

The story of *Romeo and Juliet*

Is *Romeo and Juliet* true?

There is no simple answer to that question. It all depends on what you mean by 'true'. In thirteenth-century Italy there certainly were two Italian families, the Montecchi and the Capelletti, locked in political struggle. But the Montecchi lived in Verona, and the Capelletti lived in Cremona, sixty miles away. No one knows whether the families had children called Romeo and Juliet.

However, the story of two young lovers from opposing families was very popular in Italy and France. Myths and folktales about them existed for hundreds of years before Shakespeare. He based his play on a poem published two years before he was born: *The Tragicall Historie of Romeus and Juliet* (1562) by Arthur Brooke. That poem was an English translation of a French translation of an Italian version! Below is an extract from a section of Brooke's poem. You can see how Shakespeare used this source material as the starting point for the beginning of Act 4 Scene 3.

Unto her chamber doth the pensive wight repair
And in her hand a percher light the Nurse bears up
the stair.
In Juliet's chamber was her wonted use to lie,
Wherefore her mistress dreading that she should her
work descry
As soon as she began her pallet to unfold
Thinking to lie that night, where she was wont to lie
of old,
Doth gently pray her seek her lodging somewhere else.

- ◆ Re-read the extract above. What differences can you find between Shakespeare's version and the original? Look back at the script to make comparisons and compile a list of the changes Shakespeare makes.
- ◆ Find a copy of Brooke's poem (e.g. in the New Cambridge Shakespeare edition of the play). Compare it with *Romeo and Juliet*. What kind of similarities and differences do you find?

Although you can argue that it is probably not true historically, *Romeo and Juliet* still remains 'true' in other ways. Because it has proved so enduring, and because people still find the story fascinating, it has a truth in human experience. In every age, young people have fallen in love against their parents' wishes. Where families or societies are in conflict, trouble always lies in store for a boy and a girl from opposing camps who wish to marry. Poets, playwrights and novelists have been irresistibly drawn to write about the troubles and torments of such young lovers.

To help you deepen your understanding of the tragic story of *Romeo and Juliet*, try one or more of the following activities.

'Forbidden love' – your own version

- ◆ Research other examples of young lovers experiencing huge difficulties because of a clash between their families, cultures or societies.
- ◆ Afterwards, try writing your own version of what happens. You could base your story on a real situation or relationship you have researched, or you could invent or adapt your own. Give your story a title that reflects the lovers' predicament.

The bare bones of the script

- ◆ Have a go at retelling the story of the play in just one sentence, or rewrite the play as a mini-saga in exactly fifty words.
- ◆ Imagine you are the same newspaper sub-editor who wrote the headlines for Act 2 (see Activity 1 on p. 88). Now that the whole story has unfolded, write brief, memorable headlines for each of the five acts in the play. Of course, they may include puns or clever wordplay to gain attention and interest, but they must also be accurate.

Longer versions

- ◆ In a group of five, each take responsibility for retelling the story of an individual act, then put the narrative together. Display your version on the classroom wall and compare it with that of other groups. What have they included that you have missed out? Argue your case.
- ◆ Try writing a sentence about Act 1 Scene 1, then pass your paper to another student who should pick up the narrative. Keep working around the group, adding a sentence about each scene, until you reach the end of the play.
- ◆ Use the scene summaries in modern English at the top of each left-hand page to help you recreate a full-length retelling of the action of the play.
- ◆ Review the photo gallery at the start of this edition, which gives a version of the play in pictures and captions. What pictures have been missed out? Suggest three other images you would include, giving reasons for your choices.

Change the genre

- ◆ In small groups, discuss what *Romeo and Juliet* might be like if the script was transformed into a quite different genre:
 - a cliffhanger: a serial in five episodes with each one ending at a moment of climax or suspense
 - a morality story for young children
 - a fairy story
 - a television production cut to two hours (run the production meeting, deciding which episodes and incidents to keep).

From another perspective

Shakespeare focuses pretty closely on events seen through either Romeo's or Juliet's eyes. Other characters might, therefore, have a completely different view of what happens during the action of the play.

- ◆ Take on the persona of one of those other characters and write up the events of the play from your point of view. Perhaps working as a larger group, you could each select a different character and then put your stories together as a myriad of contrasting (and conflicting?) viewpoints. How would Tybalt's story weigh against Mercutio's or Benvolio's, for example? How closely would Lord and Lady Capulet's narratives match?

Fifteen-minute theatre

- ◆ Split into five groups, with each group taking one act of the play. Produce a three-minute version of your chosen act, using only the words from the script.
- ◆ When you are ready, put each of the five acts together in turn to create a fifteen-minute version of the whole play.

Sculpture park

- ◆ The class divides into two groups. As one group looks away, the other half of the class – working in pairs – freezes into 'sculptures' that represent some of the key moments of the play. When the first group of students turns round, they see various statues depicting moments from the play set out before them. Their task is to identify as many of the sculptures as possible.

Produce a timeline for the play

Shakespeare allocates only four days to the action of the play. It begins on Sunday morning and ends as dawn is about to break on the following Thursday.

- ◆ Look carefully at the signals given in each scene about the timing of the action, then produce a timeline for the play. Afterwards, discuss why you think Shakespeare focuses so specifically on the issue of time in the play.

Characters

In earlier centuries, people writing about characters tended to do so as if they were living human beings with real personalities. More recently, critics have argued that playwrights such as Shakespeare were not concerned with creating psychologically consistent 'people', but rather with dramatic 'constructs', embodying certain dramatic functions and set in a social and political world with particular values, attitudes and beliefs. Keep these different viewpoints in mind as you explore Shakespeare's characterisation.

Juliet

In thinking about how Juliet is presented in the play, first study the two images opposite. Which image best reflects how you see Juliet, and why? Then consider the comments below that come from directors and performance critics.

Juliet is first seen mutinously playing with a toy whip as her marriage prospects are discussed. But ... what is striking is her bold teasing sexuality in the balcony scene and her constant awareness of 'love-devouring death'.

Critic Michael Billington, 2010

There's a tenderness and sincerity in the lovers' meetings, but Shakespeare gives Juliet language that shows she is aware of the physical aspects of love.

Director Alasdair Ramsay, 2001

[She is] totally the product of a rich, aspirational upper-class ... gorgeous and uncluttered.

Director Peter Gill, 2004

[Juliet is] alert to the transformation from social conformity to rebellion, as well as from girlhood to womanhood.

Review of RSC performance, 2004

[Although] Juliet flourished under the effects of a new-found sexuality there also lingered within her a childish terror and naivety.

Review of RSC performance, 1995



- ◆ **Talk with a partner about which of these quotations you think most accurately defines the essence of Juliet's character, and why.**

When she first appears, Juliet seems very shy. She is only thirteen, and as the Nurse and her mother talk about her age, she can come across as innocent and docile. Sometimes she is played as almost tongue-tied – reluctant to take part in adult conversation. She appears to respect her mother's authority. But this thirteen-year-old girl, seemingly so quiet and modest, matures rapidly after first encountering Romeo. They have only just met when she allows him to kiss her, and when she appears on the balcony, she is full of longing for him. Throughout the 'balcony' scene she takes the lead, speaking twice as many lines as Romeo. Juliet even proposes their marriage and arranges (through the Nurse) the nuptials for the very next day.

Juliet's swift journey towards independence is evident when she defies her father's demand that she marry Count Paris. Visiting Friar Lawrence, she displays remarkable courage, first in her determination to kill herself rather than marry Paris, then in willingly accepting the Friar's dangerous plan. She returns home and deceives her father, but becomes isolated when the Nurse lets her down, advising her to marry Paris. But even in her isolation, she bravely carries out the Friar's plan and drinks the 'poison' that will make her appear to be dead. She displays resolution and fearlessness when, unwilling to live without Romeo, she kills herself.

- ◆ **Explore the commentary above, then flick back through the play to find the 'Characters' boxes about Juliet (pp. 26, 60, 136 and 144). How do your enquiries there qualify your evaluation of Juliet? Produce a final character study of Juliet. Include quotations and evidence to back up any points you make.**

Romeo

Hannah Miller, the casting co-ordinator for the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC), describes what she was looking for in Romeo for the 2004 production:

A sensitive, good natured, loyal young man, Romeo could be a few years older than Juliet. He is part of the Montague gang, a group of educated, restless young men – though Romeo is certainly not a troublemaker at heart. He is teased for his romanticism and has a history of falling head over heels in love. He is, however, blown away when the real thing hits him and he becomes irrational and impetuous. He is truly on an emotional rollercoaster once Juliet is in his life and he becomes increasingly reckless.

Below, actors and critics discuss Romeo's character:

There is a brooding, withdrawn quality ... as if Romeo only comes fully to life in the presence of Juliet; YET ... there are sudden sparks of humour as when [he] does a wild, exultant dance at the realisation that the balconied Juliet is smitten.

Critic Michael Billington, 2010

I wanted to tell the story of a disaffected youth at odds with his predicament, his environment and himself, and full of the 'nobody-understands-me' ire of adolescence ... Romeo is always upstaged by Juliet.

Actor David Tennant, 2003

Streetwise Romeo [is] full of energy, rashness and vigour, swaggering in at the start of the play ... and mellowing into devotion to Juliet.

Actor David Tennant, 2003

Romeo is very passionate but does have a tendency to moan ... When he enters, Romeo is a woebegone, melancholic figure: poetic and indulgent, a lover. He thinks he's rather gorgeous and he revels in his misery.

Actor Matthew Rhys, 2004

[This is] a petulant, awkward Romeo of childlike extremes, fidgeting with awkward delight when speaking with Juliet, and reacting to his banishment with an almighty tantrum.

Review of RSC performance, 1995

- ◆ **Discuss these viewpoints with a partner and keep in mind what you think are the key ideas as you read the commentary that follows.**



In his first appearance, Romeo declares his love for Rosaline (whom he does not name). This makes him seem a stock character of traditional drama: the melancholy young lover who is rejected by an unattainable woman. But when he meets Juliet, there is a progressive deepening of his character (even though evidence of his immaturity and early style of speaking are sometimes found later in the play). The first sign that he will develop into a tragic figure is just before he enters Capulet's mansion for the party. He fearfully broods on the future (Act 1 Scene 4, lines 106–7):

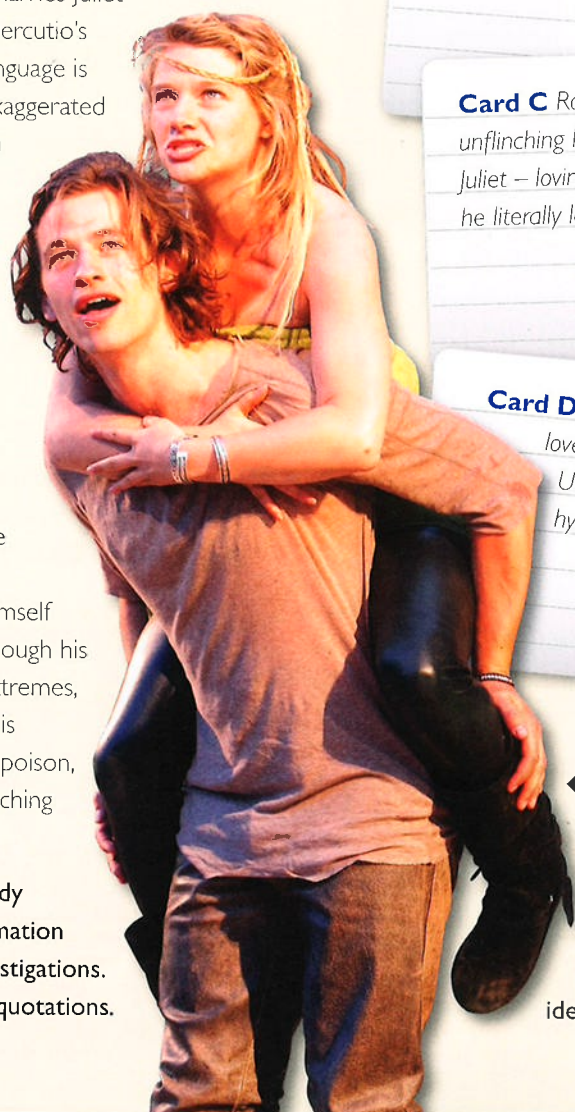
*my mind misgives
Some consequence yet hanging in the stars*

Although Romeo grows in maturity, he is hasty and impetuous. His moods change quickly. He falls in love at first sight, marries Juliet the next day, and revenges Mercutio's death by slaying Tybalt. His language is sometimes hyperbolic and exaggerated ('that vast shore washed with the farthest sea'). In Friar Lawrence's cell, he becomes emotionally childlike and distraught. He seems to lose all self-control in his hysterical outbursts and actions.

