

Year 7 English Knowledge Booklet

Romeo and Juliet

Name:

Class:



Big Questions

BQ: What are the conventions of a Shakespearean tragedy?

BQ: How is the scene set?

BQ: What is the importance of love in the play?

BQ: How are Capulet and Paris presented?

BQ: How is Lady Capulet presented?

Big Questions

BQ: How is Juliet presented?

BQ: How is Romeo presented?

BQ: How is Mercutio presented?

BQ: How is Friar Laurence presented?

BQ: To what extent does the play have a fitting ending?

Key Vocabulary

Key Word	Definition
Tragedy	A drama or literary work in which the main character is brought to ruin or suffers extreme sorrow, especially as a consequence of a tragic flaw, moral weakness, or inability to cope with unfavourable circumstances.
Fate	A power or agency that predetermines and orders the course of events.
Monologue	A long speech by one actor in a play or film, or as part of a theatrical or broadcast programme.
Aside	A remark or passage in a play that is intended to be heard by the audience but unheard by the other characters in the play.
Grudge	A persistent feeling of ill will or resentment resulting from a past insult or injury
Feud	A prolonged and bitter quarrel or dispute.
Forbidden	Not allowed; banned
Justice	Justice, in its broadest sense is the principle that people receive that which they deserve
Patriarchal	A system of society or government in which the father or eldest male is head of the family and descent is reckoned through the male line.
Honourable	Bringing high respect or worthiness to something or someone.
Dominant	Most important, powerful or influential
Subservient	Prepared to obey others unquestioningly
Duel	A contest with deadly weapons arranged between two people in order to settle a point of honour
Spontaneous	Performed or occurring as a result of a sudden inner impulse of inclination and without premeditation or external stimulus
Unrequited	A feeling, especially love, which is not returned
Banishment	The act of sending someone away from a country or place as an official

The Plot and Key Characters

What happens in 'Romeo and Juliet'?

Act One: In Italy two noble families, the Montagues and Capulets, have a lot of bad blood between them. Romeo, son of Lord Montague, is in love with Rosaline, who rejects his love. As a result, Romeo is depressed. To cure him of his love, his friend Benvolio induces him to attend a masked ball at the Capulets, where he could encounter other beautiful women and forget about Rosaline. At the ball, Romeo is attracted by a girl who he learns is Juliet, daughter of the Capulets. They seal their love with a kiss.

Act Two: Romeo lingers in the Capulet's garden, standing in the orchard beneath Juliet's balcony. He sees Juliet leaning over the railing, hears her calling out his name, and wishes that he were not a Montague. He reveals his presence, and they declare their love and agree to be married in secret.

Act Three: Tybalt sees Romeo returning from Friar Lawrence's cell. Romeo, softened by his newfound love and his marriage to Juliet, refuses to be drawn into a quarrel with Tybalt, now his kinsman by marriage. Mercutio fights with Tybalt and Tybalt is killed. Furious with grief, Romeo fights with Tybalt, kills him and results to taking shelter in Friar Lawrence's cell as he is now wanted.

Act Four: In despair, Juliet seeks Friar Lawrence's advice. He gives her a sleeping potion, which for a time will cause her to appear dead. This will mean that, on the day of his supposed marriage to Paris, she will be carried to the family vault. By the time she awakens, Romeo will be summoned to the vault and take her away to Mantua.

Act Five: The Friar's letter fails to reach Romeo. When he hears of Juliet's death, Romeo gets a deadly poison from an apothecary and secretly returns to Verona to say his last farewell to his deceased wife and die by her side. At Juliet's side, Romeo drinks the poison and dies. When Juliet wakes up from her deep sleep, she realises Romeo's error and kills herself with his dagger. The Capulets and Montagues decide to reconcile as a result of the deaths of their children.

