The Alabama Shakespeare Festival production of *Romeo and Juliet* offers a passionate version of the beloved play, a superb way to introduce Shakespeare to students. Shakespeare took an old Italian tale handed down through many tellers and set it in his own audience's contemporary world, an artistic choice that still speaks to us.

**The Play as Popular Culture Icon**

We all come to a production of this tragedy with a number of preconceptions, many of them shaped by our first introduction to the play in school or from our experience with the Franco Zeffirelli or Baz Luhrmann films. Teenagers and adults may have quite different responses to it, for while everyone may identify with or remember adolescent love, adults may also feel the impact of the parents' situations and the full price they pay for their feud.

In many ways, our assumptions about the play resemble the site now known as Juliet's balcony in Verona—there it is, the courtyard of an old and apparently historic structure, with a balcony and a statue of young Juliet—not perhaps in pure gold, but pure bronze at least. Tourists scrawl graffiti love notes on the back wall and affix handwritten love notes in the passageway. The site is a lovefest, and tourists have even taken to rubbing the statue's right breast "for luck." It shines a bright golden bronze while the rest of the statue has weathered.

Actually this building is twentieth-century and the balcony was added in the 1930s. No young woman of the Italian Renaissance ever stood there. It is a fabrication, a fictionalization, or perhaps even a virtual dramatization of a site Verona needs for its tourist industry, because so many visitors come knowing nothing about the city except "Two households, both alike in dignity, / In fair Verona where we lay our scene...."

*Romeo and Juliet* is a story we think we know and think we need. Like tourists in Verona, modern readers/viewers of the play may find their assumptions shaped more by popular culture and romantic expectations than by the text. Looking at Shakespeare's play afresh or carefully for the first time can be a salutary and inspiring endeavor.
Fact Sheet about *Romeo and Juliet*

**Genre:** Romantic tragedy (or tragic romance)

**Date Written and First Played:** c. 1594-5

**Setting:** Verona and Mantua, Italy

**Length:** about 3000 lines (depending on edition), 87% verse and 13% prose; #6 in canon for amount of rhymed verse

**Longest Roles:** Romeo, Juliet (both over 500 lines), Friar Laurence

**Sources:** A long history of Italian versions of the story precedes its introduction into English by Arthur Brooke in *The Tragicall Historye of Romeus and Juliet* (1562). This text, much adapted, forms the basis of Shakespeare's play. Page 4 details Shakespeare's changes and strategy with the tale.

**Imagery:**
- intensified Petrarchan courtly love imagery
- light: sun, stars, fire, gunpowder, lightning, torches (and emotional "light" of beauty and love)
- sudden violence: bloodshed, storm, shipwrecked vessel

**Plot:** The Prince of Verona intervenes when servants re-ignite an old feud between the Capulet and Montague families. As a distraction, the love-sick Montague heir, Romeo, is invited by his cousin Benvolio and friend Mercutio to crash a Capulet feast in masks. There Romeo meets Juliet, the Capulet heir, who is being sought as a bride by Count Paris, the Prince's kinsman. Romeo later breaks away to woo Juliet at her balcony, and they secretly marry the next day.

A brawl in the street incited by Juliet's cousin Tybalt results in Mercutio's death and in Romeo's killing of Tybalt, for which act the Prince banishes him. To prevent her imminent wedding to Paris, Juliet and the Friar scheme to fake her death with a special sleeping potion so she can join Romeo in Mantua, but the plan goes awry when Romeo does not get the Friar's message.

Instead he returns to Verona to find Juliet's body in the Capulet tomb and, after killing Paris who challenges him there, then takes poison. Juliet awakens to find Romeo dead and stabs herself. On learning the truth of their dead children's love, the shocked and grief-stricken fathers reconcile.

**Things to Look and Listen For:**
- which generation the feud is more important to and why
- the nature of Romeo's crush on Rosaline and why he fixates on Juliet
- the nature of Romeo and Juliet's attraction—hormones? true love? teen defiance of parents and tradition? and their maturity levels
- the advice the young lovers get from adults—do adults make or advise better choices?
- why the action ends tragically; is it inevitable?
- whether secrecy is helpful or harmful
- the effect of the young male clan code

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*The first printed copy of the play, a pirated (bad text) quarto edition capitalizing on the play's popularity; a good quarto text was printed in 1599, the basis of the Folio in 1623*

*Zeffirelli’s young lovers in the 1968 film (Leonard Whiting and Olivia Hussey)*
Stories of divided lovers and of sleeping potions used to avoid marriage are ancient narrative devices well known in the Renaissance. Because the Middle Ages and Renaissance had no copyright law, authors did not "own" their work but freely rewrote and adapted extant tales. Collections of tales, such as Boccaccio's Decameron and Chaucer's Canterbury Tales, reshape and rewrite others' stories for their new context. By this method—which is a bit like a literary version of the game of "Gossip"—we get the Romeo and Juliet story passed down to Shakespeare.

### Earlier Italian Versions of the Tale: How the Story Grows

**Luigi da Porto, Hystoria nouellamente ritrouata di due Nobili Amanti** (c. 1530)

The scene is now Verona, and the scions of the two feuding families—the Montecchi and the Cappelletti—fall in love during carnival, Romeo forgetting his previous infatuation with another young woman.

- Romeo and Giulietta are secretly married by Friar Lorenzo, who dabbles in magic.
- Romeo kills Theobaldo Cappelletti in a brawl he tries to avoid, and while he is exiled in Mantua, Giulietta's family arranges her marriage to a count. The friar gives her a sleeping potion, but his messenger cannot find Romeo in Mantua.
- Romeo returns with a poison, takes it, and Giulietta wakes up and speaks with him before he dies. She refuses to enter a convent but instead stipples herself and dies.
- There are no characters like Mercutio or the Nurse in this tale.
- Da Porto says his tale shows "what great risks and what rash deeds lovers will commit in the name of love and in some cases their follies lead them even to death itself."

**Bandello, Novelle** (1554) and **Boaistuau Histoires Tragiques** (1559)

- Using the basic da Porto story, Bandello gives Romeo a mask for the ball and a rope ladder so he can visit 18-year-old Juliet before the marriage.
- A minor figure at the ball is named Mercutio.
- When Pierre Boaistuau translates this story into French, he adds the Apothecary and Romeo's death before Juliet awakes, after which she stabs herself. He does not seem to disapprove of the lovers' passion. Boaistuau's is the version Brooke adapts into English.

### Thinking about Masuccio's Story

The primary elements of the story are:
- a secret love and secret marriage
- a murder that leads to his banishment and the separation
- a communication failure
- the discovery of his beloved's tomb

Assess the difference for the story between being found and publicly executed versus killing oneself at the tomb; between joining a holy order and dying of a broken heart versus killing oneself beside the lover's dead body.

Watch how the elements and dynamics change as authors change the story. What are the implications of these changes?
Shakespeare's Source and Shakespeare's Version

Arthur Brooke, *The Tragicall Historie* (1562)
- Brooke's stated perspective on the tale is stern disapproval at the youths' impetuous, lustful passion and their failure to heed their parents. In his "Address to the Reader," he pleads to:
  - describe unto thee a couple of unfortunate lovers, thrilling themselves to unhonest desire, neglecting the authority and advise of parents and friends, conferring their principal counsels with drunken gossypes, and superstitious friers (the naturally fitte instruments of unchastitie) attempting all adventures of peryll, for th'attaynyng of their wished lust, usying auricular confession (the key of whoredome, and treason) for furtherance of their purpose, abusing the honorable name of lawfull marriage, the cloke of the shame of stolne contracts, finallye, by all meanes of unhonest lyfe, hastying to most unhappye deathes.
  (quoted from Bullough, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, underlining added)
- In the telling, however, Brooke still lets the love story emerge, making Juliet a 16-year-old with some skill at deception. Yet the fault, Brooke insists, is Fortune's, not the lovers'.
- His Nurse is a more fully-formed, talkative figure, and his Friar a virtuous and wise man. Tybalt and Paris appear just in time to be plot complications—to be killed or to propose wedlock to a Juliet already separated from banished Romeo.
- The time frame is nine months, so that the balcony scene is two weeks after the lovers first meet and the wedding two months before Tybalt's death.