In Mantua, learning of Juliet's death, his impulsiveness is again evident in his passionate words 'then I defy you, stars!' He instantly resolves to kill himself in the tomb with her. But, although his state of mind can swing to extremes, his dialogues with Juliet, and his soliloquy before he takes the poison, display maturity and his unflinching commitment to Juliet.

- ◆ Write up a character study of Romeo. Use the information above and your own investigations. Back up your ideas with quotations.

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- ◆ In groups of four, each of you takes one of the 'relationship cards' below and researches the play to find evidence in support of the stance it takes. Then, as a group, argue the merits of each 'reading'.

Card A Juliet is sweet and innocent, a young woman whose passion is courageous, admirable and wondrous. Her love for Romeo reflects all her virtues.

Card B Juliet is far too independent and strong-willed for her own good. As a thirteen-year-old, she shouldn't be jumping into a full-on relationship with a man she hardly knows.

Card C Romeo is the embodiment of unflinching love. He shows total commitment to Juliet – loving her so deeply and powerfully that he literally lays down his life for her.

Card D Romeo is in love with the idea of love and only ever acts impetuously. Under pressure, he resorts to childish, hysterical and selfish behaviour.

- ◆ After discussing Romeo and Juliet's attitude to love and to each other, all of you should write up your thoughts about the presentation of Romeo and Juliet's relationship, reflecting the ideas of the group.

Friar Lawrence

Friar Lawrence is like a father figure to Romeo, who confides in him rather than in his own father, Montague. But the Friar is a puzzling character: His language and actions are open to very different interpretations. Some productions have shown him as shrewd and level-headed, concerned to heal the breach between the Montagues and Capulets. In other productions, he has been played as cunning and dishonest or as a bungling, nervous schemer.

On his first appearance he seems a wise moral commentator; as he speaks of everything having the capacity for good or evil. He advises caution ('Wisely and slow'), and wishes to use the marriage of Romeo and Juliet to bring peace to Verona. But his deeds do not match his words. He acts hastily, breaking Church law by marrying Romeo and Juliet in secret. He devises a plan to deceive Juliet's parents, from whom he conceals her marriage. He risks poisoning Juliet, and abandons her in the tomb at her moment of greatest need. His impulsive actions help cause the death of the lovers.

- ◆ In the final scene, the Prince says 'Some shall be pardoned, and some punished'. Imagine that Friar Lawrence is called to account for his part in the tragic outcome. Half the class prepares as prosecuting counsel, the other half as defence counsel. Base your lines of enquiry and questions on the issues outlined above. In each case, try to get to the truth of each assertion.
- ◆ Put your teacher into the role of Friar Lawrence and conduct the trial. Let the class decide how much to blame he really is. Should he be pardoned or punished (and, if so, what would be your recommendation for sentencing)? Link your judgements to evidence, using quotations from the play.

The Nurse

The Nurse is Shakespeare's development of a character type in classical Greek and Roman drama: the long-winded and rude-talking servant. She is a mother figure and close confidante of Juliet, and she seems to have genuine affection for the girl. The Nurse acts as a



go-between for the lovers, helping Juliet deceive her parents. Her earthy, rambling, repetitive style gives her great stage presence, and directors often use her to bring humour to the play.

The Nurse sometimes appears to be the most sympathetic character in *Romeo and Juliet*. But for all her likeability, and her close relationship with Juliet, her advice that Juliet should marry Paris seems like a heartless act of betrayal, which leaves Juliet vulnerable and isolated.

- ◆ Prepare mini-presentations on the Nurse's role and character in Act 1 Scene 3, Act 2 Scene 4, Act 2 Scene 5 and Act 3 Scene 5. Which lines from the text do you think typify her character? Can you identify common language or speech patterns?

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- ◆ Imagine that the Nurse is placed on the psychiatrist's couch. One person becomes the Nurse, who is psychoanalysed by their partner or other members of the group. You could probe some of the inconsistencies in her character. Is she frank or secretive about her real feelings? A bit of a creep or arrogant? Trustworthy or sly and dishonest? A woman of principle or a pragmatist? A woman who knows about love or just speaks about it?
- ◆ Write up the psychiatrist's report with your honest assessment of the Nurse's personality.

Mercutio

Mercutio is perhaps the most complex character in the play. Romeo gives a good description of him: 'A gentleman ... that loves to hear himself talk' (Act 2 Scene 4, line 123). He is an entertainer – clever and witty, but also earthy and coarse. He loves playing with language, particularly when he can give it sexual double meanings. In contrast to Romeo's idealisation of love, Mercutio mocks love, seeing it only in terms of sex. His flights of fancy are full of dazzling invention, but much of his imaginative creativity can also be seen as feverish and neurotic.

Mercutio feels intense friendship for Romeo, and possesses a strong sense of male honour. He seems to be always on the edge of looking for a fight. His courage in defending the honour of his friend Romeo results in his death. Some people argue that Mercutio becomes such an engaging character that Shakespeare thought it necessary to kill him off before he completely dominated the play. There is a sense of loss at his death, but perhaps Shakespeare made Mercutio's early demise dramatically inevitable as the key to the tragedy – spurring Romeo to revenge.

- ◆ The outline above analyses Mercutio both as a character (with his own personality) and a dramatic construct (a figure used to enhance key aspects and themes of the play). In pairs, each of you chooses one approach (character or dramatic construct) and investigates Mercutio's presentation. Share your findings with each other and review their respective merits.

The parents: *Who Do You Think You Are?*

Lord Capulet appears at first to be friendly and generous. At the party he reminisces about his youth, and is determined to stop Tybalt making trouble. But he shows a different side to his character when Juliet refuses to marry Paris. He becomes short-tempered and tyrannical, exploding in uncontrollable fury when Juliet refuses to obey him. However, when she dies (both in pretence and in reality) he is overcome with grief and remorse.

Lady Capulet seems distant from her daughter. She displays little or no maternal affection. She lacks sympathy for Juliet's feelings ('tell him so yourself'), when Juliet refuses to marry Paris. She shows little sign of taking Juliet's part or comforting her when she is the target of Capulet's rage. But like Capulet, she is heartbroken at Juliet's death.

- ◆ Imagine that you have been commissioned as a researcher to investigate the background of Juliet's family in the style of the television programme that reconstructs the heritage and lineage of celebrity figures. Choose as your subject Lord or Lady Capulet (or both). Study the pen portraits above, then begin to invent their family tree. For example, bearing in mind Capulet's wealth, what trade or profession do you think his own parents might have had? And if (as his wife implies) he has had the odd fling with younger women, might there be a few illegitimate children?
- ◆ Present your imagined family trees with accompanying commentary and a brief celebrity profile of the current Capulets. Where do they now live, for example, and what is their lifestyle like?

Perspectives and themes

Tensions and oppositions in *Romeo and Juliet*

Oppositions and contrasts abound in *Romeo and Juliet*. You could think of them as themes of the play. The action begins with a violent clash between the feuding families. Throughout the play, divisions and conflicts haunt the doomed lovers.

Light versus dark

The play is alive with images of light and darkness. The flash and sparkle of eyes, jewels, stars, fire, lightning, torches, exploding gunpowder; the sun and moon, are set against a darker world of night, clouds, smoke and the blackness of the tomb: 'More light and light, more dark and dark our woes!' Juliet, waiting for Romeo, aches for the sun to set 'And bring in cloudy night immediately'. Romeo sees Juliet's beauty flooding the darkness of the tomb with brilliance: 'her beauty makes / This vault a feasting presence full of light'.

- ◆ Working in groups, look back through the play to find as many images of light and darkness as you can. In each case, identify the context: who is speaking, where and when. Then comment on the kind of effect or impact the images have, particularly at that point in the play.
- ◆ Examine the first meeting between Romeo and Juliet in Act 1 Scene 5, and pick out Romeo's words connected with light. Do the same for the start of Act 2 Scene 2. What do Romeo's 'light' words suggest about his attitude towards Juliet?
- ◆ Study the photographs in this edition. From the selection, choose five that you think express the conflict of light and darkness in a particularly striking or effective way. In each case, explain the reasoning behind your choice to a partner.
- ◆ Imagine that you are directing a movie version of the play. Focus on Act 5 Scene 3. Decide what

colours and lighting you would use. *Film noir* (from the French 'black film') uses light to hint at the psychological state of mind of its characters. At what point would Romeo be in the shadows? When would he be in close-up? What about the other characters? Discuss your ideas with a partner and then write up your notes.

- ◆ Discuss the interplay of light and dark in the play.
- ◆ Romeo and Juliet's love is defined in terms of sun, stars, moon, fire, lightning, torches and day – but it exists in a world full of the darkness of night, tombs, churchyards and clouds. Write an essay exploring the dramatic significance of this tension.

Chance versus choice: fate and free will

The Chorus opens the play with a mention of fate: 'A pair of star-crossed lovers'. The belief that fate determines our lives echoes through the play. Romeo fears that fate has unhappy things in store for him if he goes to Capulet's feast: 'my mind misgives / Some consequence yet hanging in the stars'. Juliet fears what inevitably lies ahead as she parts from Romeo: 'Methinks I see thee now, thou art so low, / As one dead in the bottom of a tomb.' Romeo and Juliet struggle to break free of what Fate threatens in dreams and premonitions. 'Then I defy you, stars!' is Romeo's defiant challenge when he hears of Juliet's death.

- ◆ There are six 'Themes' boxes in the main part of this edition, on pages 20, 140, 164, 172, 176 and 196. Remind yourself of the focus of each one, then prepare a presentation on the impact of fate on human affairs in the play.
- ◆ Take each character in turn and consider if there is any evidence that they have a choice over their own destiny. Rate the strength of their free will on a scale of 0 to 10 and display your findings as a bar graph.

Love versus hate

Here's much to do with hate, but more with love
Act 1 Scene 1, line 166

The love of Romeo and Juliet is threatened by a society full of hate. Juliet fears for Romeo's safety at the hands of her kinsmen: 'If they do see thee, they will murder thee.' The hateful, hate-full honour code that governs relationships between the feuding families of Verona will destroy Romeo and Juliet, Mercutio, Tybalt and Paris. Love, in Verona's masculine society, is about domination. The macho servants of Capulet joke about sex in violent, aggressive terms. The selflessness of Romeo and Juliet, equal in love and willing to die for each other, is in strong contrast to the hate that fills Verona.

