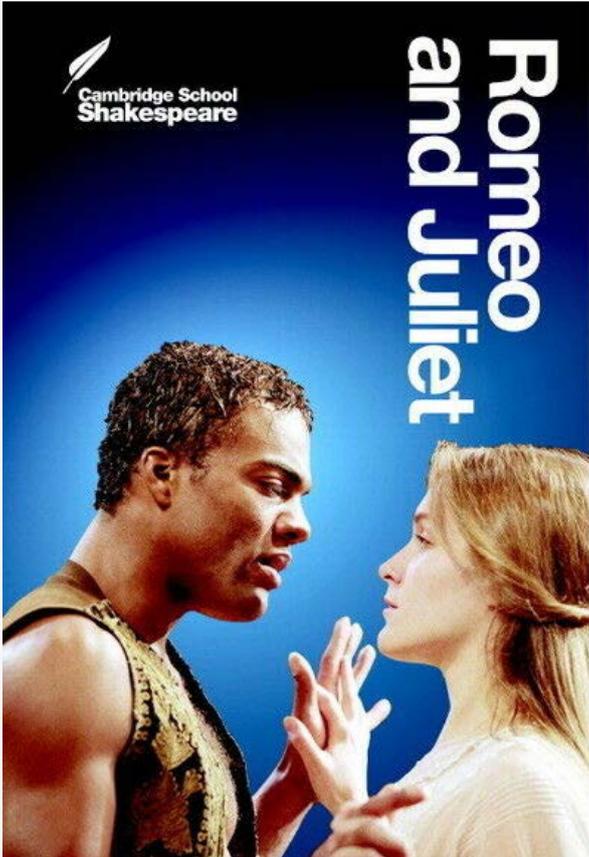




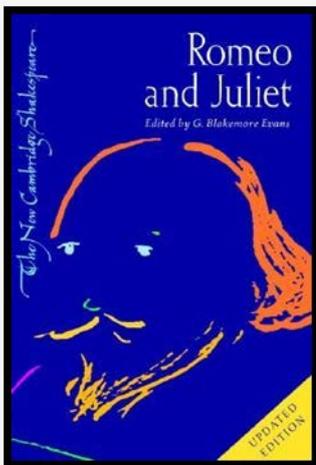
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GCSE Drama
Romeo & Juliet
by
William Shakespeare





Historical/ Social/Cultural Context



Shakespeare's tale of the "star-crossed" adolescent lovers, *Romeo and Juliet*, is probably his most famous tragedy. His main inspiration for the story was from Arthur Brooke's poem

The Tragical History of Romeus and Juliet, which was written in 1563. Many details of the plot are taken directly from this poem, which brought the

story to the attention of the English-speaking world. However, Brooke himself wasn't the originator of the story. He was inspired by adaptations of adaptations of the story, written over 100 years in various languages. It is, of course, what Shakespeare then did with the story that turned it into what is universally accepted as Western culture's archetypal tragic love story. This included his use of language, condensing the timeline into four days and the introduction of key characters, such as Mercutio. The writings of the academics - Marlowe, Greene, Lyly, Kyd, and Peele - defined the London theatre of the 1580's. Though grounded in medieval roots, these men produced new dramas and comedies using Marlowe's styling of blank verse. Shakespeare outdid them all; he combined the best traits of Elizabethan drama with classical sources, enriching the mixture with his imagination and wit.

This trail of inspiration and adaptation continued on from Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, from orchestral works, such as Berlioz's dramatic symphony (1839) and Tchaikovsky's fantasy overture (1880), to Prokofiev's ballet (1938), to the popular, Tony and Academy award-winning musical, *West Side Story* (Broadway Musical: 1957, Film: 1961). The latter might be a useful hook for students' interest and prior knowledge of the plot summary and themes.

Original Staging Conditions

- The first performance is largely thought to have taken place between 1594 and 1595, when the playhouses had reopened for the first time after a sustained outbreak of the plague. Shakespeare emphasises the relevance of the plague for his audience by using it in the play itself as the reason for Friar John failing to reach Romeo in Mantua.
- There are no surviving records for any performances before the Restoration in 1660, but it is likely that *Romeo and Juliet* was first acted by the Lord Chamberlain's Men at the Theatre and then at the Curtain.
- The Theatre - polygonal-shaped typical of the 16th century - was found behind a pub. The Theatre - for a time home to Shakespeare's company, the Lord Chamberlain's Men - was immortalised as "this wooden O" in the prologue of *Henry V*.
- The design of The Theatre was possibly adapted from the inn-yards that had served as playing spaces for actors and/or bear baiting pits. The building was a polygonal wooden building with three galleries surrounding an open yard. From one side of the polygon extended a thrust stage. The Theatre is said to have cost £700 to construct, which is a considerable sum for the age.
- The open yard in front of the stage was cobbled and provided standing room for those who paid a penny. For another penny, the attendees were allowed into the galleries where they could either stand or, for a third penny, procure a stool. One of the galleries, though sources do not state which, was divided

into small compartments that could be used by the wealthy and aristocrats. The playhouse was a timber building with a tile roof; other materials used to construct the Theatre were brick, sand, lime, lead and iron. Owing to a lack of paperwork not much is truly known about the Theatre's appearance, but it has been described as an "amphitheater".