How Shakespeare Alters Brooke
- Shakespeare radically shortens the time frame of Brooke's tale, giving the lovers a few days rather than almost a year together. The consequences of that choice greatly accelerate the drive of the action as well as the motivation and decision-making of the principals. The natural evolution of feelings and events now seems quick, intense, passionate, impulsive.
- He borrows Brooke's plot outline almost whole, but in his retelling he gives the story poetic brilliance and more dramatic force. Tybalt and Paris appear early to complicate the action; in fact, Capulet and Paris now discuss his marriage suit to Juliet before Romeo even learns about the Capulet party.
- Furthermore, Shakespeare takes another two years off Juliet's age—she is now about to turn 14, just about to enter womanhood. Her youth underlines her innocence.
- Shakespeare much expands the roles of the Nurse and Mercutio, and thereby increases the sensuality and bawdy in the play's verbal atmosphere, making the first half of the play consonant with the atmosphere of his romantic comedies.
- Shakespeare adds Mercutio's role in the Tybalt brawl of 3.1, Capulet's moving up the proposed day of marriage, and Paris's presence when a desperate Juliet seeks the Friar's aid as well as later at the tomb.
- Shakespeare adds texture; he gives us Peter the servant, Mercutio's banter about Rosaline after the party, and the musicians after the discovery of "dead" Juliet.
- He also considerably shortens the aftermath of the dead lovers' discovery by their families, for the bodies are themselves eloquent testimony enough.

Considering Shakespeare's Version of R&J
- Shakespeare makes some significant changes in the story for his play, and all of them are worth analyzing:
  - the shortened time frame
  - the plotting of the action
  - the enhanced characterization of Mercutio, the Nurse, and Tybalt
  - Juliet's age
  - the ending
  - the potential "message"

Brooke vs. Shakespeare
- Brooke sees the lovers as filled with "lust," "unhonest desire," and "unchastitie" in choosing a path of peril rather than the safer path of wise counsel (from parents, friends), and that their deaths come from their "unhonest" life. Does Shakespeare share this view?

For more information on Shakespeare's use of sources, see:
Genre Considerations with *Romeo and Juliet*

*Romeo and Juliet* lives in our cultural consciousness as one of the world's greatest love stories, as a play that begins comic and turns tragic, as a play filled with exquisite poetry, yet those generalized descriptions do not yet engage much of the detail that gives the play its greatness. The story of two households in fair Verona, both alike in dignity, gains its reputation from a richly diverse set of contrasts and interplays.

The consequences in *Romeo and Juliet* contrast with the casualness of its meetings; servants happen upon other servants in the street and brawl; two young people happen to meet at a dance and get married the next day; a young man joins his friends just as an enemy is looking for him, and two bodies lie dead shortly thereafter.

Comedy and tragedy blend in this play in larger quantities than is usual, even for Shakespeare. If the first two acts of *Romeo and Juliet* take on familiar rhythms of comedy—the wooing and wedding of young people, often against their parents' wishes—the nature and context of this action and set of attitudes live on the sharp edge of propriety. The bragging Capulet servant asserts he will thrust Montague's men from the wall and his maids to the wall—promising physical violence in each regard. The play opens with an eruption of bawdy and blood; these dynamics are the world in which the action lives, the world it must be shaped by or change (Unit 3).

**QUESTIONS for Discovery and Analysis**

- **Comedy:** In literature, comedy's traits are:
  - a group (society, family) gets divided or fractured
  - the action works to reunite the group
  - anyone not able to rejoin the group at the end is excluded
  - the protagonist is like us or worse in values and behavior
  - middle class and working class characters, not necessarily aristocrats as tragedy has, though Shakespeare often has a duke, a countess, or other aristocrat in his comedies
  - primary emotions aroused are sympathy and ridicule

  What parts of *Romeo and Juliet* seem comic—what actions, what characters, what dialogue? Make a list (citing act/scene). Notice that the literary definition of comedy says nothing about laughter, but is there laughter in R&J? Who, where, how?

  The society is definitely divided in the opening—how serious is the basis of that division? How easy or hard will it be to remedy? Is the society reunited in the end—can the ending in any sense be considered a comic ending?

- **Tragedy:** As a genre, tragedy involves:
  - an individual, usually of high status and position in the society in classical and Renaissance drama
  - the loss of something valued (honor, a beloved, life)
  - a protagonist like us or better (often ultimately better in his/her ability to accept responsibility for the climactic disaster)
  - primary emotions aroused are pity and fear (pity for suffering of others and fear that their fate/mistakes/flaws could be ours)

  When do serious, threatening elements of the play begin to emerge? Make a list (citing act and scene) of threats in action and decision and when they occur. Do such actions and decisions complicate or start to avalanche?
Shakespeare's Early View of Tragedy

_Romeo and Juliet_ comes from the first decade of Shakespeare's career as he establishes his name as a dramatist and poet in London. The play is traditionally dated 1594-96, which is called his "lyrical" period because many scholars feel the verse in these plays links to the poetry and ideas used in his sonnets and narrative poems, probably written 1592-93 while the theatres were closed due to outbreaks of plague. The fact that the tragedy bursts from blank verse into rhyme and also contains sonnets supports this belief.

Most of the tragedies in Shakespeare's first decade of writing are found among his English history plays—in the Wars of the Roses tetralogy, another saga of "two houses," here the Yorks and the Lancastrians, ending in _Richard III_, and later the "prequel" tetralogy ending with _Henry V_. His only two other tragedies have Roman subjects, the early revenge play, _Titus Andronicus_, and the later _Julius Caesar_.

In all these other plays the standard tragic elements are evident: there are protagonists of high political and social standing—kings, dukes, and generals—and the issues are those of state and family: ambition, betrayal, blindness to threat, and instability. The tragic figures scheme and lash out, suffer and lament as they come to see the emptiness or vulnerability of power and of their choices.

The Early Tragedies and Tragic Tradition

Shakespeare's Early Tragedies

- first tetralogy of English history plays, especially _Richard III_ (1590-93), politics, power, and war
- _Titus Andronicus_, a revenge tragedy, with politics
- _Richard II_, start of second tetralogy of English history plays (1595-99), politics, power, and a coup
- _Romeo and Juliet_ (1594-96)
- _Julius Caesar_ (1599), politics and assassination

In the Middle Ages, the Wheel of Fortune was also used to describe tragic action—that figures rise and fall as the wheel turns and the most unstable place to be is on high, for the next turn of Fortune pitches one down. This is a less individual view of tragedy, for it relates to all in high places, a more widespread or universal plight.

How _Romeo and Juliet_ Is Distinctive

Unlike Shakespeare's other early tragedies, _Romeo and Juliet_ has no traditional tragic protagonist, no central figure of state or military leadership. The most powerful figure is the Prince, who tries to keep order, but his is a smaller role, and the next most involved, powerful personages are Lord Capulet and Lord Montague. Romeo is not the equivalent of a Henry VI, a Duke of York, a Richard III, a Richard II, a Titus, or a Brutus.

So are two teenagers in love the tragic protagonists of this play, or are they its victims, since they are called "sacrifices" at the end? Could it be their families, their fathers, who bear responsibility, recognize it, and suffer the great loss? In this tragedy, unlike the others, the fact that the lovers are "star-crossed" would seem to undercut any effort they make. Perhaps his haste, his secrecy, his murder of Tybalt, and his despair at hearing of Juliet's "death" form Romeo's culpability, but Juliet murders no one; she simply marries the man she loves and tries to maintain her wedding vows under difficult conditions.

One must decide if violence or love drives the action more forcefully to its end, and whether the feud, the lovers, or fate is ultimately more responsible. The play is commonly called a tragedy, but in this case _how_ it is a tragedy poses more vexing questions about its tragic nature than do Shakespeare's other tragedies of the 1590s. Perhaps another literary context can offer additional perspectives on this issue.
The Tragic Romance

The romance was the most popular literary form of the Middle Ages, usually combining adventure with love and/or the supernatural, as seen in the many King Arthur tales of the English and French traditions. Adventures, often involving divided lovers, are common in romance—some ending happily with the reunion of lovers and families, and others, such as Tristan and Iseult or Chaucer’s Troilus and Criseyde, ending tragically. Romeo and Juliet gains a different clarity when seen in the context of the chivalric romance.