- ◆ Use the series of oppositions outlined in the paragraph above as the basis for an extended piece of writing. In it, explore how *Romeo and Juliet* dramatises the conflict between love and hate. You might begin your preparation by heading up a piece of paper with two columns – 'Love' and 'Hate' – and gathering evidence from the play to fill out those columns. You should look not only at the incidents, but also at the dramatic effects created. There is material to get you started on pages 6, 50 and 166.

Public versus private

The action of the play moves from outdoor to indoor, from public to private spaces. In contrast to the violent happenings in Verona's city centre and the grand occasion of Capulet's party, there are quiet, intimate scenes in the moonlit orchard or in Juliet's bedroom in the Capulet mansion. The shift from public to private, from social spaces to personal meetings, is symbolic of other tensions:

- the loyalties of groups (Montagues and Capulets) versus the loyalties of individuals towards each other (Romeo and Juliet)
- the freedoms of personal love versus the constraints of social life
- male dominance versus the vision of equality of the sexes seen in the love between Romeo and Juliet.

- ◆ Working as a group of five, each take an act of the play. Go through your allocated act and, for each scene, identify whether it is set in a public or private location. Then incorporate your findings into a flow diagram. Reconvene and put all five acts together. What do you notice about the pattern created? Choose from within your flow chart two scenes that appear to have a profoundly dramatic shift in location – from public to private or vice versa.
- ◆ Cast and act out the last few lines of your first scene and the beginning of the second. Now let other students imagine that they are switching channels on television, and this changing sequence is all they see. Get them to make a list of everything they might suppose about the characters, the situations, the circumstances of the action and the play as a whole.
- ◆ As a class, put your reflections together and consider how effectively Shakespeare establishes the contrast between public and private.

Youth versus age – fast versus slow

The differences between old and young, between cautious, mature wisdom and youthful impetuous emotion, are striking. Romeo's passion is evident: 'I stand on sudden haste'. The contrast with the Friar's advice is vivid as he urges 'love moderately, long love doth so' and pronounces 'Wisely and slow, they stumble that run fast'. But don't think the play is a simple contrast between youth and age. Juliet's father is given to mood swings and sudden outbursts as violent as any in the young people!

The contrast between passion and caution is evident in the characters, but there are also changes in tempo throughout the play. In Capulet's orchard, time seems to stand still as Romeo and Juliet exchange vows of love. After leisurely beginnings, scenes explode into violent action. Events force the lovers into hasty action. Capulet's decision to bring the wedding forward hurries Juliet into drinking the Friar's potion. News of her 'death' sends Romeo speeding back to Verona – and his own death.

- ◆ In groups, choose a scene in which the pace changes dramatically. Good ones to look at are Act 1 Scene 1 or Act 3 Scene 1 where, after slow beginnings, there is a sudden upsurge in action and incident. Study the content of your chosen scene (just the action, not the language). You'll need to know it really well, so pay attention to the details. Then imagine that you are watching a silent movie version of the play. Start to run the action of the scene as if you're focusing on the detail in slow motion and then, following the rhythms of Shakespeare's story-telling, gradually speed it up. Remember – no language, just actions! The result will probably be frenetic but it will give you a good sense of the changing rhythms of the scene that Shakespeare constructs.
- ◆ Create a sequence of photographs or freeze-frames which, act by act, highlight the contrast between youth and age. In each case, try to find a suitable extract of text that you can use as a caption. Be prepared to explain your intentions to other students as they watch your images.

- ◆ Remind yourself of the content of this scene. Go through it carefully, making notes on the ways in which Shakespeare counterpoints ideas of life and death. Gather together key quotations that you feel underline this contrast. You could then broaden your investigation to take in other scenes that have a contrast between life and death at their core.

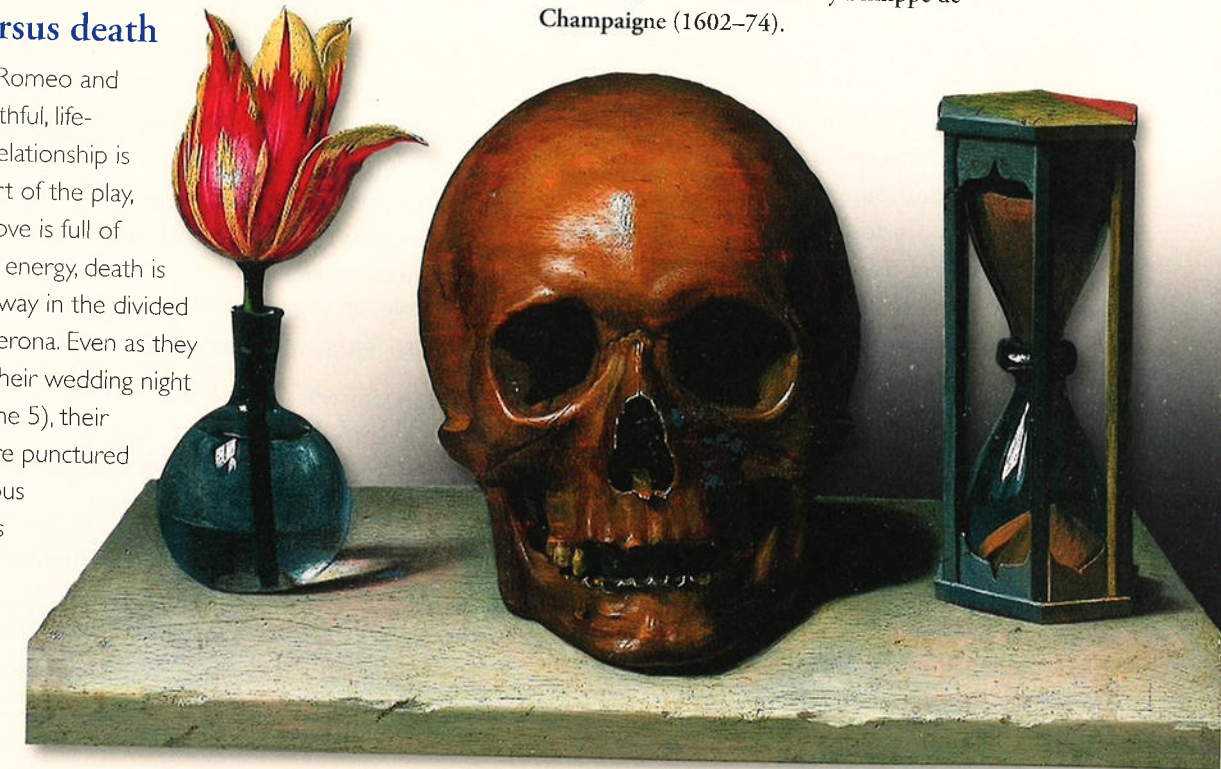
Memento mori (literally, 'remember your mortality') is a genre of powerful and graphic artistic images of Death and the vulnerability of life, which dates back to classical times. Common conventions are depictions of the 'grim reaper' (a bent-backed old man with scythe), human skeletons and representations of time.

- ◆ You have been commissioned to produce a *memento mori* for a new collection to be published in a book. Create one based on an image from the play. Either caption it with the original words that inspired it, or incorporate the quotation into your artwork. Think carefully about how you would choose to represent the figure of Death.

▼ *Vanitas*, a *memento mori* by Philippe de Champaigne (1602–74).

Life versus death

Although Romeo and Juliet's youthful, life-affirming relationship is at the heart of the play, and their love is full of vitality and energy, death is never far away in the divided world of Verona. Even as they celebrate their wedding night (Act 3 Scene 5), their thoughts are punctured with ominous forebodings of death.



Why did Romeo and Juliet die?

Romeo and Juliet is a tragedy – that is, a specific type of play that ultimately ends in the death of the main characters. Often, the **tragic hero** or **heroine** (the central figure in the drama) is a victim of fate or circumstance, as well as being partly responsible for their own downfall as a result of their naivety or weaknesses in their character. It seems that there is an unstoppable force propelling them towards disaster, despite their efforts to halt it. At the end, the audience must confront the question: who or what is to blame for the tragedy? For hundreds of years, people have argued over the reason for the deaths of the young lovers. Your task here is to complete your own investigation into the possible causes.

- ◆ First, divide into five groups. Each group should complete research and investigation into the separate possible 'causes' listed below (1–5). Use the trigger questions in each section to firm up specific lines of enquiry. Gather evidence from the play, such as key quotations and comments from characters.
- ◆ Invent witness statements and other forms of testimony – letters, press clippings, diary entries, newspaper reports, sworn affidavits and so on. Interview other characters who might also have something to contribute: perhaps a householder whose window overlooks Verona's public square, or a boy who had crept into Capulet's orchard to steal fruit. Use your imaginations to amass as much material as possible to support your specific line of enquiry – but don't deliberately subvert the evidence of the text!
- ◆ Display all your evidence on a 'market stall'. Use the table at which you've been working, but dress it up with a banner and other visual images to show clearly the topic on which you have been focusing (for example, the 'fathers' table could be embellished with the families' coats of arms and trappings of their ancestry and lineage).

- ◆ In turn, all groups should send out representatives, or 'ambassadors', to each of the stalls to gather as much information as possible before feeding back to their host group. In this way, all groups will build a wide-ranging and detailed awareness of the possible causes.

1 Was it fate?

Were the deaths foretold in the stars? There are many suggestions in the play that the deaths were determined by fate.

- ◆ Collect references to the inevitability of the tragedy, for example 'star-crossed' (Prologue, line 6), 'the yoke of inauspicious stars' (Act 5 Scene 3, line 111). You could invent characters' horoscopes – and even call upon an astrologer to give evidence!

2 Was it chance?

Was it just bad luck? Fortune is fickle, so maybe no one is responsible – it was simply a series of accidents.

- ◆ Collect examples of chance and accident ('misadventured piteous overthrows'), for example, the accidental meeting of the Servant, carrying Capulet's invitation list, with Benvolio and Romeo, or the non-delivery of Friar Lawrence's letter. Was Mercutio's death just an unhappy chance occurrence?

3 Was it adolescent passion?

Some critics have laid the blame on the folly of Romeo and Juliet in their youthful haste and passion. But how far do you think it was the lovers' own fault? Is adolescent love at first sight a cause of the tragedy?

- ◆ Collect examples of haste and passion in the play to use as evidence.

4 Was it the feud?

Were the deaths caused by the enmity of the Montagues and Capulets? The two families struggle for power in Verona. Their 'ancient grudge' breaks 'to new mutiny' at the start of the play. A rigid code of honour makes the young men spring into violent, bloody action. Tybalt feels that the 'honour of my kin' has been insulted by Romeo's presence at Capulet's feast. Romeo is provoked into 'fire-eyed fury' by the death of Mercutio. He embraces the revenge code that governs relationships between the two rival factions of Verona.

- ◆ Collect other examples that suggest the lovers' deaths are caused by the quarrel that fractures the city.

5 Was it fathers?

Verona is a patriarchal city. Fathers have virtually absolute control over their daughters. They may give them in marriage to anyone they choose, and feel deeply insulted if their daughters dare disagree with that choice. Juliet does so, and incurs the extreme wrath of Capulet:

*go with Paris to Saint Peter's Church,
Or I will drag thee on a hurdle thither.*
Act 3 Scene 5, lines 154–5

Together with patriarchy comes all the machismo of the young men. They relish crude sexual joking, see love as brutal conquest and have no understanding of gentler, balanced relations between the sexes.