- Shakespeare designed *Romeo and Juliet* to be played in daylight on the simple thrust stage of an Elizabethan playhouse, where the rear balcony provided Juliet's bedroom window and a trapdoor in the stage was her tomb. No scenery and few props allowed the action to move swiftly and the audience to focus on the language. However, during a development of the original site, some props were unearthed:

"Probably the most interesting thing is the bird caller. Plays like *Romeo and Juliet* have several references to birdsong so it could well have been used as a theatrical prop to create special effects." Other findings include a bone comb, which could have been used by Juliet in the balcony scene.

- In Shakespeare's time, clothes reflected a person's status in society - there were laws controlling what you could wear. As plays had kings, queens and wealthy people in them, the actors' costumes reflected their character's social status. Costumes were mainly the modern dress of the time. So, for less important roles, actors might wear their own clothes. However, for a play set in ancient Greece or Rome, the company might try for an 'ancient' look for the important characters by giving the main characters togas over their normal clothes. The company reused costumes if they could - changing a cloak or putting on some expensive lace. Sometimes they had to have a new

costume made. A company probably spent about £300 a year on costumes, which in today's money would be over £35,000! Stage makeup was also used.

company's leading actor at the time, Richard Burbage, who played the Nurse. Master Robert Goffe was the first Juliet.

- However, as women were not allowed to perform on the stage until 1666, males would play roles like Juliet and the nurse. Costume was therefore important in creating these characters. The costumes used for the female characters were extremely elaborate, reflecting the clothes worn during the Elizabethan era. The women's costumes worn by the boy actors were constructed with many layers of clothing. It would have therefore taken some considerable time, and the help of a dresser, to dress a boy actor in the costume of a female. Wigs, or periwigs as they were called, were readily available as they were in fashion at the time, so this was not a costuming problem. However, the makeup used by Elizabethan women, and therefore the boy actors, was! The white makeup was lead based and highly poisonous! The young boy actors were therefore very unhealthy, had unpleasant facial skin diseases and a high proportion actually died of lead poisoning. The boy actors who took the female roles were also paid the least of all actors. The Admiral's Men paid boy players three shillings a week. The boys were apprenticed to adult actors and their wages were paid to their masters. In return, the masters gave them board and lodging and a small allowance to spend on themselves.
- Music in Shakespeare's tragedies tended to employ trumpet and drums for ceremonial sounds, and this would certainly have been the case in *Romeo and Juliet*. The one song "When griping griefs" (Act 4, Scene 5) would have had a live accompaniment on the lute.
- The first Romeo was probably the

Task

The opening scene of the play begins with a fight between the Capulets and Montagues. Look at the 4 images below showing how the opening was staged in 4 different productions of *Romeo and Juliet*.

a)



c)



b)



d)



- i) With a partner, choose one of the images. Explain how it creates the atmosphere and how and why you think it's successful in creating the atmosphere.
- ii) Choose one of the images where you think colour is used effectively. Explain the reasons for your choice.
- iii) Choose one image where you think costume is used effectively. Explain the reasons for your choice.
- iv) Choose the image which you think is least effective in creating the atmosphere of the fight scene. Explain the reasons for your choice.
- v) As a designer, create a set for the opening fight scene using theatre in the round. Explain your choice of style, set and prop, colour and fabric.

Task

'Bard act to follow: why Romeo + Juliet is still the ultimate film soundtrack'

Read this article, published in 'The Guardian' from October 2016, where the music used in Baz Lehman's film adaptation of Romeo and Juliet is discussed.

- i) In groups of 4, record a soundscape which could be used for Act 1, Scene 1. Decide at which points it would be played. Write a cue sheet showing where it would be faded in/out, the volume etc. to help create atmosphere, location and environment.
- ii) Choose a piece of contemporary music or a song which could be used for the ball scene. Explain the reasons for your choice.
- iii) Choose a piece of music or a song which could be used as Mercutio's "theme" and played at key moments when they appear. Explain the reasons for your choice.

Task

- a) With a partner, look at the 4 images below showing how the character of the Nurse was portrayed in 4 different productions of *Romeo and Juliet*.

a)



c)



b)



d)



- i) Which image is closest to your own ideas of how the character of the Nurse should be portrayed on stage? Explain the reasons for your choice.
- ii) Which image challenged your ideas of how the character of the Nurse should be portrayed on stage? Explain the reasons for your choice.
- iii) Explain what you think the character of the Nurse represents within the play and their function.
- iv) Using the internet, find an image of the Nurse from a production of *Romeo and Juliet* which you think successfully portrays the character. Explain your choice.