The romance tradition took plot-driven tales of adventure and added a greater psychological awareness of motive on the part of the characters. When lovers were featured, they explored their feelings and described them to the beloved. Stemming from the widespread influence of Ovid’s Amores and Metamorphoses, which depicted love as a “restless malady,” the idea of passionate and expressive love fed both the writers of romance and the French troubadours who developed the courtly love tradition so influential on Petrarch and subsequent love poetry. Shakespeare’s late plays, Pericles, Cymbeline, The Winter’s Tale, and The Tempest, are often called romances, and all use the happy-ending romance device of reunion; in Romeo and Juliet Shakespeare may follow the other path into tragedy.

Questions for Discussion and Analysis

• Whether one considers R&J a tragedy or a romance, the plot offers public action—the brawl, the feud, the duel, the proposed marriage—and the private—the lovers’ meetings, wedding, leavetaking, and reunion in death. Does tragedy emphasize the impact of the public action on the private? Greek tragedy is full of plays in which a public role disastrously trumps private considerations (as with Creon in Sophocles’s Antigone) or private passion that destroys or alters the public realm (Clytemnestra in Aeschylus’s Agamemnon). If R&J is considered tragedy, which world dominates its values and affects its ending? Who becomes the protagonist?

The romance shares the action—the public and private realms—but it highlights the discussion of love, the lovers’ private moments. Does R&J privilege the lovers over the play’s public context? If so, how and to what end? How do we, the audience, finally feel at the ending if the play is a tragic romance or a tragedy and what conclusions do we draw?

• If Romeo and Juliet are cultural icons of true love, does that suggest that we consider the play to be more a tragedy or more a romance?

WRITING ACTIVITY: The Juliet Club

• For years visitors have left love letters and letters seeking love advice at “Juliet’s house” in Verona. Thousands more letters are mailed to Juliet from all over the world. A group of about 15 volunteers, men and women, old and young, literate in a variety of languages, answer these letters, each and every one, by hand. They try to give good advice, and if the problem is difficult, they discuss the response. Discussing the problem is what Juliet, Romeo, and the writers of these letters do not do.

Write a letter from Juliet or Romeo seeking advice. Then swap letters and be a “Juliet Club” secretary, and handwrite a response to the letter you get, giving good advice.
Bloody + Bawdy = Tybalt + Mercutio

Blood and bawdiness, sexual innuendo and physical threats flood the first half of the play, driven by their two primary purveyors, Tybalt and Mercutio. These are the two talkers, threateners, and finally combatants and corpses whose deaths turn the promise of the secret marriage to great peril.

Talk is both vibrant and cheap in the early scenes of Romeo and Juliet. The young men are physically graphic with their weapons and very proud of their prowess, whether it be the battle of the sexes or brawling in the streets. The eroticism of violence and the near violent innuendo of eroticism are a juxtaposition that Shakespeare builds into the play as a social and human context.

Mercutio and Tybalt are two large, daring, graphic impulses in the play—they insist on their views, they conflict, and they die. Each provides the action with an essential element; one cannot have Romeo and Juliet without its violence, and one cannot have the play without its bawdy (though scores of highly edited high school texts have tried). Shakespeare juxtaposed these elements on purpose; they are as much a defining part of the young men and the society of Romeo and Juliet as the balcony scene. The Prince tries to control the violence with his own threat of violence; Mercutio's friends try to tell him he has gone too far in his sexual taunting and later in daring Tybalt. The various impulses prove difficult to control; instead, they escalate and form the counterpoise to the young lovers' passion. Many hot passions boil in the Verona's sultry July weather.

QUESTIONS for Discovery and Analysis

• Thinking about Tybalt, a Capulet:
  — What do we learn about Tybalt from his first appearance, the way he talks and acts? Does he balance or unbalance, calm or ignite the situation? What does he want and why? How does he try to get it?
  — How does Tybalt solve problems and challenges? Why does he take that course? What are his values? What is his place on a spectrum of reason and passion? on a spectrum of talk and action?
  — What are the characteristics of his talk? of his actions?
  — How does he fit in Verona society? How does he fit into the feud? Why does he take a group of Montagues to the Capulet party—is he mischievous, malicious, careless, daring?

• Thinking about Mercutio, a friend of Montagues and kin to the Prince:
  — ask the same first three questions above for Mercutio
  — How does he fit in Verona society? How does he fit into the feud? Why does he take a group of Montagues to the Capulet party—is he mischievous, malicious, careless, daring?

• Tybalt + Mercutio:
  — Why do Tybalt and Mercutio start their taunts? What is the basis of the taunts? Why does their confrontation escalate?
  — When and why do they change from verbal to physical violence? Must their swordplay be mortal? Is it inevitable?
  — What do the deaths of Tybalt and Mercutio mean to the action, verbal character, and consequences of the play? How and why?

• Mercutio + Queen Mab
  Mercutio's first defining moment is his Queen Mab "aria" describing influences on human brains when asleep. He is actually talking satirically about subconscious desires—the lover for sex, the lawyer for money, the soldier for war and valor. What are Romeo's real subconscious motivations in his love?
A Bloody, Bawdy Context for Love

Romeo vs. Mercutio on Love

Romeo uses the courtly love imagery of light and perfection for his beloved: "But soft, what light through yonder window breaks? / It is the east, and Juliet is the sun." Mercutio, however, just before that scene uses graphic sexual innuendo and often graphic gestures as well to "conjure" Romeo into revealing himself: "I conjure thee by Rosaline's bright eyes" and suggestively continuing to "her fine foot, straight leg, and quivering thigh, / And the demesnes that there adjacent lie...."

Juliet is thus a spiritual entity to Romeo and also, of course, a cause of hormonal overload when he asks her, "Oh, wilt thou leave me so unsatisfied?" though he explains that desire as his need for a true love vow. To Mercutio, desire is entirely sexual and his jesting mind has only one goal, as his gestures often indicate.

Bawdy in Juliet's Domestic World

While Juliet lives a more sheltered life than Romeo or her male kin, she, too, has a bawdy companion. Her nurse is an earthy, practical widow who has helped raise Juliet, and she has happy memories of her marriage and its physicality. When Lady Capulet mentions Juliet's marriage, the Nurse's focus lands where Mercutio's also does, so that both young lovers are surrounded by a vital, sexual ambience before they meet.

A Bloody, Bawdy Context for Love/ 2

The play needs both its bawdy and bloody elements graphically and daringly displayed to raise its questions about the society of Verona and to highlight the contrasting love of Romeo and Juliet—which is not bawdy in its sexual awareness nor violent toward others and which only gains consummation after marriage. Its only social "violence" lies in its secrecy from the couple's parents, but there is another adult on each side who knows and consents to the union. Romeo when defined by his relationship with Juliet is a peacemaker, when lured back into his relationship with Mercutio and Veronese youth, a murderer. Those are the vital issues from which Shakespeare shapes this provocative and uneasy tragedy and which his glorious poetry and prose give tremendous power.

QUESTIONS for Discovery and Analysis

• Compare/contrast Mercutio's influence on Romeo with the Nurse's on Juliet. How does each talk; what attitude toward life and love does each have; how does each view the young lover? Does this equation work—Mercutio : Romeo = Nurse : Juliet? What effect do their talk and influence have on the young lovers?

• What is the attitude toward love in the Capulet house?

• Romeo goes to the Capulet party after Benvolio tells him he should "examine other beauties" since Rosaline proves unresponsive, and Juliet is told she should consider meeting her mate/husband at the party. Are they thus predisposed to be attracted each other? How important is it that they talk to and kiss a stranger?

• While the Prince and the family patriarchs provide one power structure for the play, the play's atmosphere and energy are fed by the taunts, violent responses, and sexual energy and double entendres of everyone else. Which is more important and influential—the social hierarchy or the social context and ambience? Why?
Much is rightfully made of Romeo and Juliet's dialogue sonnet in 1.5, rhyming with the usual ababcdedecfgh scheme of Shakespeare's other sonnets. Rhyme is already an established element in this play, for Romeo strews couplets throughout his dialogue in 1.1 and 1.2, and in 1.4 adds the odd quatrain. Juliet has only seven lines of verse before 1.5, but three rhyme.

Early in 1.5 Romeo speaks couplets on seeing Juliet, and Tybalt protests in couplets about the Montague's presence. His last couplet, a threat, immediately precedes Romeo's first line to Juliet.