- ◆ Collect other examples that help you enquire into whether Verona's male-dominated society is responsible for the lovers' deaths.

Free investigation

As an alternative to the 'market stall' activity with its prescribed areas of focus, why not conduct your own free-running enquiry into the causes of the untimely and ultimately unnecessary deaths of the two lovers? You can investigate in many ways: through mock trials or select committees, or by using the techniques of investigative journalism or television.

- ◆ Call witnesses (including those who do not speak in the play, such as 'the lively Helena' or Petruchio). Require characters to defend themselves against the charge of being guilty of causing the deaths. Don't simply try to pin blame on particular individuals. Seek other reasons for the tragic outcome of the play.

What other causes?

Although the activities above invite you to speculate imaginatively and 'invent' additional evidence to enhance your enquiries, there is also a benefit in mounting a pure 'evidence-based' analysis of the reasons behind the tragic deaths of the two young lovers. In addition to the 'causes' signalled above (points 1–5), you might also consider the following:

- Is the tragedy caused by love itself? Their love makes Romeo and Juliet feel that meeting in death is the only worthwhile ending. 'Well, Juliet, I will lie with thee tonight' (Act 5 Scene 1, line 34) is Romeo's expression of that love in death.
- Should you question the Friar's motives? He marries the lovers in secret, then devises a dangerous plan that will ensure his own part in the affair is concealed. Juliet fears that he might have given her a real poison, 'Lest in this marriage he should be dishonoured' (Act 4 Scene 3, line 26).
- Or might the cause lie in the 'rude will' of human nature? The Friar sees such self-centredness resulting in evil if it gains the upper hand over 'grace' (Act 2 Scene 3, lines 27–30).
- ◆ Collect your ideas in a mind map or other graphic form of display. Present them on a large sheet of paper for others to look at and interrogate.
- ◆ Based on all your lines of enquiry and investigation, write an extended essay exploring what you think are the reasons for the lovers' deaths. Remember to use evidence and quotations from the text to support your critical judgement.

The language of *Romeo and Juliet*

Imagery

The language of *Romeo and Juliet* is full of imagery (sometimes called 'figures' or 'figurative language'). Imagery is created by vivid words and phrases that conjure up emotionally charged mental pictures or associations in the imagination. For example, when Juliet learns that Romeo has killed Tybalt, she struggles to express her contradictory feelings. How could a beautiful person like Romeo, whom she loves so much, commit so awful a deed? How could such an attractive appearance mask such an evil action? Her outburst contains at least a dozen images, beginning with:

*O serpent heart, hid with a flow'ring face!
Did ever dragon keep so fair a cave?*

- ◆ Look back at Juliet's speech (Act 3 Scene 2, lines 73–85). Identify all the images she uses and, taking each in turn, comment on how it works and how it suggests the dreadful confusion Juliet is experiencing at that moment.

Some images recur throughout *Romeo and Juliet*, highlighting the themes of the play. One example is that of light and dark:

*O she doth teach the torches to burn bright!
It seems she hangs upon the cheek of night
As a rich jewel in an Ethiop's ear*

Act 1 Scene 5, lines 43–5

*The brightness of her cheek would shame those stars,
As daylight doth a lamp*

Act 2 Scene 2, lines 19–20

*her beauty makes
This vault a feasting presence full of light*

Act 5 Scene 3, lines 85–6

- ◆ Write several paragraphs that explore how the images quoted above use the ideas of light and darkness. Add another paragraph explaining why you think Shakespeare gives these 'light' images to Romeo at these points in the play.

Death is never far away in the conflict-torn world of Verona. The old people brood over it: 'death's the end of all', 'we were born to die'. Young lives are abruptly cut short. Images of death spread through the language: 'death-marked', 'untimely death', 'death-bed', 'canker death', 'Cold death', 'death-darting eye', 'cruel Death', 'detestable Death', 'present death'.

Shakespeare's imagery uses simile, metaphor and personification. All are comparisons that substitute one thing (the image) for another (the thing described).

A **simile** compares one thing to another using 'like' or 'as' – for example: 'shrieks like mandrakes torn out of the earth'; 'And in their triumph die like fire and powder'; 'My bounty is as boundless as the sea, / My love as deep'.

A **metaphor** is also a comparison, suggesting that two things that are unlike are actually the same. When Romeo says, 'O speak again, bright angel', he implies that Juliet is an angel, some glorious thing to be praised. To put it another way, a metaphor borrows one word or phrase to express another. For example, Benvolio uses all the following as metaphors for swords and sword-fighting: 'piercing steel', 'deadly point to point', 'Cold death', 'fatal points'. The Chorus in the Prologue describes the lovers as 'star-crossed' and later says that Juliet must 'steal love's sweet bait from fearful hooks'.

Personification turns all kinds of things into people, giving them human feelings or attributes. Probably the most powerful personification in the play is the image of Death as Juliet's husband-bridegroom. It recurs in different forms:

And death, not Romeo, take my maidenhead!

*Death is my son-in-law, Death is my heir,
My daughter he hath wedded.*

*Shall I believe
That unsubstantial Death is amorous,
And that the lean abhorred monster keeps
Thee here in dark to be his paramour?*

- ◆ Find the source of these examples. Then collect some others of your own choosing, and test your classmates to see if they can discover their location and context in the play.
- ◆ Look back through the 'Language' boxes, which draw attention to the overpowering presence of Death in the play (pp. 84, 134, 146 and 162). Choose some of the most striking examples of the personification of death, then present them visually as a collage of quotations. Add your own analysis, exploring the connotations and impact of each example.
- ◆ Check your understanding of metaphors, similes and personification: which is which in the examples below? Identify each one and explain how it works.

Scaring the ladies like a crow-keeper

*When well-apparell'd April on the heel
Of limping winter treads*

bloody Tybalt, yet but green in earth

Love goes toward love as schoolboys from their books

Antithesis and oxymoron

Antithesis is the opposition of words or phrases against each other, as in 'More light and light, more dark and dark our woes!' (Act 3 Scene 5, line 36). This setting of word against word (e.g. 'light' versus 'dark') is one of Shakespeare's favourite language devices.

In *Romeo and Juliet*, conflict occurs in many forms: Montague versus Capulet, love versus hate, the marriage bed versus the grave, and all the other oppositions listed on pages 209–11. Antithesis intensifies that sense of conflict. For example, Friar Lawrence's first speech (Act 2 Scene 3, lines 1–30) contains at least fifteen antitheses as he gathers plants and thinks about the potential for good and evil in every living thing ('baleful weeds' versus 'precious-juicèd flowers', 'tomb' against 'womb', 'Virtue' against 'vice', and so on).

In another speech full of sharply contrasting antitheses, Capulet grieves for Juliet (Act 4 Scene 5, lines 84–90). He contrasts the happy preparations for the intended wedding with the mourning rites that now must mark her death. The first two lines set 'festival' against 'funeral':

*All things that we ordainèd festival,
Turn from their office to black funeral*

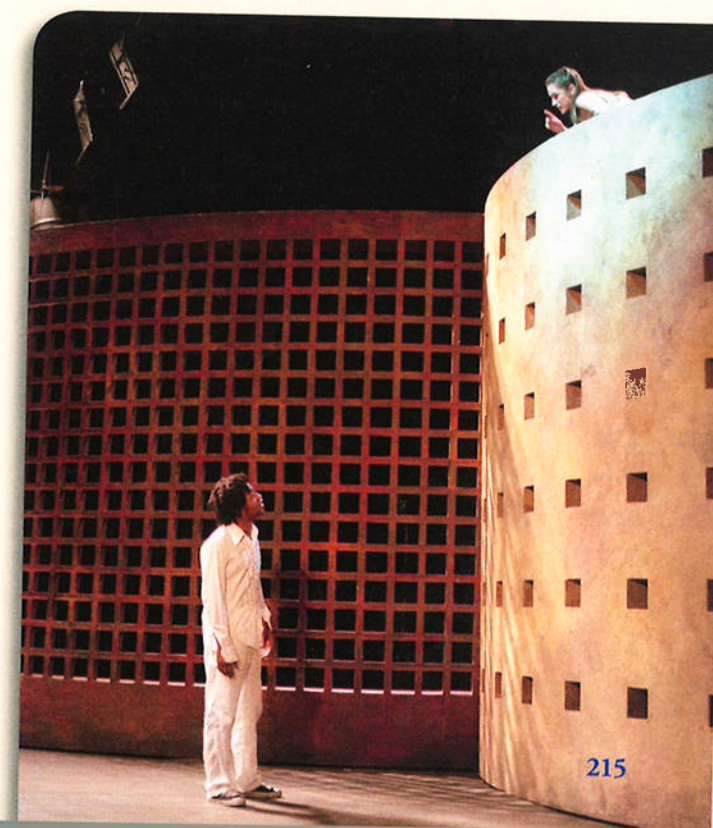
A special kind of antithesis is **oxymoron**. Here, two incongruous or contradictory words are placed next to each other, as in 'cold fire' or 'bright smoke'. Oxymoron comes from two Greek words: *oxys* meaning 'sharp' and *moros* meaning 'dull'.

On his first appearance in the play, seeing the signs of the brawl, Romeo speaks a dozen oxymorons as he reflects on love and hate (Act 1 Scene 1, lines 167–72). His musings begin with two oxymorons, quickly setting 'brawling' against 'love', and 'loving' against 'hate':

Why then, O brawling love, O loving hate

At the end of the 'balcony' scene, Juliet uses a memorable oxymoron to describe her feelings: 'Parting is such sweet sorrow' ('sweet' versus 'sorrow').

- ◆ Work through the play, collecting as many examples of antitheses and oxymorons as you can. Write an extended essay showing how these two language devices help create the sense of conflict in *Romeo and Juliet*.



Sonnets

At about the same time as Shakespeare wrote *Romeo and Juliet*, he was probably writing his **sonnets**. There are several sonnets in the play:

- the Chorus at the start and end of Act 1
- Lady Capulet's praise of Paris (Act 1 Scene 3, lines 82–95), which uses very showy and extravagant imagery (often called 'conceits') in comparing Paris to a book
- Romeo and Juliet's first meeting (Act 1 Scene 5, lines 92–105), in which the two lovers share the lines of a sonnet
- their next four lines, which are the start of another sonnet.

A Shakespearean sonnet is a fourteen-line poem. Each line usually contains ten syllables. The sonnet has three quatrains (each of four lines) and a couplet:

- the first four lines (rhyming ABAB)
- the next four lines (rhyming CDCD)
- the next four lines (rhyming EFEF)
- a couplet (two lines) to finish (rhyming GG).

- ◆ Turn to the Prologue. Identify the rhymes ('dignity'/'mutiny', 'scene'/'unclean', and so on) and match them with the rhyme scheme above.

The sonnet tradition

The language of *Romeo and Juliet* shows the strong influence of the Italian poet Petrarch (1304–74). He became very popular with English poets in the time of Queen Elizabeth I. They drew on Petrarch's themes and style to write about **courtly love**.

Romeo's love for Rosaline echoes the major theme of Petrarch's poetry: a young man's unrequited love (love that was not returned) for an unattainable and dismissive woman. Romeo was infatuated with Rosaline, but she rejected all his advances.

In Act 1 Scene 1, lines 199–207 and lines 219–29, you can see other influences of the sonnet tradition: neat rhyming; elaborate conceits (for example, metaphors of war); and the wordplay of wit, puns and repetition.