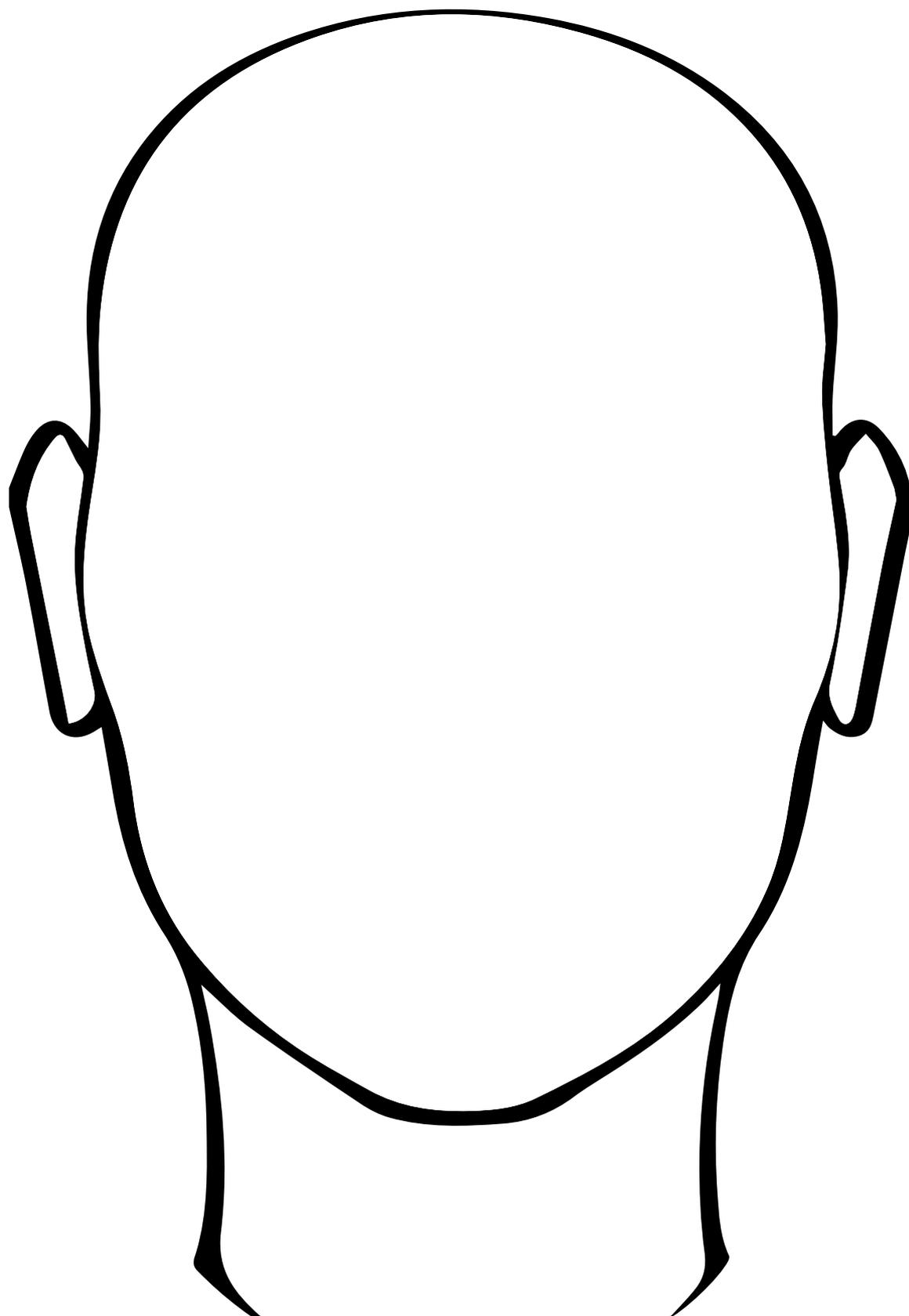
Task

- a) Using the template on the next page, design;
 - i) suitable stage makeup for the character of the Nurse in Act 2, Scene 4
 - ii) an expressionistic mask design for one of the characters to wear in the ball scene.
- b) Describe a suitable costume you would choose for the character of the Nurse.

Explain your choice, focusing on:

- the period in which you are setting your production
- the style of your production
- garments the character is wearing
- colour and fabric
- two details that make the costume unique for that character, e.g. a small brooch of a heart which Juliet could have given her for her birthday and is one of her treasured possessions.

Give two reasons for your choices.



Synopsis

This play was written in 1595-6 and is set in Verona, Italy, at a time when a long-standing feud between two noble families - the Montagues and the Capulets - constantly breaks out into brawling on the streets. Prince Escalus, ruler of Verona, threatens terrible punishment on anyone who takes part in further violence.

Romeo Montague is hopelessly in love with the unattainable Rosaline and, in an attempt to cure his lovesick misery, his friends persuade him to go disguised to a party at the home of his family's sworn enemies - the Capulets. Romeo reluctantly agrees to go when he learns that Rosaline has been invited.

At the party, he meets Juliet, only daughter of the Capulets, and not even knowing each other's names, they fall instantly in love. Juliet's hot-headed cousin, Tybalt, has spotted Romeo and his friends but is prevented from challenging them by her father, Old Capulet. He does not wish to see his party disrupted and speaks well of Romeo's reputation in Verona.

During the preparations for the party, however, Juliet's mother has told her that Count Paris, a suitable young nobleman (who is also at the party) has asked her father for permission to marry her. Even though shocked by the discovery that their families are sworn enemies, both Romeo and Juliet are determined to marry, and choose go-betweens to help them arrange a secret wedding. Romeo asks his friend and mentor, Friar Laurence, to conduct the ceremony, while Juliet sends her elderly nurse to meet Romeo and learn the arrangements he has made.

Friar Lawrence is amazed by Romeo's sudden rejection of his love for Rosaline but reluctantly agrees to marry them, believing that such a marriage might bring

an end to the ancient feud. As arranged, Romeo meets the Nurse, who is instructed to make sure that Juliet arrives at the Friar's the following morning ready to be married.

Now secretly married to Juliet, Romeo encounters her aggressive cousin, Tybalt, who challenges him to a duel. Romeo is unwilling to fight with him for Juliet's sake, but his closest friend, Mercutio takes up the challenge instead. When Romeo steps between them in an effort to stop the fight, Mercutio is stabbed to death. Romeo then kills Tybalt in a rage and is forced to fly the scene.

Angry that his laws have been broken, but accepting that Tybalt started the fight, Prince Escalus banishes Romeo to Mantua. Romeo is distraught and runs to the Friar for advice and help.