But in speaking to Juliet to beg a kiss, Romeo opens with an alternating rhyme quatrain, which Juliet mirrors in her reply, even echoing one of his rhymes. Then they speak single lines (the first ef), which Romeo caps by completing the pattern as he urges that "lips do what hands do." In single lines they then form the final couplet—an elegant piece of character interplay and imagery that makes "holy" what might at first appear "profane." Holiness is a frequent concept in the Renaissance courtly love sonnet, which puts the beloved on a pedestal as goddess or divine spirit:

**R:** If I profane with my unworthiest 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.

**J:** 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.

**R:** Have not saints lips, and holy palmers too?

**J:** Ay, pilgrim, lips that they must use in prayer.

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

**J:** Saints do not move, though grant for prayers' sake.

**R:** Then move not, while my prayer's effect I take.

The sonnet's ironic last two lines, "move not" while Romeo kisses her, exactly mirror and foreshadow their last kiss, when Romeo kisses the unmoving and seemingly dead body of Juliet.

**Analyzing Rhyme in Romeo and Juliet**

**IF the rhyme is within a single character's speech,** is the entire speech in rhyme, is it within a passage of several speeches in rhyme, or does the speech shift from blank verse into rhyme or vice versa in the midst of the speech? Speaking verse is already a heightened form; what effect does adding rhyme have? What does it imply about the thought being expressed?

**IF the rhyme is between characters,** who starts the rhyme and how long does it extend? Is it stichomythia (a series of one-liners) or several lines? Does rhyme imply agreement? How does the first speaker respond in idea and sound—is there continuation of pattern or a break?

The Chorus Sonnets

The second most famous sonnet in the play is the Chorus's opening speech, which uses its three quatrains and couplet to provide in three sentences an overview of action and characters—"ancient grudge," "new mutiny," "fatal loins," "star-crossed lovers," "death-marked love."

The sonnet that opens Act Two is seldom performed on stage (directors think it interrupts the flow of action), but it, too, offers some useful ideas—"bewitched by the charm of looks," "stole love's sweet bait from fearful hooks," and "temp're ring extremities with extreme sweet."

Discuss the role and ideas of these two sonnets and how they affect a reader's/audience's view of the coming action.
The Dramatic Structure of Scenes: Exploring Act One

How Shakespeare Builds Scenes

Shakespeare is a superb dramatic architect. Watching him work with the building blocks of drama, the scenes, is to watch a master of narrative, as is very apparent in Romeo and Juliet. Take the opening scene of the play, which gives us the larger context of the feud in Verona, shows the small spark that can ignite violence, and then refocuses onto individual issues. Shakespeare is especially good at opening scenes, using them to kick-start the action, to identify major characters and issues thematically, and to hook us into the conflict.

Act 1, Scene 1
- two Capulet servants banter
- they encounter two Montague servants
- as Benvolio and Tybalt enter, a fight breaks out
- the Prince insists on peace and reprimands Montague and Capulet
- Lord and Lady Montague ask Benvolio about Romeo
- Romeo and Benvolio discuss love

The structure of this scene is well balanced; it fills and then empties the stage. It has quiet moments, bawdy humor, courtly love imagery, and wild combat. Two young Capulet servants, posturing and bragging about their prowess with weapons and women, open the action. The scene likewise ends with a conversation between two young men, this time Montagues, in a more personal, but no less bawdy, discussion of love and frustration.

The first conversation develops into a confrontation between feuding houses, two servants facing off with two other servants until a mêlée breaks out—but only when a family member from each house appears. Tybalt incites the violence and Benvolio tries to stop it, thus setting up a dynamic that will repeat in 3.1. After a full-scale brawl, the Prince reestablishes order, threatens each house about such violence, and leaves with Capulet.

Thus the loud public moments are bracketed by smaller, quieter moments, and only at the very end of the scene do we meet a title character, Romeo, although we now know quite well the world in which he lives and how volatile is the feud in which he inevitably plays a part. The kind of sexual banter earlier shared between the servants Benvolio now uses to tease Romeo, but Romeo responds with the courtly love rhetoric of an unattainable mistress and a wounded, desire-ridden lover beset by the contradictions of unrequited love—a new verbal element in the play.

Having established this pattern, let’s watch how Shakespeare varies it for the rest of the act.
Structure of Scenes/ 2

Act 1, scene 2

- two men and a servant: Capulet and Paris discuss Paris meeting Juliet at the party
- two more men and the same servant: Benvolio and Romeo discuss Romeo meeting a new girl

The parallels here are unmistakable, both in terms of structure and subject matter. A Capulet first half becomes a Montague second half, just as in the first scene. The illiterate servant's guest list provides the means for Benvolio to learn the name of Romeo's beloved and gives him the perfect occasion to prescribe a remedy, "look on other beauties." Shakespeare, especially in his comedies, often portrays men's love as based on eyesight, and modern psychologists have proven him right in their studies of men's strong visual response to potential love objects.

Act 1, scene 3

- two women (Lady Capulet and the nurse) call in Juliet
- Lady Capulet tries to dismiss the nurse, but relents (it nearly becomes a mother/daughter scene)
- three women discuss Juliet's proposed marriage and the nurse's memories

After two predominantly male scenes, both set in the street, Shakespeare moves the third scene into the Capulet household with the women. The nurse ensures the dialogue remains bawdy with her memories of her husband's joking comfort to the hurt child ("thou wilt fall upon thy back"). Her final advice ("seek happy nights to happy days") also suggests sexuality has a vital place in domestic serenity.

The scene emphasizes Juliet's age and her being on the cusp between girl and woman. Her mother highlights Paris's social position, and we begin to sense how advantageous a marital alliance with the Prince's family might be to the Capulets. Juliet has by far the fewest lines in the scene, but we get a sense of her formal verbal respect for her mother and unabated affection for her nurse—and perhaps that she is a social pawn in the family's feud.

Act 1, scene 4

- young Montagues and Mercutio on the way to the Capulet party

The small all-Capulet scene is balanced by a small predominantly Montague scene back in the street, and if one of the Prince's kin is subject of the previous scene, another drives this scene; the Prince's young kinsmen are thus evenly divided between the houses.

Romeo provides the brakes to the group's acceleration toward the party. They have masks and are ready for a good time. Mercutio's mercurial temperament is quickly and thoroughly established; his exuberant and cynical imagination is displayed as well as his impatience with love or prudence. The "cure Romeo" regimen will succeed far beyond any of their expectations.
**Structure of Scenes/ Act 1, scene 5**

- servants scurry in preparation
- Capulet welcomes maskers and encourages dancing
- Capulet recalls own masking days
- Romeo sees Juliet
- Tybalt recognizes the presence of a Montague; Capulet reins in Tybalt's violent response
- Romeo talks with Juliet, interrupted by the nurse
- Romeo and Juliet learn each other's identity as the maskers leave

After three small scenes, Shakespeare returns to a large, social scene, now full of dancing rather than fighting. A fight could erupt if fiery Tybalt has his way, but instead love gets an opportunity. As in 1.1, the large scene also contains a series of smaller subscenes, especially Capulet with Tybalt and then Romeo with Juliet—the threat that permeates this world and then the unlikely love that emanates within it. We sense the trauma of 3.1's coming swordplay as well as the lyricism at the balcony in 2.2.

As we watch the unpredictable magic or fate that attracts Romeo and Juliet to each other, we see the forces—or fate or doom—that will interfere with their love.

The first act thus establishes a rhythm for the rest of the play: public eruptions versus duets and trios.

**Maskers at a Ball**

Shakespeare highlights the theme of hidden identity and hidden motives by introducing men in masks at the Capulet feast. The maskers include some daring enemies crashing a Capulet party, but even as Romeo first sees Juliet and expresses his love, his identity becomes known to Tybalt. Thus the love and the danger immediately intertwine. The idea of being masked opens a thematic issue as well, for the truth beneath the mask, appearance and reality, shapes much of the action that follows—the hidden marriage, the feigned agreement to marry Paris, and the feigned death that leads to the final real ones.

**Topics to Discuss and Analyze**

- Why is Romeo so attracted to a girl he doesn't know? Why is Juliet so attracted to a stranger at the party? Is it fate or the stars? Love at first sight? Lure of the unknown? Chemistry? Hormones? Being "on the lookout"? Meant to be? Chance?

Make a case for what contributes to or prompts their connection on each side and back it up with details from the play. How does the basis of this initial connection affect their subsequent experience?