- ◆ Conduct your own research into sonnets, the sonnet tradition and the nature of courtly love. Use your college library or the Internet to find out more about Petrarch and the tradition he inspired. The Cambridge School Shakespeare edition of *The Sonnets* will give you more help about Shakespeare's sonnet writing, but you could also look at how other poets, especially modern ones, have approached and adapted the form to write about love.
- ◆ After you have investigated the tradition of sonnet writing, have a go at writing your own version of a Shakespearean sonnet! (You might first like to read through the next section on verse and prose to help you with the rhythm.)

Verse and prose

Although quite a few lines in *Romeo and Juliet* end in rhymes, most of the play is actually written in **blank verse**: unrhymed verse with a 'five-beat' rhythm (iambic pentameter). Each line has five iambs (feet), with one stressed (/) and one unstressed (x) syllable:

x / x / x / x / x /
But soft, what light through yonder window breaks?

The 'five-beat' rhythm (or metre) is often obvious, but at other times, notably in the later stages of the 'balcony' scene, it is less prominent.

Prose was traditionally used by comic and low-status characters. High-status characters spoke verse. However, the Nurse (low-status) speaks a good deal of verse when she is with high-status Lady Capulet and Juliet. Also, Romeo, Mercutio and Benvolio (all high-status) use prose in Act 2 Scene 4 (probably because their talk is 'comic'). And although the conventional rule is that tragic death scenes should be in verse, Mercutio, at the point of death, speaks in prose.

- ◆ Look again at the line quoted on page 216. Read the line in unison with a partner, pronouncing each syllable very clearly, almost as if it were a separate word. As you read, beat out the five-stress rhythm (e.g. clap hands, tap the desk).
- ◆ Now turn to the opening lines of Act 2 Scene 2. Repeat what you have just done. Can you find the rhythm? (Note that 'Juliet' would have two beats in line 3!) When you have found it, try the exercise again with verse spoken by other characters.
- ◆ Read through the rest of Act 2 Scene 2 and notice how Shakespeare gradually moves away from the rigid enforcement of the iambic pentameter rhythm. Why do you think he does this?
- ◆ Choose a verse speech and speak it to emphasise the metre (five beats). Then speak it as you feel it should be delivered on stage.
- ◆ Some scenes (such as Act 2 Scene 3 in particular) contain a good deal of rhyming. With a partner, read quickly through the scene again. First, try accentuating all the rhymes; then, on a second reading, try to make them less pronounced and obvious. Afterwards, talk together about the different effects created, and which version you think would be more powerful in a stage performance of the play.

Repetition

Repeating words or phrases was a favourite device of Shakespeare's. **Repetition** can heighten tension and add depth and dramatic impact. Apart from familiar grammatical words (such as 'and', 'the', and so on) the two most frequently repeated words are 'love' (which appears over 130 times) and 'death' (around 70 uses). Their repetition is a clear indication of two of the play's major thematic concerns.

In addition, Shakespeare packs the play (especially Acts 3 and 4) with words connected with time. Why? To intensify the gathering pace of the drama and the sweeping tide of events that overwhelms the two young lovers.

Repetition can also strengthen the presentation of character. For example, when Juliet opposes her mother in Act 3 Scene 5, lines 114–17:

LADY CAPULET *The County Paris, at Saint Peter's Church,
 Shall happily make thee there a joyful bride.*

JULIET *Now by Saint Peter's Church and Peter too,
 He shall not make me there a joyful bride.*

- ◆ Collect two or three extracts from the play that contain examples of language repetition (if you're stuck, it's always a good idea to look at the language of the young men, especially Mercutio and Romeo together). Think carefully about the mood Shakespeare is trying to create, then have a go at dramatising them to bring out the dramatic impact of the repetitions.

Puns

A **pun** is a play on words that sound similar, but have different meanings. Shakespeare was fascinated by puns – especially in *Romeo and Juliet*. Mercutio loves to use puns, and they are often very rude and sexual. You'll find a cluster of such puns commented upon in the 'Language' boxes on pages 50, 74, 76. Remind yourself of the nature of Mercutio's coarse wordplay on those pages and compare it with the Nurse's (a box on her punning language appears on p. 114).

Even at the point of death, Mercutio can't resist punning: 'Ask for me tomorrow, and you shall find me a grave man' (Act 3 Scene 1, lines 89–90).

- ◆ Working in a group of five, take one of the following bullet points each and investigate further!
 - Why do you think Shakespeare includes so many rather offensive, sexually charged puns in the play?
 - Does every character in the play use puns?
 - Discover the first pun each character uses. For example, Gregory and Sampson pun on 'colliers'/'choler'/'collar' at the very start of Act 1 Scene 1.
 - What is the dramatic impact of the characters using so many puns?
 - Since puns are often viewed as clever, witty and humorous examples of wordplay, why do you think Shakespeare includes so many in *Romeo and Juliet*, even at moments of great seriousness and pain?
- ◆ Rejoin your group and share your findings with each other.

Soliloquy

As in all Shakespeare's tragic plays, he uses the dramatic device of the **soliloquy** powerfully in *Romeo and Juliet*, particularly as the lovers' increasing isolation and vulnerability are emphasised in the second half of the play. In order to appreciate the impact of some of the language, try one of the following activities based on a soliloquy of your choice.

Bare bones soliloquy

- ◆ In a small group, take one line at a time and agree what you consider to be the key word. Write down that key word – just one per line. This will give you a 'bare bones' script of a handful of words.
- ◆ Keeping the words in their original order, present this new script in any ways that seem appropriate. Think about using choral speech, echoes, repetitions, sound effects or movement. Share your performance with the rest of the class for comment.

Two-handed soliloquy

- ◆ Read through your chosen soliloquy, with each person handing over the reading at each full stop, colon, semi-colon or question mark.
- ◆ Now consider ways of performing this speech as if it's a conversation (which it is, in a way, as it's like a piece of internal dialogue or a character debating with himself or herself). Experiment with other ways of dividing up the speech and ways of speaking to create different effects.
- ◆ Then think about how you might layer in movement, where you might stand (back-to-back, facing each other, one kneeling the other standing, and so on). Share your final response with others in the class.

Creating atmosphere

Shakespeare often creates atmosphere through language. Remember, for example, that his plays were originally staged in broad daylight, so words had to establish setting and atmosphere (see pp. 220–1). A good example of his technique is Act 5 Scene 3, where the language has to suggest night in a graveyard, then inside the funeral vault.

- ◆ Focus on this scene, or choose your own favourite scene. In a small group, talk together about its atmosphere (aggressive, fearful, joking, tragic and so on). Compile a 'language list' of phrases or lines from your chosen scene that create the atmosphere. Use your list to make up a short play with your own plot and characters. Create as powerful an atmosphere as you can by using Shakespeare's words.

Creating character

Most of Shakespeare's characters have a distinctive way of speaking, but their style can change from situation to situation. For example, Friar Lawrence's highly stylised lines in Act 2 Scene 3 in conversation with Romeo are all in rhyming couplets, whereas in the closing scene he speaks in plain, uncomplicated language when reporting on the events in the tomb.

- ◆ Why do you think Shakespeare specifically adapts the Friar's language in this way in these two scenes?
- ◆ Choose a character, follow them through the play and compile a list of their 'typical' language in different situations. Afterwards, write a short commentary exploring what their different language styles tell you about them as people and how they interact with other characters.

The 'love' language of Juliet and Romeo

Look back to the 'Language' boxes on pages 56 and 58. They both draw attention to Juliet's ways of speaking about love as a character in love (for example, Juliet describes her developing relationship with Romeo as: 'Too like the lightning, which doth cease to be/ Ere one can say "It lightens"'.)

- ◆ Use this and other references from those pages as a starting point for an exploration of how the two main characters describe and define their experiences of love.
- ◆ Create two posters (one for each character), in which you assemble all your references and evaluations. How similar do you find their ways of speaking about love, the kind of words, images and expressions they use? Are there any distinct differences?

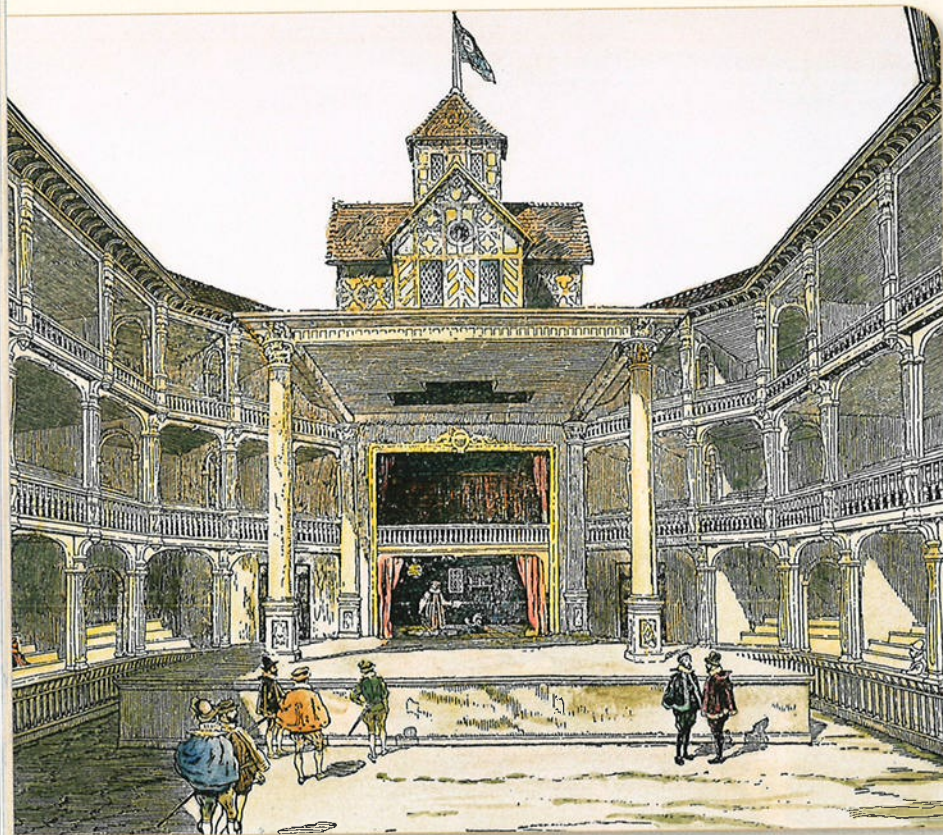


Romeo and Juliet in performance

Performance on Shakespeare's stage

Many of Shakespeare's plays were performed at the Globe Theatre in London, one of many specially built outdoor playhouses that appeared at the end of the sixteenth century.

Performances took place mostly during the summer months and in broad daylight, so there were no special lighting effects. Shakespeare's language had to establish the time, setting and atmosphere of each scene. This is particularly noticeable in *Romeo and Juliet*, where several key episodes either take place in darkness or refer strikingly to the thematic interplay of light and darkness (see p. 209). In addition, Shakespeare often used the words of the script to suggest how the actors should move and behave. For example, Friar Lawrence's opening line to Romeo at the start of Act 3 Scene 3 is 'Romeo, come forth, come forth, thou fearful man'.



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There were no elaborate sets on the bare stage of the Globe Theatre, but the actors wore attractive and expensive costumes, usually the fashionable dress of the times.

The audience was positioned on three sides of the stage. The 'groundlings' paid a minimal entrance fee and stood in the pit around the stage. Those who paid more were seated in three tiers around the outside of the theatre. It is believed that there would have been a lot of background noise during performances – especially from the groundlings, who were often restless and probably enjoyed some kind of lively interaction with the performance itself. In order to ensure that the audience fully engaged with key ideas and issues, Shakespeare uses a good deal of repetition in his language. You will notice this is a feature of the writing in every scene!