Alone in her room on her wedding night, Juliet, unaware of the death of her cousin or her new husband's banishment, eagerly awaits Romeo's arrival. When she learns what has happened, Juliet is so distraught that the Nurse promises to arrange one night together for the newly-weds before Romeo must leave Verona. The following morning at dawn, the couple part sadly, promising each other that they will find a way to be together forever and that their current problems will be solved.

Juliet's parents believe that her grief is caused by Tybalt's death so, in attempt to cheer her, they suggest she should marry Count Paris immediately. When she refuses, her father threatens to disown and abandon her, so she too seeks advice from the Friar, who has also been approached by Paris to marry him to Juliet.

Realising that she is so desperate that she might commit suicide (and perhaps fearful of the consequences for himself if he allows her to commit bigamy), the Friar advises her to go home and make

peace with her parents. He then gives her a potion that is guaranteed to make it appear that she has died in her sleep. He explains that the effects will wear off within 42 hours, by which time she will be buried in her family's crypt.

He promises to send a letter to Romeo immediately, explaining the situation and asking him to return in time to be with Juliet when she awakes.

Juliet takes the potion and is discovered 'dead' when her nurse and mother try to wake her for her marriage to Paris. Her 'corpse' is then taken to the crypt where it is laid beside that of the dead Tybalt. The Friar's messenger leaves to find Romeo in Mantua.

Stop reading now if you don't want to know how it ends...

The Friar's messenger is delayed on the way and, instead of learning of the Friar's plan, Romeo's servant, Balthasar, returns to Mantua from Verona bringing news of Juliet's supposed death. Devastated, Romeo purchases poison with which to kill himself and hurries back to Verona, planning to die by Juliet's side.

Attempting to break into the crypt, he is interrupted by Paris and they fight. Romeo kills Paris and, reaching Juliet's body at last, embraces her and drinks the poison, kissing her as he dies.

Having learned that his messenger had not reached Romeo, the Friar runs to the crypt, discovers Paris's body and reaches Juliet's side just as she revives. Unable to persuade Juliet to leave her dead husband, and fearing for himself if he is discovered there, the Friar runs away, leaving Juliet alone with Romeo's body. Realising that all their plans have failed, she pulls his dagger, stabs herself in the chest and dies.

Once the bodies are discovered, the Friar confesses everything he knows and is pardoned by Prince Escalus. Knowing that their feud has brought about the deaths of their children, the warring families are reconciled and agree to build a monument to the young lovers.

Key Themes/ Issues

As with all of his plays, Shakespeare explores several themes and issues within *Romeo and Juliet*. They would provide useful discussion points for interpreting different elements of specific scenes.

Parents versus children

This theme represents the struggle of young people to make their own choices, in the face of parents' vested interests. Examples of this theme can be seen in:

- The Prologue: The Chorus describes the parents' "ancient grudge", which is the catalyst for the death of their children.
- Act 1, Scene 1: Lord Capulet approves Paris's request to ask Juliet to marry him.
- Act 3, Scene 5: Lord and Lady Capulet tell Juliet of their arrangements for her to marry Paris.
- Act 5, Scene 3: Romeo and Juliet commit suicide; the parents are faced with the consequences of their ancient feud.

Love versus hate

Love takes on many forms - its power to challenge hate, the impulses of young love, the irrationality of hate and its

capacity to destroy love. Examples of this theme can be seen in:

- Act 1, Scene 1: The Capulets and Montagues fight in Verona's marketplace. Romeo tells Benvolio of his unrequited love for Rosaline.
- Act 1, Scene 5: Forgetting Rosaline, Romeo falls in love with Juliet at first sight.
- Act 2, Scene 2: In Juliet's orchard, the two lovers agree to marry.
- Act 3, Scene 1: Tybalt fatally wounds Mercutio under the newly wed Romeo's arm.
- Act 3, Scene 5: Romeo and Juliet prepare to part after their wedding night.
- Act 5, Scene 3: Romeo and Juliet commit suicide. The Prince asks the two families to reconcile.

Juliet's death and Friar Lawrence learns that Brother John has been unable to travel to Mantua to tell Romeo that Juliet still lives.

Fate

From the moment in the prologue when the Chorus summarises the play and says that the "star-crossed lovers" will die, Romeo and Juliet are trapped by fate. No matter what the lovers do, what plans they make, or how much they love each other, their struggles against fate only help fulfill it. But defeating or escaping fate is not the point. No one escapes fate. It is Romeo and Juliet's determination to struggle against fate, in order to be together, whether in life or death that shows the fiery passion of their love, and which makes that love eternal. Examples of this theme can be seen in:

- The Prologue: initiates the idea of fate of the 'Star-crossed lovers'.
- Act 3, Scene 1: The fight with Tybalt, resulting in his and Mercutio's death.
- Act 5, Scene 1: Balthasar tells Romeo of

Task

- a)
- i) Working with a partner, compile a list of scenes where the theme of **Parents versus Children** is highlighted.
 - ii) As a class, prepare a list of questions based on your research in (i). Using the rehearsal technique of **hotseating**, question the characters of
 - Montague
 - Lord and Lady Capulet
 - The Nurse
 - Paris