- Names can tell us a lot in our world—a Kardashian, a Rockefeller, a Kennedy, a Manning, family names that carry traditions. Can a name be a burden? Track Romeo's identity and name issues, such as "This is not Romeo; he's some other where" (1.1.197-8) or "deny thy name" (2.2) and decide what they mean.

**Group Project on Dramatic Structure**

Continue this analysis of the play's scene structure by assigning each of the remaining four acts to a group and letting them discover and report the way the scenes are shaped for dynamic, issue, character, and theme, building through the act, and what conclusions they draw.
Larger Issues of Dramatic Structure: Shaping Forces/1

Shaping Relationship and Action
The dynamics of the city-state and its citizens and of family and friendship units shape the drive of the play's first half. They set the goals of peaceful interactions, productive social alliances, and normative behavior for lords, lads, and ladies alike, all goals which the action systematically subverts and seems to want to subvert. The violence wants to erupt in public; the love wants to consummate, even secretly. Later the supportive role of society and family is denied the lovers in the play's second half, leaving the two in an isolation that makes the love bond not only their most important but their only bond and its loss the seeming loss of everything, life's meaning itself.

Montagues and Romeo
When the action begins with yet another violent eruption of Montague/Capulet animosity in Verona, the Montagues' first concern is for their son Romeo. Alone heir amid the unpredictability of violence is very vulnerable; if "old" Montague responds to the call, surely Romeo will. The fact that Benvolio responds and Romeo doesn't in the first scene allows us to see Romeo as different, perhaps different on the small scale of being too preoccupied with his own lovelorn depression, perhaps different on a larger scale of responsibility that Benvolio seems to share, a view of stopping rather than fueling the violence. Since the Montague servants fight the Capulets, the issue of who and what keeps the feud alive is also raised. The lords are quick to respond, but at first the younger Montagues each fight for peace, not feud, in both 1.1 and 3.1 (but they are fighting in each case, albeit preventatively).

Capulets and Juliet
The Montagues want to protect and sustain Romeo; the Capulets likewise want to sustain Juliet, which at the moment is also a way of sustaining themselves socially and gaining leverage in the feud if they can ally with the Prince's family. The "cure Romeo" movement parallels the "marry Juliet" movement, and all the forces on each side unite until the two movements intersect at the Capulet ball in a mutual success that is also unforeseen, unseen, and unstoppable—Romeo is cured and Juliet will be married. The lovers now have their own trajectory, unknown by any but the Nurse and the Friar and perhaps Balthazar. The private reality within the public/social world defines their focus with the balcony scene, the wedding scene, the farewell scene, and the "reunion" in the tomb. Yet they are still within the public/social world and can be banished for murdering within a duel or still be married to Paris. Each lover tries to protest cryptically but keeps the fatal secret, fatal because secret.

(continued on next page)
The Younger Generation on Its Own

Tybalt wants to fight at the Capulet party, but Capulet prevents him, in fact, forbids him, commending Romeo. Tybalt waits a few hours and makes his own decision about the outrage; he challenges Romeo. Thus within hours of the party both the violence and the love become matters of assertive individual action and initiative. The younger generation take events into their own hands; they marry or kill each other, thrusting the action into a vortex of crisis.

The society and family, again radically split, cannot sustain what it is ignorant of, what it cannot even imagine. The Prince might join the Friar in welcoming the potential of the lovers’ union; perhaps Capulet might consider stepping beyond the feud for his newly wedded daughter if Montague would consider it (and if Lady Capulet would let him, now that her kinsman Tybalt has been slain).

We cannot pursue but only regret the “what ifs” of this play; there are so many, and they reach beyond prejudice to simple ticks of the clock—Friar John just being locked in the plague-suspected house, Juliet awaking just a moment after Romeo poisons himself, the Friar arriving just too late as well, and the watch arriving to frighten the Friar just at the crucial moment for Juliet. Every possible avenue of escape is closed; looking back from the end it can almost seem to be the hand of Fate preventing any other option in the rush toward death.

The sight of Romeo trying to take in news of his banishment or later leaving Juliet’s room alone, the sight of Juliet confronting the Friar, dagger in hand (just as Romeo had been the day before in that very room) or sending mother and nurse away to confront the vial alone—these moments focus the action tightly on the young people, now acting with very few anchors except their love. They are swept up in social actions that cannot fathom their secret marriage, polarized by a context their own marriage denies. Death fills the stage in the second half of the play—the wedding party enters to find a “dead” Juliet and then the families rush to the tomb to find both lovers still warm, still bleeding, newly dead.

Sir John Gilbert illustrates news of Romeo’s banishment and Juliet’s isolation after news of proposed marriage to Paris

Discussing Then and Now

• Are the social and generational views portrayed in the play different from those in contemporary society?
• Does the younger generation accept the allegiances and biases of its elders or critique them? Or is their world different?
• What do family identity and loyalty mean in our world? Are there modern equivalents of the play’s feud?
• How does the younger generation respond to challenge and crisis—with careful reasoning or with more quickly triggered emotion? Are generalizations about this aspect of youthful behavior accurate? Compare their “heat” to their parents’? What is the play’s/ society’s temperature?
• Do Romeo and Juliet become their own separate family in the play? Is it a problem or solution for Verona’s fractured society? Are young people problems or potentials?
The Traditional View of Marriage

The conventional view of the Renaissance family was patriarchal, a miniature version of the Renaissance church and state. The father rules, and in fact legally owns, his kin, and he has the power to determine their present and future, their lives and well-being.

Most pertinent to the play is that fathers in wealthy families expected to arrange their children's weddings, for marriage was the basis of major economic alliances during the Middle Ages and Renaissance. Between royal families, where betrothals were sometimes arranged between infants, such alliances were matters of foreign policy—and the resulting relationships often unromantic. Love was not considered the defining ingredient of a strong Renaissance marriage; economic stability and family alliances were far more important. Love was seen as far too unstable an emotion on which to base so important a relationship as marriage.

Changing Views

During Shakespeare's time, however, the social understanding of the basis of marriage was changing. The Puritans believed in "companionate marriage," that the two members of the union should be spiritually compatible and personally able to be friends and partners. Fathers often gave their progeny veto rights over prospective spouses, though many still arrived at the church to meet their life partners for the first time at the altar.

Weddings in Shakespeare's Plays

In his comedies, which reflect the age-old comic tradition, Shakespeare's young lovers often choose their own partners, with some objections from comically blocking fathers. While Kate the shrew objects to her arranged marriage with Petruchio, she goes through with it, while her seemingly compliant sister Bianca elopes with the man of her choice, Lucentio, in The Taming of the Shrew.

In A Midsummer Night's Dream Hermia loves Lysander despite her father's preference for Demetrius and his insistence that she marry him; she too chooses to elope rather than marry another man. A host of suitors surround young Anne Page in The Merry Wives of Windsor, but she elopes with Fenton while the candidates preferred by each of her scheming parents are foiled.

In his other early tragedies, marriage is not a guarantee of happiness. In Titus Andronicus, one "stolen" marriage lasts only a day before murder and rape divide the newlyweds, while another marriage is an opportunistic step toward power and revenge. In the early history plays, the wedding that bridges 1 Henry VI and 2 Henry VI is disastrous, as are all the other weddings in that series—impulsive indulgences or manipulative ploys.

Many critics recognize that the first half of Romeo and Juliet fits Shakespeare's standard approach to romantic comedy—multiple suitors for a young woman's hand, with the scheming or secret lover often winning out over more public and parentally-approved suitors. What needs to be tamed this time, however, is not the bride but the outbreaks of violence spawned by the ancient feud. Like the old law of Athens that threatens Hermia, did Oberon and Puck not intervene in the forest, a past beyond the lovers' control shapes the present in Romeo and Juliet, and the present denies their future a comic ending.

Topics for Analysis

- Examine how Lord Capulet handles Juliet's marriage prospects. Does he woo Paris as much as Paris woos him to wed Juliet? Who does Paris spend more time with—Lord Capulet or Juliet? What does that suggest?
- What are Lord Capulet's assumptions of power and position as he discusses Juliet's engagement and rejection of it in 3.5? How does he view Juliet and her place?
- Does Lady Capulet discuss the idea of marriage any differently than her husband when with him or Juliet?
Shakespeare bookends the world of his young lovers with a Prince and a Friar. Each man uses the authority of his office to try to end the feud, which both see as counterproductive to peace and prosperity for Verona and its influential families.

