



Romeo and Juliet

-Travaux Pedagogiques-

EXERCISE 1

Questions to consider before you study the play

- What do you know about Shakespeare?
- Have you seen any Shakespeare plays?
- Why is Shakespeare so famous?
- Do you agree that it is still important to play his plays today? Why (not)?
- How do you imagine the story of Romeo and Juliet? On a scale of 1 to 10 how much is it romance, action, violence, comedy, horror?

EXERCISE 2

The Story

How well do you know the basic story of the play? Answer True or false to the following statements. Check your answers by reading the story synopsis below.

- When the play starts, the Montague family and the Capulet family already have a long history of fighting each other.
- Romeo goes to Lord Capulet's party because he loves Juliet and wants to see her there.
- Lord Capulet wants Paris to marry his daughter Juliet.
- Tybalt recognises Romeo at the party and wants to kill him.
- After the party Romeo climbs over the walls of the Capulet house and hears



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Juliet talking about him.

- Friar Lawrence refuses to actually marry Romeo and Juliet because he knows that their families would be very angry.
- Tybalt kills Romeo's friend Mercutio and that is why Romeo kills Tybalt.
- Romeo gives Juliet the special drink that she takes to make her family think that she is dead.
- Romeo comes back to Verona because he knows that Juliet will wake up and he wants to be with her.
- They all live happily ever after.

Compare your answers with this version of the basic story of the play.

- The Montague and Capulet family have a big fight in the streets of Verona. The Prince of Verona is totally tired of the endless fighting that has gone on between the families for many years. He tells the heads of the families that the fighting must stop or he will have them killed.
- Romeo, the son of Lord Montague, is in love with Rosaline. His friend Benvolio persuades him to secretly visit a party held by Lord Capulet (their enemy) so that he can compare Rosaline to other girls and hopefully forget her.
- Count Paris visits Lord Capulet to ask if he can marry Juliet. Lord Capulet tells Paris that Juliet is too young and that he must wait.
- At the party at the Capulet's house Romeo meets Juliet, and they fall deeply in love. Tybalt is very angry that Romeo has come to a Capulet family party and wants to kill him, but Lord Capulet tells Tybalt not to hurt Romeo in his house.
- After the party, Romeo climbs the walls of Juliet's house and overhears her on the balcony talking about how she loves him. They agree to get married as soon as possible.
- Friar Lawrence marries Romeo and Juliet secretly. Immediately afterwards Tybalt finds Romeo and wants to fight with him. Tybalt is Juliet's cousin and so



EXERCISE 3

The Prologue

In *Romeo and Juliet*, Shakespeare does an unusual thing. He tells the audience the basic story of the play right at the beginning, before the play starts. Why does he do that? Here is a modern version of the prologue together with the original.

In Verona there are two equally noble families who have hated each other for many years. In recent days they have started again to have bloody fights in the streets. Two children from these families fall in love but in the end die tragically. Their death was the only thing that could stop their parents from arguing. The terrible story of their death and of their parents' anger, is what we will play for you now during the next two hours. If you watch patiently we will work hard to fill in the details of this story.

Two households, both alike in dignity,
In fair Verona, where we lay our scene,
From ancient grudge break to new mutiny,
Where civil blood makes civil hands unclean.
From forth the fatal loins of these two foes
A pair of star-cross'd lovers take their life;
Whole misadventured piteous overthrows
Do with their death bury their parents' strife.
The fearful passage of their death-mark'd love,
And the continuance of their parents' rage,
Which, but their children's end, nought could remove,
Is now the two hours' traffic of our stage;
The which if you with patient ears attend,
What here shall miss, our toil shall strive to mend.

- **The phrase 'star-crossed' lovers has become quite famous. How are they 'star-crossed'?**



EXERCISE 4

Love at first sight - The Sonnet

A Sonnet is a 14 line poem. The lines rhyme in the pattern AbAB CDCD EFEF GG. The prologue of the play (above) is in the form of a sonnet. Shakespeare wrote a lot of sonnets, most of them are to do with love. Shakespeare found the to be a specially strong form of verse for love poetry. It is not a coincidence that when Romeo and Juliet first meet, their conversation naturally takes the form of a sonnet. It is a sign of how well they understand each other from the very beginning, love at first sight.

Romeo is playing a game where he wants to kiss Juliet. He pretends to be a pilgrim and Juliet is the shrine that he is coming to worship and kiss. Juliet tells him that pilgrims can pray by putting their hands together, they don't need to use their lips.