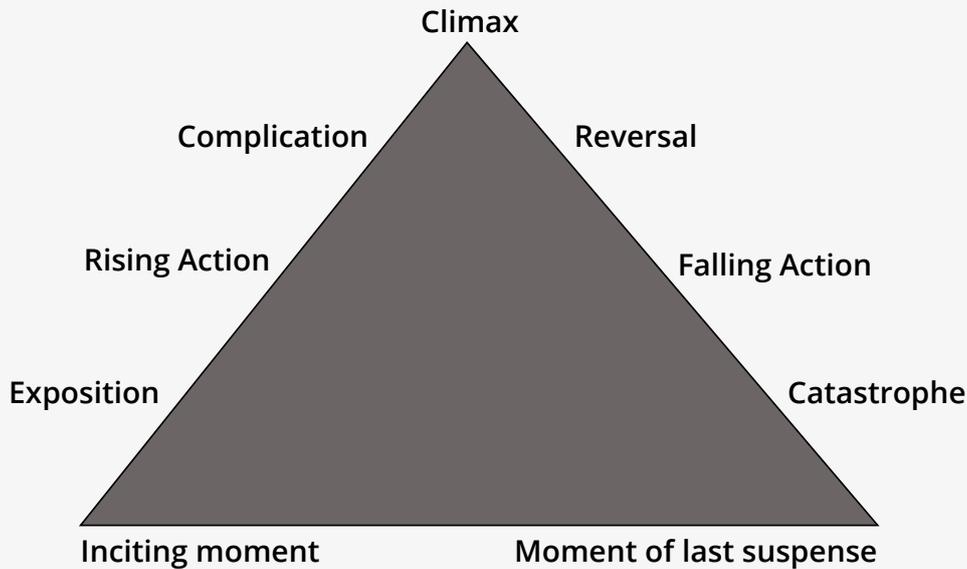
about how the differences between what Romeo and Juliet wanted and what their parents wanted for them might have contributed to the tragedy.
- b) As a set designer, compile a mood board based on the theme of **Love versus Hate** for a forthcoming production of *Romeo and Juliet*.
- c)
- i) Working with a partner, choose a scene which illustrates the theme of **Fate**. Compile a list of sound effects and music you would use to highlight this theme. Explain at which points you would use them to help create atmosphere and help underline the theme.

Structure of a Tragedy

To understand the structure of *Romeo and Juliet*, it might be helpful to look at the classical roots that Shakespeare would have drawn influence from. Aristotle defines tragedy as, *'The imitation of an action that is serious and also, as having magnitude, complete in itself'*. A tragedy incorporates incidents surrounding fear and those which provoke pity. Often in the form of a tragic hero – someone who is given a shift of fortune from happiness to misery, because of a misunderstanding or a mistaken act. In *Romeo*, we have a perfect example of a tragic hero – he is trapped in a situation which he cannot win. This could be further extended to *Juliet* also. Tragedy can be broken down into seven elements:

- The conclusion is catastrophic.
- The catastrophic conclusion will seem inevitable.
- It occurs, ultimately, because of the human limitations of the protagonist.
- The protagonist suffers terribly.
- The protagonist's suffering often seems disproportionate to his or her culpability.
- Yet the suffering is usually redemptive, bringing out the noblest of human capacities for learning.
- The suffering is also redemptive in bringing out the capacity for accepting moral responsibility.

The structure of tragedy can be seen more clearly in Freytag's Pyramid of Tragedy:



In tragedy, the plot generally has the following structure:

Exposition: This is usually all or most of Act 1. The exposition introduces the characters, their positions and circumstances. Shakespeare usually begins a play with a short scene, often full of activity. In *Romeo and Juliet*, this is Scene 1, where there is a brawl between factions of the Montague and Capulet households. Then, having captured our attention, he proceeds to conversations that provide a lot of information, accompanied by little action. The characters often talk about the central character, before he or she appears.

- Setting: Verona, Italy, 16th or 17th century.
- Characters: Capulets and Montagues, specifically, Romeo and Juliet.
- Conflict: The Montagues and Capulets are feuding.

Rising Action: Introduces the conflict and builds tension (usually Act 2). This portion of the play focuses on the hero and his decisions, or lack thereof. There is hope at this point.

- Romeo and Juliet fall in love but cannot be together because their families are feuding. They decide to get married in secret.

Climax: The high point in the hero's fortune. Here, he meets with his first serious defeat, after which, his fortune is on the downgrade (usually Act 3).

- After they gate-crash the Capulet party, Tybalt goes after the Montague faction and kills Mercutio.
- To avenge his friend, Romeo duels with and kills Tybalt – Juliet's cousin.
- Romeo is banished, but before he goes, he and Juliet share a proper wedding night.

Falling Action: The opposing force takes over and becomes more prominent than the hero. In Act 4, Shakespeare often introduces a new kind of emotion, a quiet, pathetic emotion that is usually painful.

- Juliet's parents arrange a marriage for her to Paris.
- She and the Friar have an elaborate plan to get her out of a second marriage, by faking her death. Part of

this plan is that Romeo will receive a letter saying she's not dead, so that he can be there when she wakes, and they can live happily ever after.

- Romeo – never having received the letter – thinks Juliet has died (this is a prime example of dramatic irony).
- Romeo buys poison and goes to her tomb to commit suicide.

Catastrophe: This is generally all, or most, of Act 5. It involves a total reversal of the protagonist's fortunes. In Shakespeare's tragedies, the reversal always results in the death of the character, which is usually a brighter prospect for him/her, than living in disgrace.