Montagues		Who are they?		Capulets		Who are they?	
	Romeo		Juliet	A teenager who ends up falling in love with Romeo.			
	Lord Montague Lady Montague		Lady Capulet Lord Capulet	Juliet's parents; head of the Capulet household.			
	Benvolio		Tybalt	Juliet's cousin; he is honourable to the Capulet name.			
	Mercutio		Nurse	Juliet's 'nanny' who has cared for Juliet her entire life.			

Other key characters	Who are they?
	Friar Lawrence A friar and friend to both Romeo and Juliet. He is always ready with a plan.
	Paris A kinsman of the Prince and the man the Capulets want Juliet to marry.
	Prince The Prince of Verona; Prince Escalus. He is concerned about public peace.

Homework

Deadline:	Task
Week 6 Due date:	Fill in the blanks to reveal quotations found in 'Romeo and Juliet'. <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. The Prologue: "Two households, both _____ in dignity."2. Romeo (Act 1): "My only love sprung from my only _____."3. Romeo (Act 2): "It is the east, and Juliet is the _____!"4. Juliet (Act 2): "O' Romeo, Romeo! Wherefore art thou _____?"5. Tybalt (Act 3): "No better term than this: thou art a _____."6. Mercutio (Act 3): "... ask for me tomorrow, and you shall find me a _____ man."7. Juliet (Act 4): "And hide me with a _____ man in his shroud."8. Juliet (Act 5): "O, _____ dagger."9. Juliet (Act 5): "This is thy sheath; there rest and let me _____."10. Romeo (Act 5): "O true apothecary! Thy drugs are quick—Thus with a _____ I die." <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
Week 8 Due date:	Read the second critical reading in the knowledge organiser and answer the recall questions. <u>The critical reading focuses on Act 3: Scene 1 of the play (the fight scene).</u> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Who does Torrance say is the catalyst of the scene?2. Why is Tybalt determined to fight Romeo?3. Before Romeo is introduced, which two characters does Shakespeare present who could potentially clash?4. Which character wishes to avoid confrontation?5. List 3 qualities that Shakespeare portrays Benvolio's character to have.6. At the beginning of act 3, scene 1, which characteristics does Mercutio have which Benvolio tries to manage?7. What does the quotation "The day is hot" suggest about the situation?8. What does Benvolio's use of collective pronouns highlight about his character?9. When Mercutio taunts and provokes Tybalt, why does Tybalt publically back down?10. Tybalt's and Benvolio's lines are written with a deliberate structure. What does this suggest about Tybalt's and Benvolio's characters? <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>

Critical Reading 1

Michael Donkor studies the characters of Romeo and Juliet in Act 2, Scene 2 of the play – otherwise known as the ‘balcony scene’.

Setting the scene

Famously referred to as the ‘balcony scene’, Act 2, Scene 2 of Romeo and Juliet begins with Juliet standing on her bedroom balcony, talking to herself. She muses on how unfair it is that the striking gentleman she kissed moments ago is in fact Romeo Montague – a young man from the family her Capulet kin are warring with. Romeo, who has crept into the Capulet grounds in order to find Juliet, overhears her words. Stepping out of the shadows, Romeo presents himself to Juliet and the two embark on an impassioned conversation in which they try to define their feelings and profess their love for one another. Their declarations are cut short both by the fear that Romeo will be discovered and by Juliet’s Nurse insistently calling her to come back into her bedroom. Before Romeo finally leaves, Juliet steals away from the Nurse and returns to the balcony. She issues Romeo with instructions about covertly communicating with her the following day in order for them to make plans to marry.

How does Shakespeare present Juliet here?