In Shakespeare's day, Juliet, the Nurse and other female parts were played by boys because women were not allowed to act on stage. On stage, only a few props were used (swords, chairs, and so on). As you look through *Romeo and Juliet*, you will notice that some basic props become very important to the action of the play. These include:

- swords and daggers
- masks and torches
- a rope to help Romeo to climb up to Juliet's window
- Juliet's ring
- the sleeping potion
- the Friar's letter to Romeo
- the Apothecary's poison.

◀ The interior of the Globe Theatre in Shakespeare's day.

- ◆ Take one or more of the items listed. Produce two sets of designs for the props you have selected, one for a period Elizabethan production and one for a very modern version.

The play features several important settings or locations:

- Verona
- a room for the Capulet party
- Juliet's balcony/window of her bedroom
- Friar Lawrence's cell
- Mantua
- the funeral vault/tomb.

- ◆ Study the representation of the Globe Theatre on the previous page. Working in a small group, research Verona in Italy at the time the play was set. Together, produce a series of designs that show how these locations could be represented in Shakespeare's theatre.

- ◆ A professional theatre designer would produce a three-dimensional model of the set, with its key features reproduced in miniature. Have a go at creating such a model for yourselves, perhaps by using a shoe box as the basic structure.

- ◆ Compare your set designs with those of other students. How different do you think the audience's response will be to the different sets?

The Globe has now been rebuilt on London's Bankside, close to the site on which it first stood. Many of the productions there are staged as Shakespeare's Elizabethan audiences probably saw them. In 2004 and in 2009, *Romeo and Juliet* was performed in Elizabethan costume.



▲ Romeo kneeling over the 'dead' Juliet in a performance at Shakespeare's Globe in 2004.

▼ A 2009 Globe performance of Mercutio fighting with Tybalt.



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Performance after Shakespeare

It seems that *Romeo and Juliet* has always been a popular play, but, like virtually all of Shakespeare's plays, it has been rewritten and adapted over the centuries. This was mainly done to reflect the tastes and social circumstances of the times, or to boost the dramatic impact and the spectacle of the play in performance.

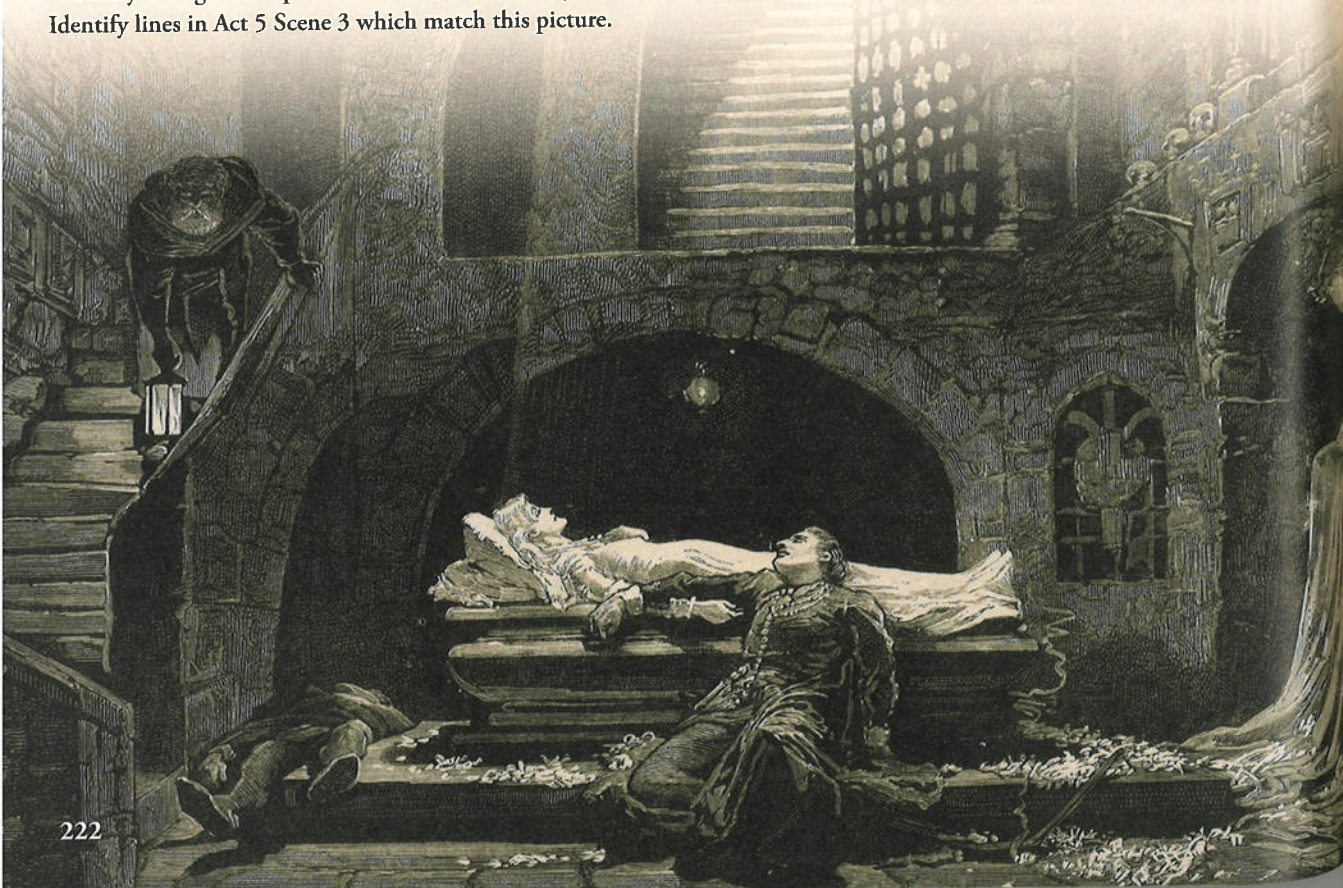
In the eighteenth century, David Garrick's rewritten version of *Romeo and Juliet* was very popular. He cut much of the dialogue, but added a funeral procession (see p. 169) and a final conversation between Romeo and Juliet in the tomb. The play was acted in the fashionable costumes of the day, as you can see in the picture (right). In the nineteenth century, productions of *Romeo and Juliet* became obsessed with historical accuracy. Period costumes and settings were designed with meticulous attention to detail.

- ◆ Pick out features in the picture below that show attempts to recreate twelfth-century Verona on stage.

▼ Henry Irving's 1882 production at the London Lyceum. Identify lines in Act 5 Scene 3 which match this picture.



▲ Spranger Barry as Romeo and Miss Nossiter as Juliet, Covent Garden, London, 1753.



Modern productions – distinctive interpretations

Most directors, set designers and production teams work in harmony to create a particular 'vision' for their staging of the play. However, many comment that one of the challenges of producing *Romeo and Juliet* is its very popularity – it's a story well known to audiences and often enacted on stage. So how does each production make it fresh and interesting?

In the 'Stagecraft' boxes in the main part of this edition, you have been encouraged to consider, and try out, ideas for lifting the script off the page.

Six 'script boxes' follow, which focus on key elements of the play:

- 1 Dramatic openings
- 2 Dramatic endings
- 3 Location and setting
- 4 The Capulet ball (Act 1 Scene 5)
- 5 The 'balcony' scene (Act 2 Scene 2)
- 6 Interesting stagecraft

Inside each of the boxes you'll find information about how particular productions have approached specific aspects of the play and attempted to make them distinctive or unusual.

- ◆ In pairs, select one of the numbered boxes and work through the ideas described in it, discussing each one in turn. Which do you find the most interesting and why? In your discussion, consider what the director might have had in mind by approaching the play in this way.
- ◆ Talk together about how any of these ideas for staging have helped further your understanding of *Romeo and Juliet*. Add your evaluative comments to the Director's Journal that you began on page 22.

1 Dramatic openings

- a One movie opening made strong use of contemporary CNN-style news reporting, helicopter surveillance, and security tapes.
- b In one production, the fight scene was staged with the graceful movements of a ballet. Swords were waved by men as if they were underwater.
- c In a ferocious opening, the face of a brawler in this production was smashed against concrete wall. Romeo delivered the Prologue.
- d In a production set in a Sicilian village, the fight was conducted with agricultural scythes.
- e One opening skipped the first forty lines and went straight into a violent and brutal fight. Benvolio was tied to a stake by Tybalt – jets of steam and sheets of fire erupted around them. The Prologue was a voiceover.

2 Dramatic endings

- a The lovers' double suicide cut to a press conference. The Prince delivered the Prologue to the flashbulbs of reporters' cameras.
- b The ghosts of Romeo and Juliet emerged from the tomb full of mourners, to view their own memorial.
- c The back wall split open, revealing the crypt, tomb and iron railings that kept Romeo out of the funeral vault.
- d The play moved into the modern world – police radios and sirens could be heard. The impassive observer Balthasar spoke the ending. The final incidents were jotted down by a plainclothes police officer.

3 Location and setting

- a** One production was set in nineteenth-century Italy, with clothes lines strung across narrow streets.
- b** In another, brutal 'Clockwork Orange' style production, gangs inhabited a concrete subway.
- c** Soft music and subtle lighting created a dream-like, surreal atmosphere.
- d** A complicated set of doors, arches and windows opened up to present vistas of other rooms. The atmosphere suggested an Italian Renaissance painting. The lighting was like candlelight.
- e** Costumes were black leather, creating a gritty, urban feel. The Prince was a Mafia Don. Violent gangs, using vicious flick-knives, ruled the streets.
- f** The set suggested 1920s Shanghai when the opium trade flourished. The Montagues were tea-sipping Europeans, the Capulets Oriental (costumed with silks and fans).
- g** This production portrayed the maddening midday heat of a volatile state. Gang warfare was rife. The Capulets were white, the Montagues black.
- h** Located in a Sicilian village, the terracotta-tiled piazza became a focal point for the action.
- i** The culture of 1940/50s Italy dominated. There was no visual distinction between the Montagues and Capulets as both were dressed in formal black.

4 The Capulet ball (Act 1 Scene 5)

- a** Capulet's ball was staged as a family get-together. Mercutio appeared in drag costume.
- b** The guests were 'frozen' in an amber glow, as the two lovers were picked out in white spotlight.
- c** Paris was more in love with Lady Capulet than her daughter Juliet.
- d** Romeo spotted Juliet through the glass walls of a fish tank.
- e** The Charleston dance was followed by the Chinese Lion Dance, lit in deep red.

5 The 'balcony' scene (Act 2 Scene 2)

- a** The balcony was transposed to a swimming pool.
- b** On a minimalist bare stage with very few props Juliet's white bed acts as balcony (and, later, her funeral bier).
- c** The scene was played on the back of a large symbolic statue of a black horse.
- d** The position of the lovers was reversed – Juliet was in a courtyard standing below Romeo.

6 Interesting stagecraft

- a** Additional performers were used as a 'Chorus' to echo the lovers' lines, which reverberated around the stage. These voices spoke Romeo and Juliet's thoughts after their wedding night.
- b** The costumes were cream and beige, light dappled the stage through a weeping willow tree.
- c** Lady Capulet was clearly having an affair with Tybalt.
- d** The ghosts of Mercutio and Tybalt were present on stage at the end of play.
- e** A rectangular stone plinth doubled as Juliet's bed and her tomb.
- f** The production showed a 'play within a play'. Set in a Sicilian town, the residents stepped onto the stage to play a part.
- g** Romeo and Juliet were in modern dress; the other characters were in Renaissance costume. The interval was taken deep into Act 3 (rather than the customary end of Act 2).