- Romeo confronts Paris at Juliet's tomb, slaying him before taking his own life.
- Juliet awakens from her sleeping potion to see that Romeo has committed suicide.
- She takes his dagger and kills herself.
- The Friar and Nurse explain to the Capulet and Montague families that the two lovers were married in secret.
- Both families are saddened by the situation and vow to end their long-standing feud.

The Characters

Romeo

The son and heir of Lord and Lady Montague. A young man of about 16, impulsive and immature, his idealism and passion make him an extremely likable character. He lives in the middle of a violent feud between his family and the Capulets, but he is not at all interested in violence. His only interest is love. At the beginning of the play he is madly in love with a woman named Rosaline (whom we don't see in the play), but the instant he lays eyes on Juliet, he falls in love with her, and forgets Rosaline. Thus, Shakespeare gives us every reason to question how real Romeo's new love is, but Romeo goes to extremes to prove the seriousness of his feelings. He secretly marries Juliet, the daughter of his father's worst enemy, he happily takes abuse from Tybalt and he would rather die than live without his beloved.

Juliet

The daughter of Capulet and Lady Capulet. A beautiful 13-year-old girl, Juliet begins the play as a naïve child who has thought little about love and marriage, but she grows up quickly, upon falling in love with Romeo, the son of her family's great enemy. Because she is a girl in an aristocratic family, she has none of the freedom Romeo has to roam around the city, climb over walls in the middle of the night, or get into swordfights. Nevertheless, she shows amazing courage in trusting her entire life and future to Romeo, even refusing to believe the worst reports about him after he gets involved in a fight with her cousin. Juliet's closest friend and confidant is her Nurse.

Friar Lawrence

A Franciscan friar, friend to both Romeo and Juliet. Kind, civic-minded and always ready with a plan, Friar Lawrence secretly marries the lovers in hope that the union might eventually bring peace to Verona. As well as being a Catholic holy man, Friar Lawrence is also an expert in the use of seemingly mystical potions and herbs.

Mercutio

One of the most extraordinary characters in all of Shakespeare's plays, Mercutio overflows with imagination, wit and wordplay. He can be quite hot-headed, and hates people who are pretentious or obsessed with the latest ideals or fashions. He finds Romeo's romanticized ideas about love tiresome and tries to convince Romeo to view love as a simple matter of appetite. It is widely thought that it is his death, in Act 3, that is the turning point towards tragedy. "A plague o' both your houses" is the curse he utters, as he lies mortally wounded, and is one of the most famous quotations from the play.

The Nurse

Juliet's nurse, the woman who has cared for Juliet her entire life. A vulgar, long-winded, and sentimental character, the Nurse provides comic relief with her frequently inappropriate remarks and speeches. But, until a disagreement near the play's end, the Nurse is Juliet's faithful confidante and loyal intermediary in Juliet's affair with Romeo. She provides a contrast with Juliet, given that her view of love is earthy and sexual, whereas Juliet is idealistic and intense. The Nurse believes in love, and wants Juliet to have a nice-looking husband, but the idea that Juliet would want to sacrifice herself for love, is incomprehensible to her.

Tybalt

A Capulet, Juliet's cousin on her mother's side. Vain, fashionable, supremely aware of courtesy and the lack of it, he becomes aggressive, violent, and quick to draw his sword, when he feels his pride has been injured. Once drawn, his sword is something to be feared. He loathes Montagues.

Capulet

The patriarch of the Capulet family, father of Juliet, husband of Lady Capulet, and enemy, for unexplained reasons, of Montague. He truly loves his daughter, though he is not well acquainted with Juliet's thoughts or feelings and seems to think that what is best for her, is a "good" match with Paris. Often prudent, he commands respect and propriety, but he is liable to fly into a rage when either is lacking.

Lady Capulet

Juliet's mother, Capulet's wife. A woman who herself married young (by her own estimation, she gave birth to Juliet at close to the age of 14), she is eager to see her daughter marry Paris. She is an ineffective mother, relying on the Nurse for moral support.

Montague

Romeo's father, the patriarch of the Montague clan and bitter enemy of Capulet. At the beginning of the play, he is chiefly concerned about Romeo's melancholy.