ROMEO [To JULIET] If I profane with my unworhiest hand
 This holy shrine, the gentle sin is this:
 My lips, two blushing pilgrims, ready stand
 To smooth that rough touch with a tender kiss.

JULIET Good pilgrim, you do wrong your hand too much,
 Which mannerly devotion shows in this;
 For saints have hands that pilgrims' hands do touch,
 And palm to palm is holy palmers' kiss.

ROMEO Have not saints lips, and holy palmers too?

JULIET Ay, pilgrim, lips that they must use in prayer.

ROMEO O, then, dear saint, let lips do what hands do;
 They pray, grant thou, lest faith turn to despair.

JULIET Saints do not move, though grant for prayers' sake.

ROMEO Then move not, while my prayer's effect I take.

Note: 'Palmer' was another name for pilgrim.

EXERCISE 5

Mercutio and the Queen Mab speech

Mercutio is an unusual and special character in the play. There are different theories that Shakespeare wrote the part for a special star actor (see the film 'Shakespeare in Love').



EXERCISE 6

The Balcony Scene / What's in a name?

In this speech, Juliet is talking to herself, she doesn't know that Romeo is listening to her.

O Romeo, Romeo! wherefore art thou Romeo?
Deny thy father and refuse thy name;
Or, if thou wilt not, be but sworn my love,
And I'll no longer be a Capulet.....

'Tis but thy name that is my enemy;
Thou art thyself, though not a Montague.
What's Montague? it is nor hand, nor foot,
Nor arm, nor face, nor any other part
Belonging to a man. O, be some other name!
What's in a name? that which we call a rose
By any other name would smell as sweet;
..... Romeo, doff thy name,
And for that name which is no part of thee
Take all myself.

Wherefore art thou = Why are you

Thou wilt not = You will not

Thou art thyself = You are yourself

Doff = Remove/ take off

- How important are our names to our idea of who we are? If you had to change your name, what new name would you choose? Would suddenly having a different name change your feeling of who you are or wouldn't it matter?



EXERCISE 7

Selling the idea of Love

In this part of the balcony scene, Juliet is worried in case any of her family find Romeo in the garden, because they could kill him. Romeo though is only interested in one thing. Love.

ROMEO With love's light wings did I o'er-perch these walls;
For stony limits cannot hold love out,
And what love can do that dares love attempt;
Therefore thy kinsmen are no let to me.

JULIET If they do see thee, they will murder thee.
I would not for the world they saw thee here.

ROMEO I have night's cloak to hide me from their sight;
And but thou love me, let them find me here:
My life were better ended by their hate,
Than death prorogued, wanting of thy love.

JULIET By whose direction found'st thou out this place?

ROMEO By love, who first did prompt me to inquire;
He lent me counsel and I lent him eyes.

O'er-perch = Fly over, *Kinsmen* = Family
Prorogued = Made to wait *Wanting of* = not having

Generally Romeo is almost obsessed with love. It almost feels like he is selling the idea of love.

- Just for fun in pairs think of a product that you like (e.g. Cornflakes or Gambrinus) and read the scene, saying the product instead of the word 'love'. (With Coke's light wings) Try and let your partner feel how much you love this product.



EXERCISE 8 **Banishment**

When Romeo kills Tybalt the Prince says that he is banished (i.e. He has to leave Verona). Juliet is desperate as she talks to her nurse and Romeo is equally desperate as he talks to Friar Lawrence.

Juliet - My husband lives, that Tybalt would have slain;
And Tybalt's dead, that would have slain my husband:
All this is comfort; wherefore weep I then?
Some word there was, worsers than Tybalt's death,
That murder'd me:
'Tybalt is dead, and Romeo--banished;'
That 'banished,' that one word 'banished,'
Hath slain ten thousand Tybalts.
'Romeo is banished,' to speak that word,
Is father, mother, Tybalt, Romeo, Juliet,
All slain, all dead. 'Romeo is banished!'
There is no end, no limit, measure, bound,
In that word's death; no words can that woe sound.....
..... Come, nurse; I'll to my wedding-bed;
And death, not Romeo, take my maidenhead!

Slain = Killed, *Maidenhead* = Virginity

This is a very black and hopeless image, but it is important for the story that the nurse (who knows Juliet very well indeed) really believes that she is depressed and may kill herself. That is why after this, despite the danger, the Nurse goes to bring Romeo to Juliet for the last time.