Juliet’s portrayal in this scene feverishly wavers between different positions, reminding the audience how inexperienced and emotionally unsteady she is. Firstly, her speech – seemingly delivered in private – offers the audience access to the thinking of a young girl on the cusp of independent womanhood. In her wrestling with the thorny issue of Romeo’s identity, she repeatedly asks questions: ‘What’s Montague? ... What’s in a name?’ These disgruntled interrogatives about the inefficiencies of language and labels – a linguistic probing which connects with Romeo’s later promise to ‘tear the word’ (2.2.57) – are also assaults on social rigidity and received wisdom. These are not the words of a submissive child content to follow rules as she has been instructed. They are challenges posed by an individual developing a singular, personal way of looking at the world. They are the utterances of someone dissatisfied with the way things are.

This boldness continues throughout this almost-soliloquy, reaching its greatest intensity at the end of the speech when Juliet offers her ‘self’ to Romeo in exchange for him shedding his ‘name’. This imagined or proposed transaction is radical as it undoes all sorts of patriarchal assumptions. One of these is the idea that after marriage it was women who should lose their names. Secondly, in determinedly stating how she envisages her future, her vow here contradicts the Elizabethan expectation that fathers should ‘pilot’ the destinies of their young daughters rather than the daughters directing themselves.

How does Shakespeare present Romeo here?

Romeo’s impulsive nature is in full evidence in this exchange. The very fact of his location – Romeo has brazenly crept behind enemy lines – and his bragging that he has no fear if the Capulets ‘find him’ in their midst clearly demonstrate to the audience how Romeo’s ego is dangerously inflated by the power of love (2.2.75–78). As soon as he engages in conversation with Juliet, and in order to win her over, he immediately and without real thought about the consequences denies his lineage and heritage, instantly claiming his Montague background is now ‘hateful’ (2.2.55).

Critical Reading 1

Equally, in response to Juliet's tender attempts to understand how he has trespassed into her family's grounds, his hyperbolic declaratives and ornate comparisons are dazzlingly quick and unequivocal. For example, adopting the language of chivalric bravery and flattering of the prized lady, he claims

... there lies more peril in thine eye
Than twenty of their swords! (2.2.71–72)

He figures his pursuit of Juliet in the language of perilous expedition, where he must adventurously scale 'stony limits' (2.2.67) and traverse the 'farthest sea' (2.2.83) in order to reach his love. But, movingly, the grandness of his self-presentation is eventually reduced by the power Juliet has over him. By the end of the scene, rather than as a heroic, questing figure, Romeo describes himself as Juliet's pet 'bird' (2.2.182): a tiny toy of a thing controlled by her every whim.

How does this presentation of Juliet and Romeo fit into the play as a whole?

This scene compares and contrasts with the beginning of Act 3, Scene 5, which contains another anguished parting between the two lovers. As in Act 2, Scene 2, in the later scene there is a sense of negotiation, exchange and gentle conflict between Romeo and Juliet as they sleepily argue about whether or not it is daylight and if Romeo must leave Juliet's bedroom before he is caught. In the earlier scene both characters seem to agree that linguistic signs – names, in particular – are problematic. In the famous aubade – a song between lovers marking the dawn – of Act 3, Scene 5, the meaning of other kinds of signs – nightingales, larks and what these might symbolise – troubles the lovers.

In Act 3, Scene 5, the pretence both lovers uphold – at different times – that it is not yet daylight adds a note of childishness to the scene. By seemingly lying to themselves and to each other, these characters reveal themselves to be unwilling or ill-equipped to deal with the adult realities of their situation, and so escape into a fantastical realm where they can control the passage of time and prolong the secrecy of night. This youthful element neatly matches with Romeo's impetuosity and Juliet's greenness explored earlier.

Themes

Identity emerges as one of the key ideas in Act 2, Scene 2. As well as the discussion of naming, the shifting characterisations of the two lovers prompt audiences to ponder who we become when influenced by love, what we might sacrifice in order to love and how we change ourselves in the presence of one we love.

How has this scene been interpreted?

In typically punchy style, the academic Germaine Greer has referred to Romeo as an unsophisticated 'dork'. In many ways, this scene provides ample evidence for this useful – albeit unkind – assessment. Romeo's grandiose and often clichéd expressions of his intense feelings perhaps attest to the foolhardy nature of Romeo that Greer is getting at.