Lady Montague

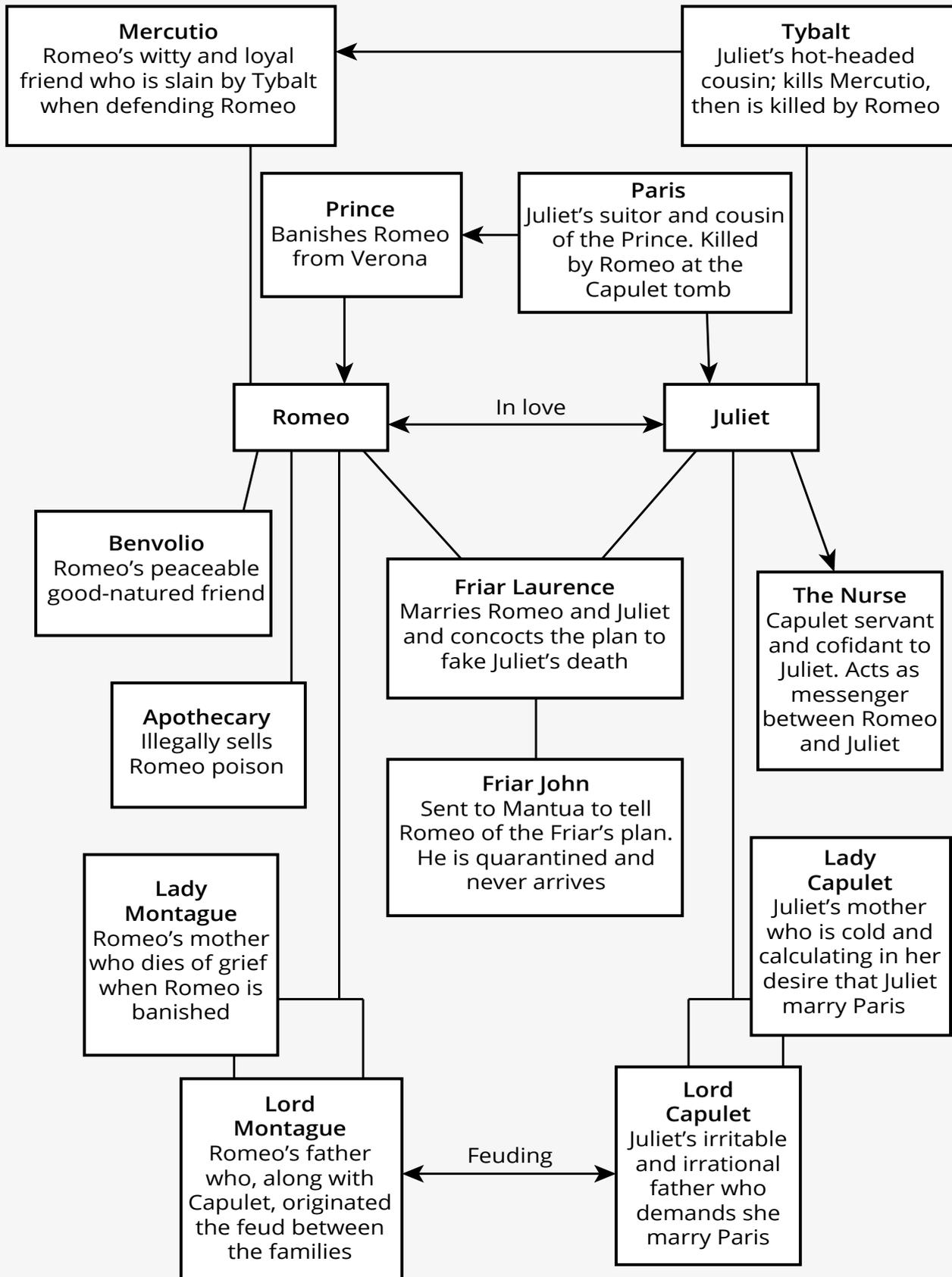
Romeo's mother, Montague's wife. She dies of grief, after Romeo is exiled from Verona.

Paris

A kinsman of the Prince, and the suitor of Juliet most preferred by Capulet. Once Capulet has promised him he can marry Juliet, he behaves very presumptuous toward her, acting as if they are already married.