The Prince publicly orders the violence to stop and threatens punishment and penalties on Capulet and Montague should it recur. He uses force to control the present that has been so strongly shaped by past virulence; he uses the "stick." The Friar uses the "carrot," for he sees that a future defined by a loving bond between Romeo and Juliet just might get Montague and Capulet to rethink their enmity, especially once this Catholic marriage is consummated.

Invoking belief in civil order or spiritual injunction, both power figures use death threats as a means of clarification and attention-getting. The Prince announces, "If ever you disturb our streets again / Your lives shall pay the forfeit of the peace" (1.1.96-97). The Friar, who uses a secret wedding to effect his peace plan, employs a feigned death to give it continued hope of succeeding. He does not at this time use his other potent force, the fact of the wedding, to attempt to defuse the rivalry, perhaps feeling the death of Tybalt has stoked rather than damped the blazing passions—or perhaps feeling his secret action might be culpable if revealed. The loss of a child might shock Capulet into welcoming her back alive even if married to a Montague.

But the Prince and the Friar must deal with several passions in this tragedy, love and hate, and the incendiary needs of passion insist that two corpses in the middle of the action are not enough: there must be four more. Only when the future is obliterated in a tomb can the past too be laid to rest—"all are punished."

Social Forces in the Play: The Prince and the Friar

Plants: What Not to Eat

General rule of thumb is to avoid plants with these traits unless you know for sure what it is because many plants that can be used on the skin are toxic if ingested:

- Milky or discolored sap
- Spines, fine hairs, or thorns
- Beans, bulbs, or seeds inside pods
- Bitter or soapy taste
- Dill, carrot, parsnip, or parsley-like foliage
- "Almond" scent in the woody parts and leaves
- Grain heads with pink, purplish, or black spurs
- Three-leaved growth pattern

Aftermath: For Discussion

- In the tomb the Prince questions the Friar, Romeo's servant, and Paris's man, and having gathered oral evidence and Romeo's letter to his father, lists the dead and decrees "all are punished," as if these dead bodies are the final result. But thirteen lines later, in the last speech of the play, the Prince adds, "Some shall be pardoned, and some punished." Who at this point deserves pardon and who punishment, and why? With so great a personal loss, what greater governmental or religious consequences are required?

- The Prince's statement—like the Friar's first public comment at the tomb, that he can "impeach and purge" himself—implies a need for responsibility. In the puzzle of interlocking pieces of motive and what Shakespeare in the prologue calls "star-crossed" and "misadventured" action, assign relative degrees of responsibility. What or who is most responsible for this tragedy?
It may seem that in 2.4 Mercutio will go out of his way to insult Tybalt about anything, including his fencing moves, but the way Shakespeare builds Mercutio's views actually embodies a long debate going on in London in the mid-1590s about which fencing style was better—the Italian or the English. Tybalt is associated with the flashy Italian style, whereas in his approach Mercutio is the more solid "English" citizen of Verona.

In Elizabethan London, the Italian fencing masters had carried the day; they were all the rage, and Shakespeare's friend and patron, Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southhampton, had an Italian fencing master about the time Shakespeare wrote the play. But all the Italian imports did not impress one Englishman, George Silver, who wrote a protest called Paradoxes of Defense in 1599, followed by a technical manual, Brief Instructions upon My Paradoxes of Defence. His argument is that a fight with short swords between capable combatants can be nimble, dangerous, and thrilling without hurt, whereas with the longer rapiers, used mostly for thrusting, it is impossible to avoid bodily harm.

Silver's main rival was the Italian Vincentio Saviolo, whose two books appeared in 1595. Texts of these manuals are available transcribed online at:
http://bestoflegends.org/swash/rapier.html

So Tybalt is not only "in your face" verbally but also in the way he uses his blade and body as he fences, full of quick moves and thrusts, one of which wounds Mercutio to the death.

**Topics for Research and Discussion**

- Did Shakespeare choose rapier fights for 3.1 so they would be deadly? Is the purpose of the bout a display of skill or an attempt to harm? Should we know survival is far less certain with this particular weapon, as Renaissance audiences may well have known?
- To consider Silver's view of the two styles of fencing, one emphasizes skilled combat with a short sword and survival, while the other emphasizes style with a rapier but winning at all costs—the "thrust" view as opposed to Silver's "blow and thrust" in combination. Does this difference also describe characters and situations in the play?
- Research the debate between rapier and short sword, Italian style and English style fencing in the Renaissance. How does that debate affect the action of the play and our view of it?
Shakespeare's Language: Romeo and Courtly Love Poetry

**Courtly Love Imagery**

The Romeo we first meet in the play, morose and “out of her favor where I am in love,” is an unrequited lover consumed by desire and pining for an unresponsive Rosaline, in other words, the standard courtly lover of medieval romance and of hundreds of Renaissance sonnets.

The literary tradition known as courtly love emerged in the Middle Ages, idealizing the behavior of knights and ladies attracted to one another. Given the predominance of economic arranged marriages, individual attraction or love outside marriage could occur. Whether courtly love was ever a matter of practical behavior, whether—as one theory suggests—it was designed to control or re-channel impulses at home while lords and knights were absent at the Crusades or—as another offers—an aristocratic game, whether it acknowledged or fostered adultery, its basis recognizes that men pursue women and vice versa. The nature of that “love” can be both physical and psychological/spiritual; consequently, the courtly love tradition tries to focus the physical reality into spiritual goals.

Barbara Tuchman describes the process of courtly love in her book, *A Distant Mirror*:

• the lover is attracted to the lady, usually by seeing her
• he worships her from afar
• he declares his devotion to her
• she virtuously rejects him
• he pledges his virtue and eternal loyalty
• his unsatisfied desire makes him feel lovesick and near death
• he enacts heroic deeds to prove his worthiness and to win his lady's love
• the secret love is consummated
• the lovers engage in endless adventures and subterfuges to avoid detection

This process was famously put into poetic form by the Italian poet Petrarch in the 14th century in a series of 14-line poems he called little songs or sonnets, all describing his adoration of Laura—a woman who may or may not have existed and to whom he may or may not have ever spoken. He embodied the tensions of courtly love in a series of images describing the contradictions and confusions of such emotion, including the hunt (love as pursuit), the ship/star (lover with or without sextant navigation: lost or guided), love as disease, and many others, all of which influence English Renaissance poetry.

**The 16th-Century English Context**

Early in the sixteenth century Sir Thomas Wyatt translated and adapted some of Petrarch's sonnets into English. His “Sonnet 12” [*Petrarch's Rima 134*] expresses the paradoxes of love, “I find no peace and all my war is done, / I fear and hope, I burn and freeze like ice...,” and many other English poets following in his Petrarchan wake explored that paradoxical emotional state called love—“Likewise displeaseth me both death and life, / And my delight is causer of this strife.”

The English poets both used and critiqued Petrarch's courtly love, for the English poetic tradition was in its own Renaissance as Petrarch's ideas were introduced. Many English poets used his rhyme scheme of octave and sestet—the abbaabba cdcdcd (or cdecde) of the Italian sonnet—but others adapted it into quatrains, a scheme more friendly to an uninflected language—abab cdcd efef gg, the English sonnet used by Shakespeare.

In playing with Petrarch's attitudes and images, English poets used his description like a role to enact, then found their own voices and psychological truths in such sequences as Sir Philip Sidney's dazzling *Astrophil and Stella* [i.e. Stargazer and Star, a conventional image for lover and beloved] and Edmund Spenser's *Amoretti*, which he wrote about wooing and wedding his second wife.
"I Find No Peace" by Sir Thomas Wyatt
I find no peace, and all my war is done,
I fear and hope, I burn and freeze like ice,
I fly above the wind, yet can I not arise,
And naught I have, and all the world I seize on.
That looseth nor locketh holdeth me in prison,
Nor letteth me live nor die at my devise,
And yet of death it giveth me occasion.
Without eyen I see, and without tongue I plain;
I desire to perish, and yet I ask health;
I love another, and thus I hate myself;
I feed me in sorrow, and laugh in all my pain.

