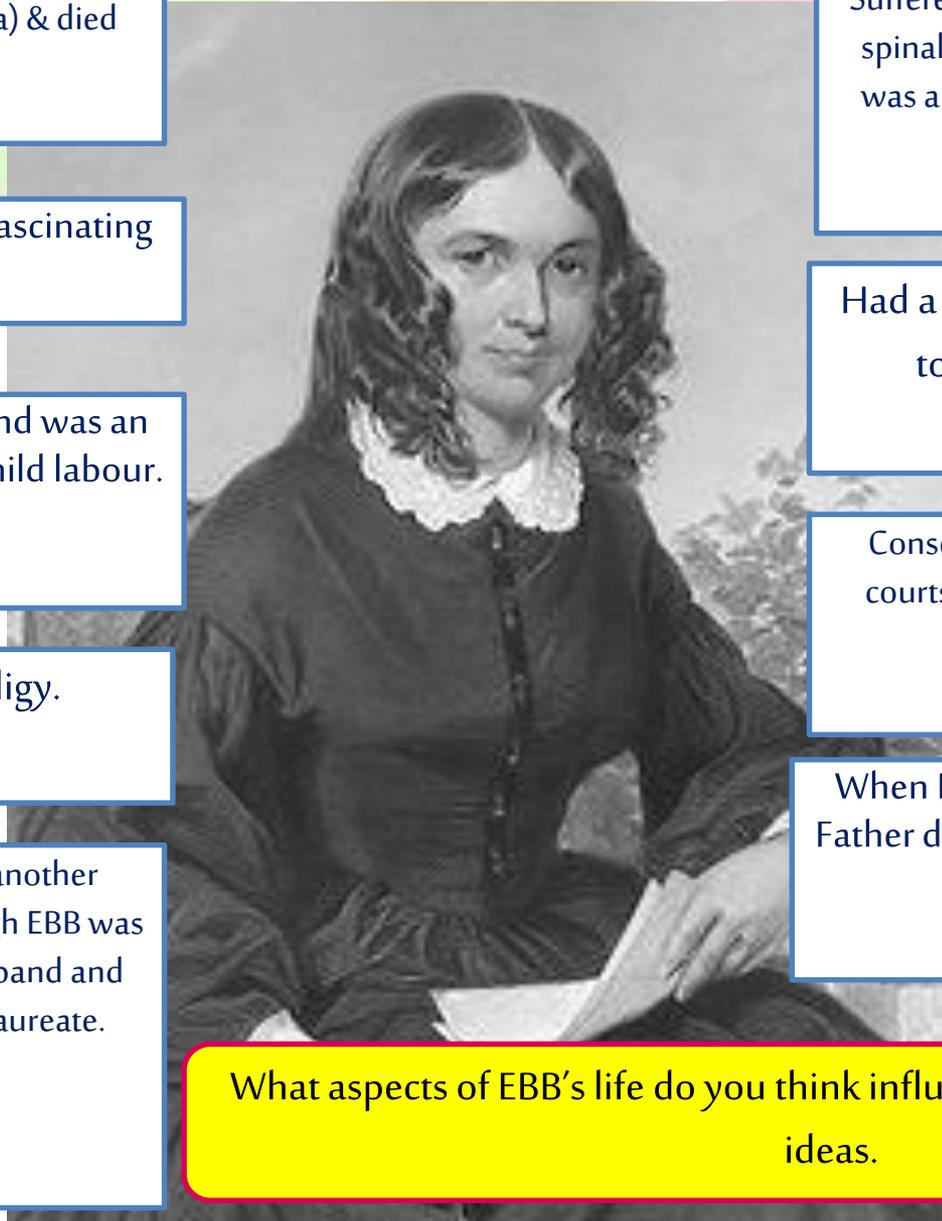
Suffered from a lung disease and severe spinal injury throughout her life – she was an invalid, addicted to painkillers.

Had a very controlling Father who took a disapproval to RB.

Consequently, EBB and RB had a secret courtship where they wrote around 500 letters to one another

When EBB eventually married RB, her Father disowned her and never spoke to her again

What aspects of EBB's life do you think influenced her poetry? Justify your ideas.