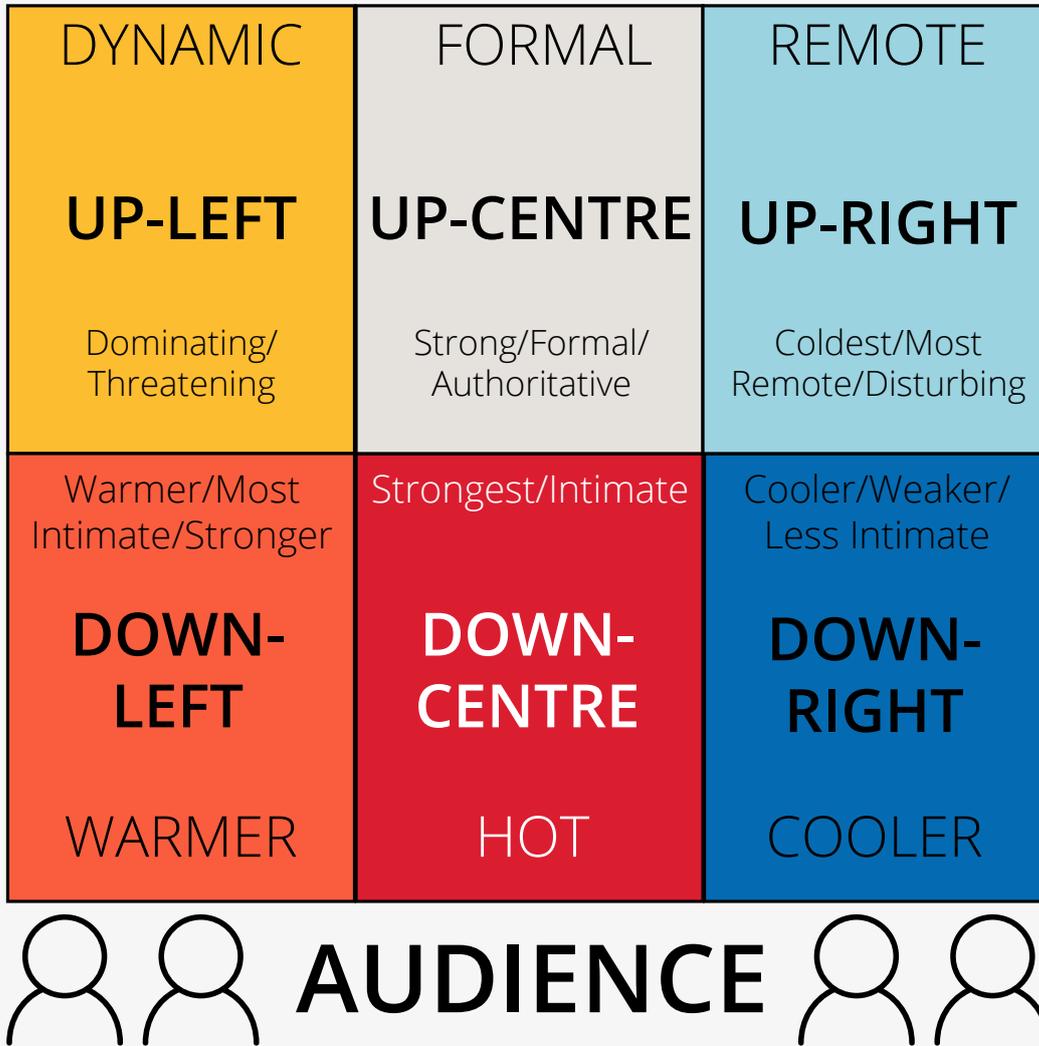
Benvolio

Montague's nephew, Romeo's cousin and thoughtful friend. He makes a genuine effort to defuse violent scenes in public places, though Mercutio accuses him of having a nasty temper in private. He spends most of the play trying to help Romeo get his mind off Rosaline, even after Romeo has fallen in love with Juliet.



Task

a) Look at the diagram below which explores the positioning of characters and the semiotics of that position:



- b) Look at Act 1, Scene 4. In groups of 3, practically explore where you would position Mercutio, Romeo and Benvolio to explore the changing relationships and atmosphere within the scene.
- c) As a director, choose 2 rehearsal techniques you would use to explore the relationship between the three characters within the scene.
- d) Look at Mercutio’s speech. With a partner, experiment performing it using different vocal expressions, e.g. angry, ominous, loud etc., tempo and volume. Compile a list of which vocal expressions are the most effective in conveying these lines.
- e) With a partner, choose a scene between Romeo and Juliet. Improvise the scene placing it within a contemporary setting. Discuss where the scene is set, the relationship between the characters, character motivation and the mood of each of the characters within the scene.

- f) Choose one of the fight scenes within the play. Find a suitable piece of music and choreograph the scene focusing on movement, gesture and facial expression to create relationships and mood.
- g) As a class, create the ball scene. Divide the class into small groups and each group creates their own dance routine to a suitable piece of music. Experiment by placing it in both a contemporary and Elizabethan setting. Useful viewing would be the ball scene from the Zeffirelli, Baz Luhrmann and *West Side Story* films.
- h) Imagine the Nurse and Friar Lawrence meet up a few months after the tragic events at the end of the play. Base your improvisation on key events that happen throughout the play.
- i) Compile a **Role on the wall** for Lady Capulet based on her character throughout the play.
- j) Make a list of “insults” used throughout the play. Explore practically how effective they are within the context of the scene where they are found. Focus on tone, tempo and volume.
- k) Romeo and Juliet both act impulsively. But what would have happened if they had thought their decisions through first? Choose a significant part of the play and create a conscience corridor for them. One student will play Juliet and the rest of class will create a corridor, i.e. 2 lines facing each other. One side will advise caution, the other side will urge her to go with her plan. Juliet must walk down the corridor to seek advice. As she passes, each student must give advice. At the end, Juliet must make a decision.

Staging the Play

In Shakespeare's time, the Elizabethan theatres were built of wood and composed of three tiers of seating, in a circular shape, around a stage area that was on one side of the circle. A roof section would partially cover the audience, leaving the standing area and performance space exposed to the elements. Appropriately, 1,750 audience members could pay extra money to sit in the covered seating area, while the 800 'groundlings' paid less to stand in the open, in front of the stage.

The stage area was divided into three levels:

1. a main stage area with doors at the rear and a curtained area in the back for "discovery scenes"
2. an upper, canopied area called "heaven", for balcony scenes
3. an area under the stage called "hell," which could be accessed by a trap door in the stage.

The performances would take place during the day, to allow the use of natural light in the absence of theatrical lighting. Scenery and props were scarce, and the audiences were to rely on the actors' lines and staging to supply the time of day, location and atmosphere of the scenes. It is thought that this is why the language is so descriptive.

The popularity of the play has lent itself well to being performed in a vast range of experimental ways. Encourage students to consider a wide variety of styles and choices for staging that would assist the flow and ebb of the key themes, symbols and motifs. Explore the original staging to help understand the structure and language.



There is a wealth of material on notable past productions online, such as the Zeffirelli 1960 Old Vic production, in which he integrated his own Italian background, to full effect, creating a compellingly real atmosphere of Italian street life. London audiences were wowed and bemused by the sight of young people flirting, chatting and fighting in a totally naturalistic style; the title roles were played most notably by Judi Dench and John Stride.

A sharp contrast to the above was the 1947 Brook production, which went against the natural inclination of the time. Brook's interpretation stressed and emphasised the play's violence and the lovers' extreme naivety of youth in a compelling and controversial approach. Notably, Paul Scofield's bitter and dark Mercutio and the absence of the families' declaration of peace at the end of the play, served as the apex to this prominent production.

Considering these productions, or any that you may have access to, may help to inspire students to interpret the play.

Task

Choose 2 scenes and experiment how you would stage them using the following styles:

- Naturalism
- Expressionism
- Minimalism/symbolism
- Brechtian.

Consider:

- the acting area you would use for each style
- the position of the audience
- set and props
- lighting and sound
- colour and fabric.

Explain, giving 3 specific reasons, which style you consider the most effective for a contemporary production of the play.