"Whoso List to Hunt" by Sir Thomas Wyatt
Whoso list to hunt, I know where is an hind,
But as for me, alas, I may no more.
The vain travail hath wearied me so sore,
I am of them that farthest cometh behind.
Yet may I, by no means, my wearied mind
Draw from the deer, but as she fleeth afore,
Fainting I follow. I leave off, therefore,
Since in a net I seek to hold the wind.
Who list her hunt, I put him out of doubt,
As well as I, may spend his time in vain.
And graven with diamonds in letters plain
There is written, her fair neck round about,
"Noli me tangere, for Caesar's I am,

"Sonnet 71" by Sir Philip Sidney
Who will in fairest book of Nature know
How Virtue may best lodged in beauty be,
Let him but learn of Love to read in thee,
Stella, those fair lines, which true goodness show.
There shall he find all vices' overthrow,
Not by rude force, but sweetest sovereignty
Of reason, from whose light those night-birds fly;
That inward sun in thine eyes shineth so.
And not content to be Perfection's heir
Thyself, dost strive all minds that way to move,
Who mark in thee what is in thee most fair.
So while thy beauty draws the heart to love,
As fast thy Virtue bends that love to good;
"But, ah," Desire still cries, "give me some food."

Wyatt's poem (like the Petrarch sonnet it adapts) uses many of the standard paradoxes and contradictions of the lover's unrequited, frustrated love. Have the musicians in your class take some of these images and write a song for Romeo's first entrance.

Wyatt based this sonnet on Petrarch's Rima 190, but he also made it his own. He unfortunately fell in love with Anne Boleyn when she first came to court, only to see her wooed by King Henry VIII. His sonnet is far more pointed and poignant than Petrarch's as a result.

Hunting the "deer" is actually a way of pursuing the beloved, the "dear," so a simple hunting story quickly becomes a love story in the imagery. Watch how such layers work in the play.

Virtue is capitalized but beauty is not; how does that distinction support the point of Sidney's sonnet? Which other words are capitalized? What role do they play?

Describe how Sidney argues the comparative value of physical and spiritual values and love in this sonnet.

How does Sidney use light/dark imagery here? How does he use the sun to describe Stella (and compare that to Romeo's image for Juliet in 2.2)?

Why does Desire get the last word? What is the effect of that; what does the poet feel?
Romeo, Juliet, and the Courtly Love Tradition

Romeo and Conventional Imagery
As we meet Romeo, he embodies the role of spurned courtly lover perfectly. His feelings are rife with courtly love imagery, and his emotions veer erratically. During his first scene he spouts standard courtly love imagery—the oxymorons and paradoxes of love—to describe both the feud and his own personal agony:

Why then O brawling love, O loving hate,
O anything of nothing first create,
O heavy lightness, serious vanity,
Misshapen chaos of well-seeming forms,
Feather of lead, bright smoke, cold fire,
sick health,
Still-waking sleep, that is not what it is!
This love feel I that feel no love in this.

In his agony, Romeo perceives his altered state: "Tut, I have lost myself, I am not here. / This is not Romeo; he's some other where" (1.1.197-8), but is at a loss to remedy it. Benvolio, Mercutio, and Friar Laurence all try to heal or counsel Romeo, Mercutio with bawdy and Benvolio with jests and advice, but Romeo swears he cannot be healed, that is until he sees Juliet.

Romeo as unrequited lover exudes the conventional imagery, which feeds the view that he is playing at being in love with Rosaline rather than actually being in love. Yet Romeo as newly enamored lover of Juliet also employs the courtly images to his advantage.

His hand-holding sonnet at the Capulet ball uses the idea of the beloved's divine nature for the somewhat more self-interested purpose of begging a kiss. Leaving the ball he perceives her as his "soul," again using the spiritual image for the female beloved. Below her balcony, his courtly images of light abound, "It is the East, and Juliet is the sun," continuing his image upon first seeing her, "O, she doth teach the torches to burn bright!" Again he disavows his identity, "Call me but love, and I'll be new baptiz'd; / Henceforth I never will be Romeo." All the denial of identity only reinforces it, however, for he is Romeo, hence the complications of their love.

Real Love-as-Death: Speech + Action
In living the imagery, Romeo and Juliet also involve themselves in the love-is-life/not-having-love-is-death idiom of the courtly love ethic. In telling Benvolio of Rosaline's refusals Romeo says, "She hath forsworn to love, and in that vow / Do I live dead that live to tell it now." Yet with Juliet, child of his family's enemy, the death threat is always more real, more potent, not a figurative lovesick image. As she warns him against being found by her kinsmen in the garden, he pledges, "My life were better ended by their hate / Than death prorogued [postponed], wanting of thy love." Juliet shares this view in 3.2, misunderstanding as Romeo the Nurse's grief for Tybalt, "Vile earth, to earth resign; end motion here, / And thou and Romeo press one heavy bier!"

Romeo's response to news of his banishment is to draw a weapon to cut out his name: "O, tell me, friar, tell me, / In what vile part of this anatomy / Doth my name lodge? Tell me, that I may sack / The hateful mansion." Likewise, Juliet's response to her father's demand that she marry Paris is first to beg her mother to delay the marriage "Or, if you do not, make the bridal bed / In that dim monument where Tybalt lies," for she knows "myself have power to die." With the Friar she pulls a dagger on herself, preferring death to betrayal of her wedding vow. Having sanctioned the courtly image of death as the only option to love so many times verbally, it is but a short step to the seemingly inevitable act in the Capulet tomb when they each face the corpse, apparent and real, of their beloved.

Death is a common theme in courtly love poetry, but as a metaphor rather than a reality. Olivia Hussey and Leonard Whiting in the tomb in Zeffirelli's film.
Leo and Claire Meet Shakespeare's Language—and Like It

Young Hollywood stars are not usually trained as classical actors conversant with the techniques for performing Shakespeare's poetry and depth of character. Yet in 1996 when Leonardo DiCaprio and Claire Danes took on the roles of the famous lovers in Baz Luhrmann's film *Romeo + Juliet*, they found that the language was not a problem but, in fact, an asset.

Leonardo di Caprio said,

“At first, I thought I would have to put on an English accent and try a sort of Affected Shakespeare Thing …. But, Baz [Luhrmann, the film's director] explained that he wanted to make it very understandable and clear, and after working with him awhile, I began to feel more comfortable with it. There is a lot of beauty in each word and when I began to dissect sentences, I'd find meanings referring to something way back in the script, or words with double and triple meanings. So I really had to know what I was talking about to do the words justice; but at the same time, I had to make it conversational. That was a challenge and different from anything I’d ever done -- and I liked it.”

Claire Danes agreed:

“The words can be very helpful because they are so descriptive and so absolutely on the button of the emotion you’re supposed to be playing … Although the feelings are very intense, his words are so powerful that he makes the job of the actor fairly easy if you allow yourself to relax and understand them fully. **There are no missing pieces in the writing.** In fact, when I read scripts for other movies now, I’m ridiculously disappointed. It’s impossible to measure up to Shakespeare.”

For more information on the Baz Luhrmann film, which originally set out to film in Miami but switched to Mexico City, go to:

http://www.romeoandjuliet.com/players/prod.html

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**What They Learned**

- **words and their meanings**—Shakespeare, like most great poets, uses language to its fullest potential, so that several layers of meaning may be relevant at one time. Knowing a word's possible meanings in the Renaissance means opening not a modern dictionary, which records our language use, but the *Oxford English Dictionary*, which is an historical dictionary in which you can find what meanings were in use in or before Shakespeare's time
- **thematic use of language**—that Shakespeare uses words in patterns and clusters throughout the play
- **that Shakespeare's use of language is intense**, but as it is fully explored, it is powerful and evocative
Astrology for Star-Crossed Lovers

Banished Romeo learns of Juliet’s death from his servant and cries out, “I defy you, stars.” Can the stars be defied? From the opening we are told the lovers are "star-crossed," and at times they feel a contrary fate shaping events around them.

Astrology, the study of the relationship between planets, stars, and human lives, is an ancient human interest. After all, prehistoric structures such as Stonehenge were aligned to the summer solstice, and everything from bird innards to comets were scrutinized for insight into human destiny. Horoscopes are still with us, so like the playwright, let's examine the signs for the young lovers.

The Grand Irrationality

The action of the play takes place in mid-July about two weeks before Juliet’s 14th birthday on Lammas Eve, July 31. During several recent Julys, as apparently in the 1590s, the summer stars were anchoring a conjunction of Neptune, Pluto, and other heavenly bodies which is known as The Grand Irrationality. The name proves all too apt for the play’s action, for it places the lovers "in a period of more pressure, more choices, more hard edges, and more weirdness that propels us into a greater destiny" [Aquarius Papers website].