## Let's listen to a reading of Sonnet 29:

### Sonnet 29 – *'I think of thee!'*

I think of thee!—my thoughts do twine and bud  
About thee, as wild vines, about a tree,  
Put out broad leaves, and soon there 's nought to see  
Except the straggling green which hides the wood.  
Yet, O my palm-tree, be it understood  
I will not have my thoughts instead of thee  
Who art dearer, better! Rather, instantly  
Renew thy presence; as a strong tree should,  
Rustle thy boughs and set thy trunk all bare,  
And let these bands of greenery which insphere thee  
Drop heavily down,—burst, shattered, everywhere!  
Because, in this deep joy to see and hear thee  
And breathe within thy shadow a new air,  
I do not think of thee—I am too near thee.

Make a note of key themes you identify in the poem.

# Task:

## Sonnet 29 – '*I think of thee!*'

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Now summarise what you think this poem is about. You must try and include the words listed below:

Overwhelming

Extended metaphor

Romantic

## Feedback :

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### Sonnet 29 – 'I think of thee!'

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Sonnet 29 is a **romantic** poem about EBB's **overwhelming** thoughts of her husband-to-be RB when she is not with him. The poem is an **extended metaphor**, a conceit, where the wild vines concealing a tree are EBB's thoughts of RB who is the tree. The love expressed by EBB in the poem is incredibly intense, spiritual and somewhat sexual.

# Structure: The Petrarchan Sonnet

EBB uses the petrarchan sonnet. Sonnet 29 is from a series of 44 sonnets Browning wrote between 1845-1846 during her courtship with RB.

EB was older than RB and initially found it hard to believe in his love. The series of sonnets reveals her increasing confidence in their relationship.

The sonnet is a 14 line poem, normally written using iambic pentameter, a beat which imitates the human heart.

The petrarchan sonnet, is an Italian form of poetry and has 2 parts:

- The first 8 lines, the octave, propose a problem.
- The last 6 lines, the sestet, solves the problem.
- The 9<sup>th</sup> line, the volta, is the turning point and signals a change.

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Browning does not strictly follow the structure, however, there is an octave, sestet and volta.

Re-read sonnet 29 and identify the following:

1. What is EBB's problem?
2. What solution does she propose?
3. In which lines does the turn for a resolution take place?

If a sonnet is a poem about perfect love, what may Browning be trying to show by not following the structure correctly?

## Structure: The Petrarchan Sonnet

How does the enjambment of the first four lines imitate the movement of the vine?

How does the punctuation and word choice in line 11 emphasise the effect of RB's presence of her thoughts?

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# Language :

Highlight and words or phrases EBB uses to describe her love.

What are the connotations of these words and what effect do you think they are designed to have?

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# Language & imagery:

Complete the below table:

<u>The Images:</u>	<u>Explore:</u>
...my thoughts do twine and bud About thee, as wild vines...	How does the image of a vine represent EBB's thoughts? How does the use of 'wild' evoke the natural world? What does this suggest about her emotions? What's an alternative interpretation of 'wild vines'?
Put out broad leaves and soon there's nought to see Except the straggling green which hides the wood.	What contrasting image is being presented here? How does this image convey the way the poet thinks of love?

Language & poetic techniques:

Complete the below table:

<u>Technique:</u>	<u>Evidence:</u>	<u>Analysis:</u>
Metaphor		<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. What kind of imagery is created?</li><li>2. Identify key words/phrases – what is their effect?</li><li>3. What message do you think EBB is trying to deliver through her use of these techniques?</li><li>4. How may a reader respond?</li><li>5. Alternative ideas?</li></ol>
Simile		
Alliteration		
Alliteration		
Interesting lexical choices		

Task :

What do you think EBB meant by the unusual word  
insphere?

The use of 'insphere' creates the image of two separate items joining as one. EBB conveys the idea of encircling surrounding RB. She asks him to accept her love by dropping his branches and allowing her to envelop him. A very sensual and daring image for a respectable Victorian lady.