Conversely, the actress Ellie Kendrick, who played Juliet at the Globe in 2009, describes Juliet as 'fiercely intelligent, very spirited, a really ... mind-blowingly principled ... girl [who] can match anyone on any image, any logic, any conversation that's thrown at her'. Indeed, the deftness of some of Juliet's responses in this exchange, her burgeoning self-awareness and analysis of the complexity of her position do make her a remarkable, singular creation; one with perhaps more perceptiveness and insight than her older, male counterpart.

Critical Reading 2

Emma Torrance analyses the characters of Benvolio, Mercutio and Tybalt within Act 3, Scene 1 of *Romeo and Juliet* – a key scene in which a fight breaks out between the Capulets and Montagues.

Key quotation

MERCUTIO Men's eyes were made to look, and let them gaze;
I will not budge for no man's pleasure, I. (3.1.54–55)

Setting the scene

The fight which breaks out between the Capulets and Montagues in Act 3, Scene 1 is central to the plot of *Romeo and Juliet*: its consequences shift the story from romantic comedy to tragedy in a few short lines. The catalyst, Mercutio, is ironically a member of neither family. It is the day after the Capulet ball, and he, always ready to cause trouble, is hanging around the Verona streets with Benvolio and other Montague men. Tybalt is also out, determined to challenge Romeo to a duel. He thinks Romeo has insulted and mocked his family by disguising himself to gatecrash their ball. Tybalt wants to restore his offended honour publicly.

How does Shakespeare present Benvolio here and in the rest of the play?

Before Romeo's arrival, Shakespeare presents us with a potentially explosive clash between two important characters: Mercutio and Tybalt. Between this hot-tempered pair stands level-headed Benvolio, Romeo's cousin, a Montague and friend to Mercutio. In contrast to Mercutio, Benvolio wants to avoid confrontation. He is presented throughout the play as cautious and careful (his name, translated from Italian, means 'good will'). Shakespeare portrays him as a go-between from the start. In the brawl opening Act 1, Scene 1, he plays the peacekeeper ('Part fools, you know not what you do!' (1.1.64–65)), and through these words Shakespeare establishes him as wise and cautious. These qualities are explored further in Act 3, Scene 1.

At the beginning of the scene Benvolio tries to manage Mercutio's playful and dangerous temper. Shakespeare presents him as instinctively aware of the tension and his reasonable voice worryingly foreshadows what is to come. He knows from experience how easily trouble can break out and clearly fears the consequences:

I pray thee, good Mercutio, let's retire:
The day is hot, the Capels are abroad,
And if we meet we shall not scape a brawl, (3.1.1–3)

Critical Reading 2

In this example Shakespeare avoids forceful language. Instead, he represents Benvolio as persuasive, encouraging Mercutio to 'retire' from this very public place. He focusses on the influence of the weather and the Capulets' presence rather than his powerful friend's wild, reckless personality. His reasoning illustrates his ability to predict Mercutio's likely response. Shakespeare shows him deliberately placing the potential blame elsewhere to avoid incensing the unpredictable Mercutio. 'The day is hot' conveys the mood as electric, dangerous and out of their control, whilst 'the Capels are abroad' seeks to suggest that the instigators of conflict will be Capulets. Finally, and most convincingly, Benvolio states with fatalistic certainty, 'And if we meet we shall not scape a brawl'. Here, Shakespeare reinforces the conflict as unavoidable through Benvolio's authoritative negative modal, 'shall not'. However, in this well-judged warning Benvolio hints at what the audience suspects: Mercutio's presence makes the probability of 'scap[ing] a brawl' unlikely. However, another important aspect of Benvolio's character is also revealed through these lines: his loyalty. By using the collective pronouns 'us' ('let's) and 'we', Benvolio commits to standing by Mercutio's side regardless of his own concerns.