Transforming genre

All kinds of transformations of Shakespeare's play have been made. For example, there is a ballet by the Russian composer Sergei Prokofiev, an opera by Gounod, and an American stage musical and movie, *West Side Story*, with music by Leonard Bernstein.



▲ Russia's Bolshoi Ballet performs Prokofiev's version of *Romeo and Juliet*.

◀ Romeo lies dying as Juliet prepares to stab herself in a performance of Gounod's opera version.

▼ The musical *West Side Story* updated the play and set it in 1950s New York City.



Romeo and Juliet on film

The Italian film director Franco Zeffirelli chose images of youth and beauty in Renaissance paintings as an inspiration for his 1968 movie. He also made great use of the outdoor world: the sun-baked Italian setting was hot and intense. Searing sunlight on dusty streets was set against strong torchlight for the interior scenes, which were filmed inside authentic stone buildings. The Montagues dressed in blue, the Capulets in red and orange.

The director Baz Luhrmann (see the pictures on pp. 47, 184 and below) also sharply distinguished the feuding families by their clothes. The Montagues wore casual beachwear, including colourful Hawaiian shirts. The Capulets wore expensive designer clothes, ornamental jewellery and bullet-proof vests. In addition, Luhrmann transported the play to 'Verona Beach' (a fictional North American setting) and gave it a contemporary soundtrack. The action of the play is high-octane, featuring drug trips, car chases and gunfights.

When a stage play is transferred to the medium of film, it offers the director considerable artistic freedom. In addition to a variety of camera angles (panning shots, close-ups, etc.) special effects and the addition of a soundtrack, the 'action' can be presented in a more



naturalistic way. Editing techniques and multiple 'takes' can also ensure that what you see is a 'perfect' interpretation of the director's intentions.

- ◆ Make a list of some of the qualities and effects of a good stage production that could be lost in a film version.
- ◆ Choose one scene, or part of a scene, that you think lends itself to being filmed. Write a design brief, showing clearly how this would work.



Stage your own production of Romeo and Juliet

Talk together about the period and place in which you will set your play. Will it be medieval Italy? A present-day place where conflict exists between two social groups? A 'timeless' setting? When you have made your decision, choose one or more of the following activities. Your finished assignment can be a file of drawings, notes and suggestions, or an active presentation.

- ◆ Design the set – how can it be used for particular scenes?
- ◆ Design the costumes – look at past examples, but invent your own.
- ◆ Design the props – furnishings and hand props (e.g. swords).
- ◆ Design a lighting and sound programme – for one or two scenes.
- ◆ Design the publicity poster – make people want to see your play!
- ◆ Design a 'flyer' – a small handbill to advertise the production.
- ◆ Design the programme – layout? Content? Number of pages?
- ◆ Write character notes for actors' guidance.
- ◆ Work out a five-minute presentation to show to potential sponsors.

Visit a production of Romeo and Juliet

Shakespeare wrote *Romeo and Juliet* to be acted, watched and enjoyed – not to be studied for examinations! So visit a live performance. Prepare for a school or college visit using the following:

- ◆ Everyone chooses a character (or an incident or scene) to watch especially closely. Write down your expectations before you go. Report back to the class on how your expectations for 'your' character or scene were fulfilled or challenged.
- ◆ Choose your favourite line in the play. Listen carefully to how it is spoken. Does it add to your understanding?
- ◆ Your teacher will probably be able to provide one or two published reviews of the production. Talk together about whether you should read the reviews before or after you see the play for yourself. After the visit, discuss how far you agree or disagree with the reviews.
- ◆ Write your own review. Record your own perceptions of what you actually saw and heard – and your feelings about the production.
- ◆ Two points to remember: preparation is always valuable, but too much can dull the enjoyment of a theatre visit; every production is different. There's no such thing as a single 'right' way to 'do' Shakespeare – but you might think that there are 'wrong' ways!



Practitioners' perspectives

Nancy Meckler, director of the RSC production of *Romeo and Juliet* in 2006, speaks in 'Director's Talk' about some of her ideas for the production:

The thing I found really interesting was that if everybody already knows the story is there any way the people on stage can share with the audience the fact that we all already know the story? Very early on, when I first was asked to do it, I had this idea that it would be performed by a community of people living in Italy who already know the play, and who perform it once a year. So it means that the people who are performing it already know the story, and the audience that's watching already knows the story. That would free me from the idea that we all have to pretend that you don't know what's going to happen.

We talked about a village that had warring families in it — somewhere in Italy, and in the end we settled on Sicily. The idea is that these two warring families — or clans — have come to perform *Romeo and Juliet* on the edge of town in a wasteland space.

So we thought about a rather desolate wasteland where these people gather once a year to put on a play. That's why they've built a stage and at the back [indicates the back wall] that's meant to make us think of an outdoor movie screen, because in Italy you often get outdoor cinema. When we first began it really did look like an outdoor film screen and it was going to be tattered and torn. Then as time went on and Katrina Lindsay worked on the design, she began to think that she didn't want the design to be so real, and that maybe the screen should be almost transparent, so that you could light through it and sometimes you could see images behind it. So the set started off by being a realistic place and then it became less real — if that was a cinema screen you wouldn't be able to light through it in that way. The main thing was that we wanted somehow to be on the edge of nowhere, to be in a neutral space. If these clans were killing each other and they were going to put on a play, it had to be in a very neutral space.

I had the idea very early on that the fights in *Romeo and Juliet* shouldn't be realistic, because I feel that sometimes with realistic stage fights it takes us out of it a little bit,

because we think, 'Oh look, they're doing a stage fight, they must have rubber tips on the ends of the swords'. Sometimes the actors have to be really careful because it has to be so carefully choreographed, so you don't always get the sense of the violence and the aggression. So I wondered if there would be a way of staging the fights where we could look at the aggression and not at the art of stage-fighting.

What I love about *Romeo and Juliet* is that it's quite an early play of Shakespeare's and he doesn't really have a sub-plot going but he just keeps throwing in these little servant scenes in the middle. In the middle of the tragedy you get a silly servant scene, and I love that — the way he turns it round. There's one servant scene that we've left in that's often cut because people think it's too silly at too serious a moment. It's the musicians' scene and we've still got it in there. I love the idea of bringing out the whole idea of comedy and tragedy being together like that.

Of course as a play, it's so much about opposites: much of the imagery is about dark and light — how Juliet's eyes light up the night in a particular way, and when she's in the grave she lights up the grave. When Romeo sees her for the first time, he talks about her being a swan among crows, and she's like a bright light in a dark night.

There's so much imagery of dark and light, black and white, life and death. Friar Lawrence talks about the fact that the earth is a womb that brings forth life but it's also a tomb that buries life. There's so many things about opposites in the play that somehow making the comedy silly and the tragedy tragic, putting them right next to each other, feels like it's a real expression of the way he wrote it.

There's something primal about the idea that two young people with their lives ahead of them have to be sacrificed in order for a community to decide to make peace. Peace movements, even now, are so often started by people who say, 'We can't bear the fact that we keep losing our young people. It's our young people that end up dead in this war and we adults have got to find a way to stop killing our children.' Perhaps it's only when enough children die that the adults can find a way to make peace, because it is often the young and the innocent that get it, isn't it?

Neil Bartlett, director of the RSC production in 2008, also speaks in 'Director's Talk':

One thing that's really important to Shakespeare is that it needed to take place in a Catholic country where the rules of religion are absolute, there is no space for, 'Oh I believe this and you believe that.' It's no accident in the play that you hear people swear 'by the Virgin Mary', 'by Our Lord', all the time. There's lots of priest action in *Romeo and Juliet*! It's a very religious society.

I wanted to anchor it very firmly in Italy. It's a very conservative society. This is not a world in which the Nurse can say to Juliet, 'Why don't you think about going to university?' Or, 'Here, read this book.' No one says to Romeo, 'Actually if you ever heard the word "macho" perhaps you want to think twice about the way you're behaving in your life.' It's very, very conservative (both with a small 'c' and with a capital 'C') culture. So I've set it slightly back in the past. It's somewhere ... I don't know, in the 1940s.

But I stress the 'somewhere'. It's not set in Rome in 1949 and everyone's recovering from the war. The setting, as you can see [indicates stage] is very simple. That's your lot: there's a floor, there's a wall.

Also the clothing of the 1940s is very good for this play, in that the 1940s were a time when everything appeared to be very prim and proper. Women wore tailored suits, sensible shoes and hats, and men wore suits. But actually it's sexy as hell! It's that classic Italian thing of saying, 'I'm a mature, responsible, respectable woman and these are my breasts. Are you staring at them? Please stare at them again.' That whole double-whammy of women in a Catholic culture.

The women in this play are very sexy, I think. Lady Montague is a tiny part, though beautifully played in this production by Katy Krane, but the Nurse and Lady Capulet and Juliet are fantastic female parts, the three of them, and they're vibrantly sexual in their different ways. Very raunchy women.

◆ In the extracts on these pages, the two directors share their thoughts about some crucial issues that must be addressed in designing a production of *Romeo and Juliet*:

- 1 The audience already knows the story.
- 2 Where to set it (place and period).
- 3 How to stage the fights.
- 4 The balance of comedy and tragedy.
- 5 Highlighting the 'oppositions' in the play.
- 6 Why the lovers die.
- 7 The importance of religion.
- 8 How to present the women.

Read the extracts carefully, looking for the directors' views on the issues listed above, and make notes on what they say. Then prepare a short presentation for your class on what you think about their ideas — where you agree and where you disagree.

Writing about Shakespeare

The play as text

Shakespeare's plays have always been studied as literary works – as words on a page that need clarification, appreciation and discussion. When you write about the plays, you will be asked to compose short pieces and also longer, more reflective pieces like controlled assessments, examination scripts and coursework – often in the form of essays on themes and/or imagery, character studies, analyses of the structure of the play and on stagecraft. Imagery, stagecraft and character are dealt with elsewhere in this edition. Here, we concentrate on themes and structure. You might find it helpful to look at the 'Write about it' boxes on the left-hand pages throughout the play.

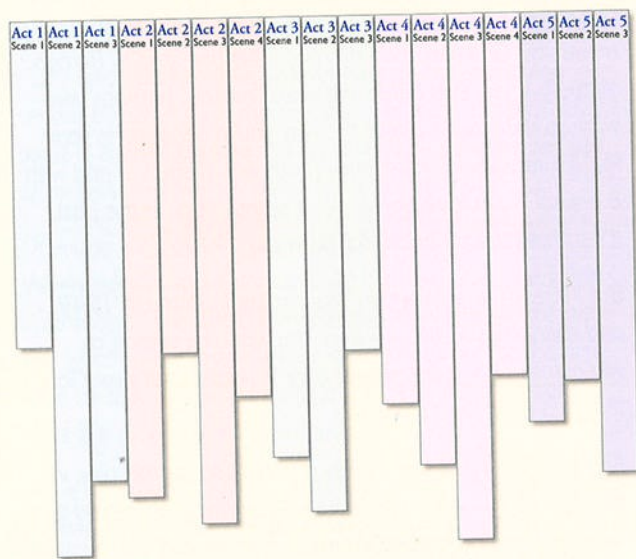
Themes

It is often tempting to say that the theme of a play is a single idea, like 'death' in *Hamlet*, or 'the supernatural' in *Macbeth*, or 'love' in *Romeo and Juliet*. The problem with such a simple approach is that you will miss the complexity of the plays. In *Romeo and Juliet*, for example, the play is about the relationship between love, family loyalty and constraint; it is also about the relationship of youth to age and experience; and the relationship between Romeo and Juliet is also played out against a background of enmity between two families. Between each of these ideas or concepts there are tensions. The tensions are the main focus of attention for Shakespeare and the audience, and they also happen to be how drama operates – by the presentation and resolution of tension.