FRIAR LAURENCE	Hence from Verona art thou banished: Be patient, for the world is broad and wide.
ROMEO	There is no world without Verona walls, But purgatory, torture, hell itself. Hence-banished is banish'd from the world.
FRIAR LAURENCE	This is dear mercy, and thou seest it not.
ROMEO	'Tis torture, and not mercy: heaven is here, Where Juliet lives; and every cat and dog And little mouse, every unworthy thing,



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Live here in heaven and may look on her;
But Romeo may not.
I am banished -- 'banished'?
O friar, the damned use that word in hell;

EXERCISE 9

Final topics for discussion – Do you agree?

- Leonardo di Caprio, who played Romeo in the 1996 film version said that he can't imagine really dying for love. Do you agree? Generally, Romeo and Juliet is a very strong play full of strong emotions and extreme reactions. Is it possible to believe that these things could really happen.
- Is Shakespeare really relevant today. There are plenty of modern plays and films which reflect the modern world. Do we really need to keep watching these old things now?
- It is still good to play Shakespeare's plays but the text should be changed into modern English so that people can understand it better. Do you agree?

Extra Notes on the characters for Teachers

I am David Fisher. I play Friar Lawrence, Benvolio and the Nurse. I am also the assistant director of the play and I took over when the main director, Guy Roberts returned to America. Guy guided us through the play and gave us a lot of insight into the story and the characters. These notes are purely my personal comments on how I now understand Romeo and Juliet as a result of having worked on it for a year, but they are largely a reflection of the expert guidance that we got from Guy at the start of the whole process.



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The Story

Romeo and Juliet is a very passionate play. It is set in Italy in the summer. The characters are mostly very hot-blooded, they fight, argue and love very suddenly and very intensely. Thus it makes sense for the action to move at a fairly high pace. It is also a very violent play. It starts with a big fight and the Prince has to threaten death sentences as the only chance he has to stop the families fighting in public. The love between Romeo and Juliet is like an eye of calm in this hurricane of tension and violence, although it is also sudden and intense. They are 'like fire and powder, which as they kiss, consume.'

The Main Characters

Romeo is a lover. He is obsessed with love and the idea of love. At the start of the play he is in love with Rosaline before he finds his true love Juliet. Once he finds this love he lives it 100%. He is clearly intelligent and witty as we see in the exchanges with Mercutio and indeed with Juliet. However he seems to be addicted to love to the extent that he doesn't easily take initiative for himself in the real world. Mercutio and Benvolio push him to go to the party, Juliet arranges how they should get in touch and urges him to arrange the marriage, Friar Lawrence arranges his stay in Mantua and Juliet pushes him to leave her bedroom when day is breaking. The action that Romeo takes for himself is simply driven by love or very strong passion, jumping the Capulet's wall to see Juliet, going to her tomb when he believes that she is dead and killing Tybalt when he is angry at Mercutio's death.

Juliet is a more complex character than Romeo and her situation is more difficult than his as she is trapped at home and is very dependent on her family. When her father and mother force her to marry Paris and threaten to throw her out of the house it puts her under an enormous amount of pressure. The fact that she stands up to them in the first place is a sign of how tough she is even before she follows Friar Lawrence's plan of drinking the sleeping potion and waking up among the dead bodies. She is forced to do a lot of what she does by the strength of her love and the difficult situation she is in, but there is no doubt that Juliet isn't just nice, sweet and romantic, she's a tough girl. She is also more practical and I think more mature than Romeo. While he is swimming in his feelings of new love, she is already organising the practical details. Guy (the director) always emphasised that Romeo and Juliet is



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Juliet's play. Her story is the main story and if the actress playing Juliet does a good job, then the production has strong foundations, otherwise nothing can really save it.

Prince Escalus is the big boss. He is probably the only one that Lord Capulet and Montague are afraid of, but it is important that they really are afraid of him. He says

that he is related to both families and he is really sick of them fighting. He is strong authoritan ruler of this restless and violent city. What he says is law.

Lord Capulet is Juliet's father. He is head of the Capulet family and clearly a volatile character. The first time we see him in the full play is with a sword attacking Lord Montague, even though they are supposed to be quite old men. His unstable character is seen in his dealings around Juliet's marriage to Paris. At first he says that Juliet is too young to marry and that Paris must wait two years. A few days later he tells Paris that he can marry Juliet on Thursday, then even earlier. His mood changes are extreme. He becomes furious when Juliet refuses to marry Paris, and says terrible things to her, then, when Juliet seems to be sorry he seems to be as happy as he was angry before, saying 'my heart is wondrous light.'