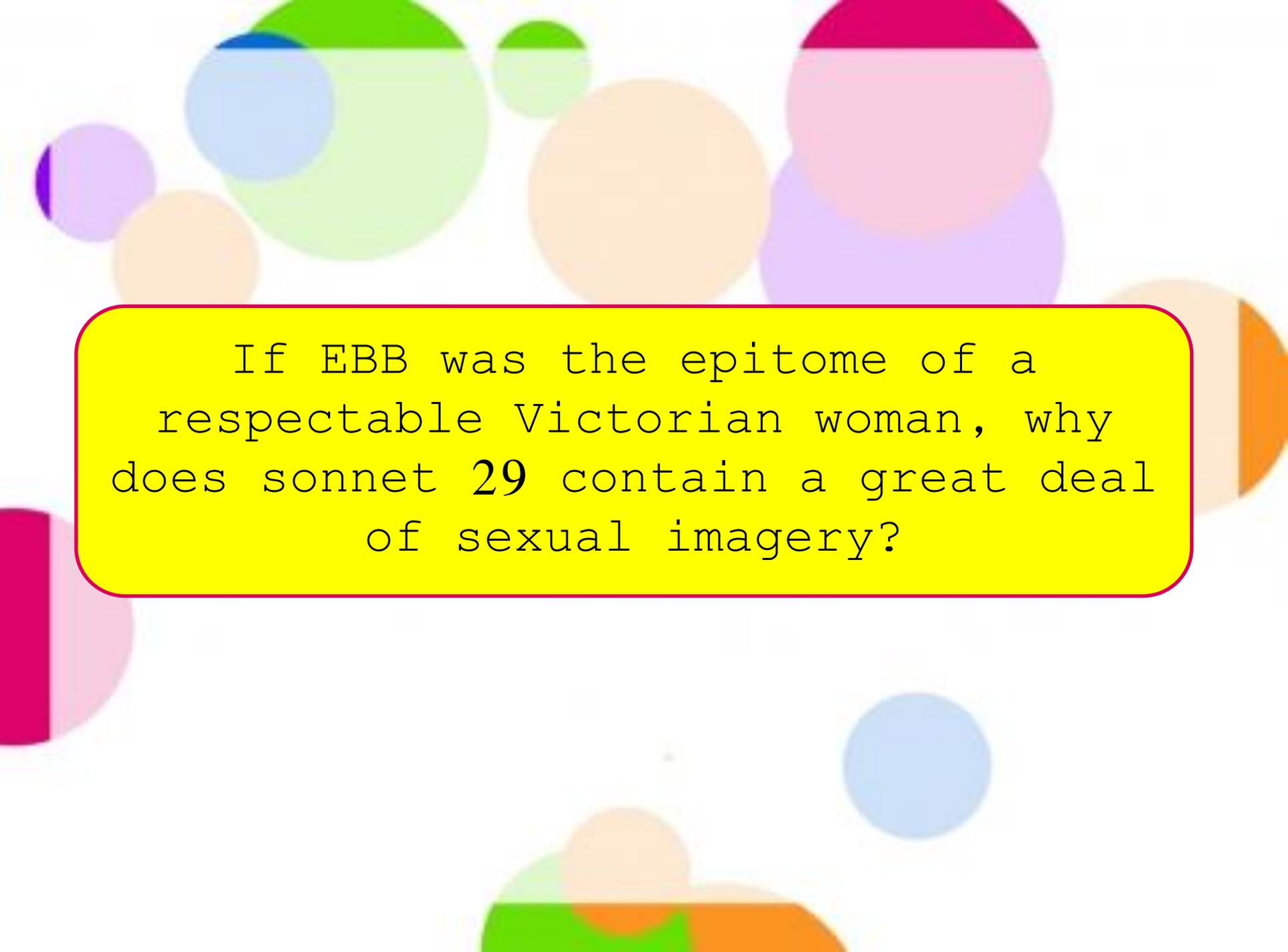
Re-read sonnet 29 and identify where else EBB may be trying to create sexual  
imagery?

## EBB as a Victorian Woman:

EBB was known for explicitly and directly confronting political issues such as women's rights and slavery and yet during the Victorian Era and even now, she is most renowned for her love poetry. Why do you think this is?

In presenting herself through the conceit of the vine, EBB is presenting herself a weak woman, in need of something to hold onto and something to support her, the trunk, RB.

During the Victorian Era, women had very few rights and were in fact completely dependant on me. Supported by the conceit of the vine. EBB is merely presenting herself as the epitome of a respectable Victorian woman.



If EBB was the epitome of a respectable Victorian woman, why does sonnet **29** contain a great deal of sexual imagery?