In his exploration of their friendship, Shakespeare depicts them as intimate and friendly. Here, Benvolio draws on this intimacy to influence Mercutio. Despite Benvolio's lower status, he addresses Mercutio using the informal, intimate pronoun 'thee'. This symbolises the connection and affection between them. We might expect Benvolio to use 'you' – more appropriate and respectful to a social superior such as Mercutio. However, Shakespeare chooses this deliberately to demonstrate Benvolio's diplomatic 'good will' and Mercutio's relaxed attitude. At the same time, Benvolio reinforces his inferior status by pleading 'pray' rather than asking outright, and compliments Mercutio as 'good' in order to encourage sensible behaviour. Benvolio knows his influence is limited as Mercutio's connection to the Prince gives him power and protection, allowing him to act recklessly without fear of the consequences. Shakespeare emphasises the danger of Mercutio's unpredictable (or mercurial) personality and status through Benvolio's deliberately tactful and diplomatic words.

How does Shakespeare present Tybalt here and in the rest of the play?

Interestingly, Shakespeare presents Tybalt as uncharacteristically wary in this scene. This is despite being established as hot-tempered and confrontational in Act 1, Scene 1's brawl, and through his choleric rage when stopped from challenging Romeo at the ball. He now addresses Benvolio (who he earlier threatened to murder), Mercutio and the Montagues as 'Gentlemen' and wishes them 'good den' (3.1.38), both marks of polite, respectful behaviour. When speaking directly to Mercutio, Tybalt uses 'you' and 'sir' (3.1.41) to indicate Mercutio's social superiority, taking care not to challenge or offend the Prince's kinsman. Even when Mercutio taunts and provokes him to anger with deliberately insulting verbal attacks, Tybalt publicly backs down from the conflict to pursue Romeo ('Well peace be with you, sir, here comes my man' (3.1.56)).

Shakespeare presents the usually quick-tempered Tybalt as capable of both sensible and honourable behaviour: characteristics we rarely associate with him. He shows Tybalt avoiding confrontation, perhaps because of the Prince's decree, and emphasises the importance of social hierarchy in Verona. Tybalt's avoidance of Mercutio's initial challenge and his determination to duel honourably with Romeo are actions which arguably follow the codes of both chivalry and honour, showing Tybalt to demonstrate better judgement than we expect.

Like the majority of Benvolio's lines in this scene, many of Tybalt's are written in iambic blank verse. Whilst Shakespeare often uses this technique to indicate a character's higher social status, he is also hinting that both men approach this conflict cautiously. This rigid structure could symbolise that they plan their speech and behaviour rather than respond impulsively. However, Tybalt does slip out of meter and drops the polite pronoun in his accusation: 'Mercutio, thou consortest with Romeo–' (3.1.45). Through this momentary loss of control, Shakespeare reminds us of Tybalt's natural temperament.



Wider Reading List

Other Shakespeare plays

Hamlet– The story of Hamlet, the young Prince of Denmark, his tortured relationship with his mother, and his quest to avenge his father's murder at the hand of his brother Claudius has fascinated writers and audiences ever since it was written around 1600.

King Lear- "King Lear" has been widely acclaimed as Shakespeare's most powerful tragedy. Elemental and passionate, it encompasses the horrific and the heart-rending. Love and hate, loyalty and treachery, cruelty and self-sacrifice: all these contend in a tempestuous drama which has become an enduring classic of the world's literature.

Macbeth- "Macbeth" is one of Shakespeare's four great tragedies, encompassing witchcraft, bloody murder, ghostly apparitions as well as high poetry, blended in such a way as to demonstrate the assured dramatic touch of Shakespeare's maturity. Macbeth's tragedy is that of a good, brave and honourable man turned into the personification of evil by the workings of unreasonable ambition.

Film adaptations

(be careful of plot changes!)

Romeo and Juliet (Dir. Baz Luhrmann) 1996