Lady Capulet is Juliet's mother, though it must be said she is not particularly loving. I think that the key is that she was married to the older and sometimes brutal Lord Capulet when she was very young, probably as an arranged marriage against her will. She also had Juliet when she was young too. Lord Capulet says 'Too soon marred (spoilt) are those so early made' and it makes sense to me if Lady Capulet is played as a young mother who is quite bitter and possibly a bit mad because of her ruined childhood. An especially significant moment is when Lord Capulet gets angry and threatens to throw Juliet out of the house if she doesn't marry Paris. Juliet asks her mother for help and Lady Capulet says

'Talk not to me, for I'll not speak a word:

Do as thou wilt, for I have done with thee.'

Juliet basically doesn't have very supportive parents.

The Nurse is Juliet's main companion and the person who looked after her when she was a little girl. She is clearly older than Juliet then and is presented as a simple comic character. Her role in the play is important as she helps to arrange the marriage between Romeo and Juliet. However when Romeo is banished and Lord Capulet orders Juliet to marry Paris, the nurse can see how hopeless it is to go against the wishes of Juliet's father and she also advises Juliet to marry Paris even though she is



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already married to Romeo. After this Juliet is angry with the nurse and doesn't tell her any more of her secrets. The nurse loves Juliet and cares for her, but maybe she is a bit too old and simple to be a real friend of the kind that Juliet would need.

Friar Lawrence is a difficult character to play because he is full of contradictions. On the one hand he is respected as a priest (Juliet says 'He has still been tried a holy man') and he clearly is liked and trusted by the young people in the city. Both Romeo

and Juliet tell him the big secrets that they don't dare to say to their parents. On the other hand he starts all of the big steps which lead to them dying in the end. He arranges for Romeo to stay in Mantua and he gives Juliet the sleeping potion. He advises Romeo not to hurry and to do things carefully, but then he organises their secret marriage immediately. The most difficult thing for me to understand is his fear. He is terrified when he is hiding Romeo and somebody knocks at his door, then he actually runs away and leaves Juliet alone in the tomb when she kills herself. It seems natural to play him as a man of character and wisdom, but his actions are not always as wise as his words.

Benvolio is a Montague and, together with Mercutio, one of Romeo's best friends. He is not as fast thinking or as witty as the other two, who are always sharing jokes, but he has a good sense of humour too and is especially good-natured, responsible and peace-loving. (Benvolio means 'Good will'.) He is generally trying to stop the others from fighting. It is significant that both Lord Capulet and the Prince, both very important people, talk to him and seem trust him to be honest when they ask his opinion.

Mercutio's name suggests mercury and it is a good image for his character. Fast, volatile, and unstable. He is certainly quick thinking in his battles of wit with Romeo and his mind seems to be overflowing with thoughts and images, most noticeably the famous Queen Mab speech. He is stubborn and ignores Benvolio's advice to leave the market square in order to avoid a fight with the Capulets. He is very different to Romeo in that he is totally unromantic and repeatedly makes fun of Romeo for being in love. However, they are clearly close friends and it is Mercutio's death that prompts Romeo to kill Tybalt.

I am personally struck by the images of the war in the Queen Mab speech and I imagine Mercutio as something like one of the American Vietnam war veterans who were made half mad by their horrific experiences. It's difficult to say though. Although he is a major Shakespearean character, Mercutio is difficult to pin down.



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Tybalt is a cousin to Lord Capulet. He is described by other characters as 'fiery' and 'storming'. When he hears Romeo at the ball he becomes so angry that he wants to kill him immediately. The general image is of someone who is hot-tempered and, as we see in the first scene, who loves to fight. Mercutio also talks about Tybalt's fighting ability with less respect, calling him 'a villain who fights by the book of arithmetic.' This suggests that Tybalt fights well technically, but without special character or personality.

Paris is Juliet's suitor. We see him twice asking Lord Capulet if he can marry Juliet. The first time he is not successful. The second time is after Romeo has killed Tybalt and the Prince is angry with both houses. Paris is then successful. There is a stronger dynamic in these scenes if it is clear in the first scene that Capulet doesn't like Paris, but in the second scene there is a power struggle, which Paris wins. Paris is often played simply as a good-looking rich young man, the type of man that every young girl would want to marry. This is true, but there is another side in the fact that he is clearly quite powerful and probably related to the Prince. It is a question if he really loves Juliet. In those days marriages were arranged for power and money and in the scene where Paris meets Juliet at Friar Lawrence cell he talks in the sense that she is his possession. However he is alone at Juliet's grave at night after her death. Is this because he loves her or just because he hopes to catch and punish Romeo?