Look back at the 'Themes' boxes throughout the play to see if any of the activities there have given rise to information that you could use as a starting point for further writing about the themes of the specific play you are studying.

Structure

Most Shakespeare plays are in five acts, divided into scenes. These acts were not in the original scripts, but have been included in later editions to make the action more manageable, clearer and more like 'classical' structures. One way to get a sense of the structure of the whole play is to take a printed version of the play (not this one!) and cut it up into scenes and acts. Then display each scene and act, in sequence, on a wall, like this:



As you set out the whole play, you will be able to see the 'shape' of each act, the relative length of the scenes, and how the acts relate to each other (such as whether one of the acts is shorter, and why that might be). You can annotate the text with comments, observations and questions. You can use a highlighter pen to mark the recurrence of certain words, images or metaphors to see at a glance where and how frequently they appear. You can also follow a particular character's progress through the play.

Such an overview of the play gives you critical perspective: you will be able to see how the parts fit together, to stand back from the play and assess its shape, and to focus on particular parts within the context of the whole. Your writing will show more awareness of the overall context as a result.

The play as script

There are different, but related, categories when we think of the play as a script for performance. These include *stagecraft* (discussed elsewhere in this edition and throughout the left-hand pages), *lighting*, *focus* (who are we looking at? Where is the attention of the audience?), *music* and *sound*, *props* and *costumes*, *casting*, *make-up*, *pace* and *rhythm*, and other *spatial relationships* (e.g. how actors move across the stage in relation to each other). If you are writing about stagecraft or performance, use the notes you have made as a result of the 'Stagecraft' boxes throughout this edition of the play, as well as any material you can gather about the play in performance.

What are the key points of dispute?

Shakespeare is brilliant at capturing a number of key points of dispute in each of his plays. These are the dramatic moments where he concentrates the focus of the audience on difficult (sometimes universal) problems that the characters are facing or embodying.

First, identify these key points in the play you are studying. You can do this as a class by brainstorming what you think are the key points in small groups, then debating the long-list as a whole class, and then coming up with a short-list of what the class thinks are the most significant. (This is a good opportunity for speaking and listening work.) They are likely to be places in the play where the action or reflection is at its most intense, and which capture the complexity of themes, character, structure and performance.

Second, drill down at one of the points of contention and tension. In other words, investigate the complexity of the problem that Shakespeare is exploring. What is at stake? Why is it important? Is it a problem that can be resolved, or is it an insoluble one?

Key skills in writing about Shakespeare

Here are some suggestions to help you organise your notes and develop advanced writing skills when working on Shakespeare:

- Compose the title of your writing carefully to maximise your opportunities to be creative and critical about the play; or explore the key words in your title carefully. Decide which aspect of the play – or which combination of aspects – you are focusing on.
- Create a mind map of your ideas, making connections between them.
- If appropriate, arrange your ideas into a hierarchy that shows how some themes or features of the play are 'higher' than others and can incorporate other ideas.
- Then sequence your ideas so that you have a plan for writing an essay, review, story – whichever genre you are using. You might like to think about whether to put your strongest points first, in the middle, or later.
- Collect key quotations (it might help to compile this list with a partner), which you can use as evidence to support your argument.
- Compose your first draft, embedding quotations in your text as you go along.
- Revise your draft in the light of your own critical reflections and/or those of others.

The following pages focus on writing about *Romeo and Juliet* in particular.

Writing about *Romeo and Juliet*

The purpose of this section is to help you to write about *Romeo and Juliet* in an informed, coherent and convincing fashion. Before you begin to commit to writing down your ideas, remember to keep two key considerations in mind:

1 *Romeo and Juliet* is a play, so you should always appreciate its form and genre. In the 'fight scene' (Act 3 Scene 1), for example, there is a huge amount of 'stagecraft' built in to the writing (entrances, exits, 'stage business', action and so on). It's all about what the audience sees, hears and experiences.

◆ Look at the script on page 95 of this edition. Try writing about how the language might be brought to life on stage. Speculate about different ways of playing this short episode.

2 *Romeo and Juliet* is not about 'real' people and 'real' situations, so don't treat it as such. When Shakespeare pays close attention to the timings in the play, it's as much about making a dramatic point (the two lovers are caught up in an unstoppable and fast-moving tide of events), as trying to make it all credible and naturalistic. The play is a dramatic construct and often characters, for example, are vehicles for ideas about themes and structure. Remember the Prince? Shakespeare presents him very sketchily as a figure (and he's been played on stage in a variety of ways) but he has a crucial role in the drama.

How many different kinds of writing might you tackle? You could write about:

- an extract (a key speech, such as Juliet's before her wedding night, or a longer passage of dialogue, such as the lovers' dialogue in the 'balcony' scene)
- a key scene (such as the Capulet ball in which Romeo and Juliet meet)
- a character (the Friar), or group of characters (the women in the play)
- a core theme (the conflict of love and hate)
- an element of the text re-creatively (that is, rewriting it in another genre, or from another perspective, or in the persona of one of the characters).

- ◆ Individually, consider each of these 'types' of writing in turn. See if you can come up with three additional focuses or frameworks for questions besides the ones that are suggested in brackets. Then pass your ideas to a partner for consideration. Together, settle on two questions for each category that you think would generate interesting written responses. Keep these in mind as you work through the next section.

Writing about an extract or a key scene: the whole of Act 4 Scene 3

- 1 Locate the extract in the play, and contextualise it. What has just happened? (The Friar's plan) What is about to come? (Juliet will deceive her mother and Nurse and drink the potion.)
- 2 Concentrate on exploring the specific mood or atmosphere of the extract. (Juliet's deception gives way to her dark fears and imaginings, explored in her soliloquy.)
- 3 How might the lines be spoken – tone, emphasis, pace, pauses, and so on? What are key words and images (of fear and death)?
- 4 Think about Shakespeare's stagecraft – how he assembles and groups characters (the three women at the start of the scene), the interplay between them, the use of entrances/exits and the blocking on stage. The 'silent' character of the Nurse.
- 5 Link the details of the extract to key themes or issues rooted in the text as a whole (dramatic irony, Juliet's isolation, the pervasiveness of death).
- 6 Show how the extract links to the dramatic construction of the play (the escalation of the tragedy).

- ◆ Working in groups of six, take one numbered section each of the above essay framework. Plan your answer by researching your specific area of focus. Then divide up a large sheet of sugar paper into six sections. Take turns to fill in the notes you have compiled. Use this large sheet as a resource to help you produce an essay plan of no more than one side that you could include in a revision booklet to be used for examination preparation.

Writing about a character

Planning an essay on the character of Mercutio

Summarise what Mercutio does in each act: his interactions with other characters; his decisive actions.

Explore how Mercutio relates to other characters and note down the different ways he treats them. How do they speak to him and about him?

Focus on the type of language that Mercutio uses – the imagery he employs, the tone he strikes, his typical way of speaking. Identify quotations which will back up your points. Link Mercutio's role to key themes and aspects of the drama.

Finally, think about the possible reasons why Shakespeare killed him off in Act 3.

Writing creatively

Many assessments offer you the opportunity to write about *Romeo and Juliet* creatively, as well as critically. Act by act, throughout this edition, you have been encouraged to try a number of creative-writing activities. The great thing about such activities is that you can be as imaginative and original as you like within the framework of such responses: *Romeo and Juliet* is a complex, rich and intriguing text that offers lots of opportunities for creative approaches.

Summing up

Keep in mind the focus on *Romeo and Juliet* as a dramatic text. What features of the play as a theatrical performance enhance the impact of key issues? Remember that there is no single, right interpretation – both from you as a critic, but also from a director: How might an audience respond – in Shakespeare's time, and now? How do you respond? What are your own personal responses to the question and how can you justify them?

Possible questions

Below you'll find questions on character, theme, extracts and creative tasks. Have a go at one of each, or invent your own!

- 1 The Nurse is the most sympathetic character in *Romeo and Juliet*. Discuss.
- 2 *Romeo and Juliet* is a tragedy of fate. Discuss.
- 3 Discuss the presentation of male pride and honour in the play.
- 4 Explore the dramatic construction of Act 3 Scene 1.
- 5 Explore the contrasts between love and hate.
- 6 In role as one of the characters, write about a key incident in the play from your point of view.
- 7 'A mixture of inconsistencies and contradictions'. Consider the presentation of Friar Lawrence.
- 8 In what ways can you consider Act 3 to be a pivotal act of the play?
- 9 Romeo simply does not match up to the concept of a tragic hero.
- 10 Write an additional speech for a character, or script a section of dialogue between a character who appears in the play and one who doesn't.

William Shakespeare 1564–1616

- 1564** Born Stratford-upon-Avon, eldest son of John and Mary Shakespeare.
- 1582** Marries Anne Hathaway of Shottery, near Stratford.
- 1583** Daughter Susanna born.
- 1585** Twins, son and daughter Hamnet and Judith, born.
- 1592** First mention of Shakespeare in London. Robert Greene, another playwright, described Shakespeare as 'an upstart crow beautified with our feathers'. Greene seems to have been jealous of Shakespeare. He mocked Shakespeare's name, calling him 'the only Shake-scene in a country' (presumably because Shakespeare was writing successful plays).
- 1595** Becomes a shareholder in The Lord Chamberlain's Men, an acting company that became extremely popular.
- 1596** Son, Hamnet, dies, aged eleven.
Father, John, granted arms (acknowledged as a gentleman).
- 1597** Buys New Place, the grandest house in Stratford.
- 1598** Acts in Ben Jonson's *Every Man in His Humour*.
- 1599** Globe Theatre opens on Bankside. Performances in the open air.
- 1601** Father, John, dies.
- 1603** James I grants Shakespeare's company a royal patent: The Lord Chamberlain's Men become The King's Men and play about twelve performances each year at court.
- 1607** Daughter Susanna marries Dr John Hall.
- 1608** Mother, Mary, dies.
- 1609** The King's Men begin performing indoors at Blackfriars Theatre.
- 1610** Probably returns from London to live in Stratford.
- 1616** Daughter Judith marries Thomas Quiney.
Dies. Buried in Holy Trinity Church, Stratford-upon-Avon.

The plays and poems

(no one knows exactly when he wrote each play)

- 1589–95** *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *First, Second and Third Parts of King Henry VI*, *Titus Andronicus*, *King Richard III*, *The Comedy of Errors*, *Love's Labour's Lost*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *King Richard II* (and the long poems *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece*).
- 1596–9** *King John*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *First and Second Parts of King Henry IV*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *King Henry V*, *Julius Caesar* (and probably the Sonnets).
- 1600–5** *As You Like It*, *Hamlet*, *Twelfth Night*, *Troilus and Cressida*, *Measure for Measure*, *Othello*, *All's Well That Ends Well*, *Timon of Athens*, *King Lear*.
- 1606–11** *Macbeth*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Pericles*, *Coriolanus*, *The Winter's Tale*, *Cymbeline*, *The Tempest*.
- 1613** *King Henry VIII*, *The Two Noble Kinsmen* (both probably with John Fletcher).
- 1623** Shakespeare's plays published as a collection (now called the First Folio).

Acknowledgements

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