When the Grand Irrationality occurs, it is described as a time to "expect shifts, changes, forks in the road, irrational or compulsive behavior in self or others…," all of which describes the action of the tragedy, as well as "the sense that forces beyond our control are at work." Shakespeare may have chosen his astrological setting for the play very carefully, for during a mid-July Grand Irrationality there is a cosmic sense that "something big is coming."

Renaissance Views

Not everyone in the Renaissance felt guided by astrology, and many felt that those who choose the good are not determined by the stars.

Analyze Romeo's 1.4.106-13 comment on stars vs. divine power in this light.

For other Renaissance views, see: http://www.chartplanet.com/html/shakespeare.html

One time that a person might have a star chart done was at birth, when parents (or others, if the person were highly placed) might want to gain a sense of the person's future prospects and challenges.

What Does Star-Crossed Mean?

In addition to suggesting doom for the relationship, “star-crossed” might mean that the lovers’ signs are not compatible, that they are not a good fit astrologically. Juliet, we know, is a Leo, so anyone who is a Gemini, an Aries, or a Sagittarius would be a good match, whereas a Virgo, a Scorpio, a Taurus, a Cancer, another Leo, a Libra, a Capricorn, an Aquarius, or a Pisces would not be an ideal match.

July 31 birthdays—Juliet shares her birthday with J. K. Rowling and Harry Potter, Wesley Snipes, Geraldine Chaplin, and Alexander the Great.


Topics for Research and Discussion

• Given the signs that match or do not match Juliet’s (see above), what hints does the script offer about Romeo’s astrological sign? Which of his character traits match which signs best? Many online sites provide sign definitions in terms of character, such as http://nuclear.ucdavis.edu/~rpicha/personal/astrology

Be sure to copy the address of any sites you use.


• What is the difference between the stars shaping one’s destiny and being in the hands of a divinity? or believing in arbitrary disaster? or the contemporary motto, "it happens"? With what values do we assess the action of Romeo and Juliet today?
About Quotations
The Prologue sonnet forewarns us that doom lurks. Shakespeare keeps the sense of foreboding alive in the text through the early part of the action.

Shaping the Tragedy: Some Quotations to Consider

**Analyze** each of the following phrases or lines for thematic import, often on several levels or for several different characters or situations. Find others.

"From forth the fatal loins of these two foes
A pair of star-crossed lovers take their life" (Chorus. 1.0)

"You know not what you do." (Benvolio, 1.1)

"You men, you beasts..." (Prince, 1.1)

"Your lives shall pay the forfeit of the peace." (Prince, 1.1)

"But he ...
Is to himself—I will not say how true,
But to himself so secret and so close...
Could we but learn from whence his sorrows grow,
We would as willingly give cure as know." (Montague, 1.1)

"Here's much to do with hate, but more with love." (Romeo, 1.1)

"Tut, man, one fire burns out another's burning...
Take thou some new infection to thy eye,
And the rank poison of the old will die." (Benvolio, 1.2)

"...my mind misgives
Some consequence yet hanging in the stars
Shall bitterly begin his fearful date
With this night's revels, and expire the term
Of a despisèd life within my breast
By some vile forfeit of untimely death.
But He that hath the steerage of my course
Direct my suit!" (Romeo, 1.4)

"My only love sprung from my only hate!" (Juliet, 1.5)

"Can I go forward when my heart is here?" (Romeo, 2.1)

"Do thou but close our hands with holy words,
Then love-devouring death do what he dare;
It is enough I may but call her mine." (Romeo, 2.6)

"These violent delights have violent ends..." (Friar, 2.6)

"For now, these hot days, is the mad blood stirring" (Benvolio, 3.1)
Resources for Teachers and for Further Study

- **Canadian Interactive Folio Romeo and Juliet**: annotated hypertext and video/audio clips—a excellent and easy site for reading the play with easy access to word meanings and video excerpts, @ http://www.canadianshakespeares.ca/folio/folio.html

- **Mr. William Shakespeare and the Internet**: a superb site for links and information @ http://shakespeare.palomar.edu and for teachers, the "Education" section has course and lesson plans, materials, and educational links

- **The Electronic Shakespeare**: another comprehensive site for Shakespeare resources online with lots of links, @ http://www.wfu.edu/~tedforrl/shakespeare

- **The Shakespeare Resource Center**: a brief essay and a list of excellent links to useful websites about Elizabethan England, the monarchy, and other topics, @ http://www.bardweb.net/england.html

- **Renaissance: The Elizabethan World** has 85 pages of detail on aspects of Elizabethan life in its compendium. Worth the look to see how Elizabethans lived, @ http://compendium.elizabethan.org and the main site at: http://www.elizabethan.org

- **For teachers new to the play**, there is also a host of websites with lesson support, such as the following two, which have detailed close-reading, text-based study questions, @
  
  http://www.newi.ac.uk/englishresources/workunits/alevel/shakes/romjul/romjulstudyunitall.html
  
  http://www.lifestreamcenter.net/DrB/Lessons/RomJul/index.htm

- **Shakespeare Set Free** from the Folger Library has a volume subtitled *Teaching Romeo and Juliet*, edited by Peggy O'Brien (NY: Washington Square Press), which contains elaborate lesson plans on this play and also *Macbeth* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

The kiss that concludes the 1.5 sonnet wooing in the Zeffirelli film
(Olivia Hussey, Leonard Whiting)
Additional Activities

**ART**
- **Design** the simplest, starkest poster image that tells the story of the play. Decide what the story is, then include font, layout, and graphic in your storytelling.

**BOTANY AND PHARMACY**
- In his fascination with plants, Friar Laurence seems to be a cross between a master gardener, a botanist, and a medical chemist. He is especially focused on plants that can both cure and kill, depending on how they are used or which part.
- **Research** which plants fit this category and how they are used today.
- How apt an image for human nature is Friar's Laurence's plant analogy?
- **Research** how many concoctions can effectively simulate death in humans. What potion might the Friar have given Juliet?
- **Research** what potion the Apothecary might have given Romeo to bring on near instant death, just long enough to speak 16 syllables.
- How important an image is poison for what happens to the lovers in the play?

**FILM/ PERIOD DESIGN**
- **Watch** the Romeo and Juliet films by Franco Zeffirelli and Baz Luhrmann. The first is set in the early Italian Renaissance in a real Italian town; the second is contemporary, filmed mostly in Mexico City but referring to an American city such as Miami.
- **Analyze** the assets and liabilities of each setting for a modern audience. How does each change the story? What values are important in each world? Who are Romeo and Juliet and what threatens them in each world? How "Italian" is the story? How "American"?

**FILM/ INTERPRETATION**
- **Watch** one or both of the Romeo and Juliet films by Franco Zeffirelli and Baz Luhrmann.
- What is the director's take of the story? Who are the tragic protagonists? What shapes the action? Who is responsible for what happens? How do you know?
- **Watch West Side Story** as a modern take on the Romeo and Juliet story. What difference does the music and dance make? Are we surprised to learn that R&J is also a ballet? Why would that work?

**PSYCHOLOGY**
- Shakespeare makes a point of Romeo's and Juliet's youth. **Research** current science on the nature of the adolescent brain. Which mental processes are fully mature? Which mental processes are still maturing? How do adolescents respond to stress? to threat? to hormonal changes and an awareness of themselves as gendered/sexual beings? How fast are their reactions?
- How independent are adolescents? How bound to peer groups, to family, to their society? What effect do peers, family, and society have on adolescents?
- **Research** how independent are adolescents? How bound to peer groups, to family, to their society? What effect do peers, family, and society have on adolescents?
- **Analyse** the assets and liabilities of each setting for a modern audience. How does each change the story? What values are important in each world? Who are Romeo and Juliet and what threatens them in each world? How "Italian" is the story? How "American"?
- **How should peers, family, and society ideally view and treat adolescents? Argue for your view.**
- **What is the psychology of feuding?** What can start a feud? Must it be big—a murder, a betrayal? What keeps it alive? How can a feud end?

**POLITICAL GEOGRAPHY**
- In the Middle Ages and Renaissance, Verona was not just a city but a city state. When Romeo is banished from "Verona," find out how far he has to go to be out of Veronese territory in various centuries, and whether Mantua is a practical destination.
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