

Knowledge Organiser

Year 7: Unit 4
Romeo and Juliet



Name:

Class:

Big Questions

The big question for the unit is: **How is discovery reflected in Shakespeare's 'Romeo and Juliet'?**

Our study of 'Romeo and Juliet' will follow the structure below:

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| Week 1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ What does 'Romeo and Juliet' teach us?▪ What role does fate and tragedy play?▪ How is conflict presented in Act 1: Scene 1? |
| Week 2 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ How is Romeo's love for Rosaline presented at the start of the play?▪ How is Romeo and Juliet's first encounter presented?▪ How is Romeo presented in Act 1 of 'Romeo and Juliet'? |
| Week 3 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ How does Shakespeare present Romeo in Act 1 of 'Romeo and Juliet'?▪ How is Romeo and Juliet's love for each other presented?▪ How does Romeo demonstrate his love for Juliet?▪ How does Romeo react to conflict in Act 3: Scene 1? |
| Week 4 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ How does Romeo react to conflict in Act 3: Scene 1?▪ How does Romeo react to the news of his banishment?▪ Why might Romeo and Juliet's relationship be in jeopardy?▪ How much is Juliet willing to sacrifice for Romeo? |
| Week 5 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ How does Romeo react to the news of Juliet's death in Act 5: Scene 1?▪ How is Romeo presented in Act 5: Scene 3?▪ How much is Romeo willing to sacrifice for Juliet? |
| Week 6 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ How does Shakespeare present Romeo in 'Romeo and Juliet'?▪ How have recent theatre productions presented 'Romeo and Juliet'?▪ How would you stage 'Romeo and Juliet'? |

Acts in 'Romeo and Juliet'

For each act in the play, here is a brief summary of what happens:

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|--------------|---|
| Act 1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ The play opens as the Chorus introduces two feuding families of Verona: the Capulets and the Montagues. On a hot summer's day, the young men of each faction fight until the Prince of Verona intercedes and threatens to banish them.▪ Soon after, the head of the Capulet family plans a feast. His goal is to introduce his daughter Juliet to a Count named Paris who seeks to marry Juliet.▪ Montague's son Romeo and his friends (Benvolio and Mercutio) hear of the party and resolve to go in disguise. Romeo hopes to see his beloved Rosaline at the party. Instead, while there, he meets Juliet and falls instantly in love with her. Juliet's cousin Tybalt recognises the Montague boys and forces them to leave just as Romeo and Juliet discover one another. |
| Act 2 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Romeo lingers near the Capulet house to talk with Juliet when she appears in her window.▪ The pair declare their love for one another and intend to marry the next day.▪ With the help of Juliet's Nurse, the lovers arrange to marry when Juliet goes for confession at the cell of Friar Laurence. There, they are secretly married (talk about a short engagement). |

| | |
|--------------|---|
| Act 3 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Following the secret marriage, Juliet's cousin Tybalt sends a challenge to Romeo. ▪ Romeo refuses to fight, which angers his friend Mercutio who then fights with Tybalt. ▪ Mercutio is accidentally killed as Romeo intervenes to stop the fight. In anger, Romeo pursues Tybalt, kills him, and is banished by the Prince. ▪ Juliet is anxious when Romeo is late to meet her and learns of the brawl, Tybalt's death, and Romeo's banishment. ▪ Friar Laurence arranges for Romeo to spend the night with Juliet before he leaves for Mantua. Meanwhile, the Capulet family grieves for Tybalt, so Lord Capulet moves Juliet's marriage to Paris to the next day. ▪ Juliet's parents are angry when Juliet doesn't want to marry Paris, but they don't know about her secret marriage to Romeo. |
| Act 4 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Friar Laurence helps Juliet by providing a sleeping draught that will make her seem dead. ▪ When the wedding party arrives to greet Juliet the next day, they believe she is dead. ▪ The Friar sends a messenger to warn Romeo of Juliet's plan and bids him to come to the Capulet family monument to rescue his sleeping wife. |
| Act 5 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The vital message to Romeo doesn't arrive in time because the plague is in town (so the messenger cannot leave Verona). ▪ Hearing from his servant that Juliet is dead, Romeo buys poison from an Apothecary in Mantua. He returns to Verona and goes to the tomb where he surprises and kills the mourning Paris. ▪ Romeo takes his poison and dies, while Juliet awakens from her drugged coma. She learns what has happened from Friar Laurence, but she refuses to leave the tomb and stabs herself. ▪ The Friar returns with the Prince, the Capulets, and Romeo's lately widowed father. ▪ The deaths of their children lead the families to make peace, and they promise to erect a monument in Romeo and Juliet's memory. |

Prior knowledge

Before you begin learning about and reading 'Romeo and Juliet': What do you know about the play, Shakespeare or love in the Elizabethan era?

Knowledge learned throughout the unit

As you are learning about 'Romeo and Juliet', add any new knowledge in a brainstorm below.

Context of 'Romeo and Juliet'

Shakespeare's World

- Between the late 1580s and 1613, Shakespeare wrote 37 plays and contributed to many more.
- Shakespeare's plays were performed on stage and became a very popular attraction for the people of London.
- The Globe Theatre was carefully constructed so that people from across society came to watch: the aristocracy and upper classes would sit high up in boxes, whereas the lower classes of society would have to stand in 'The Yard', open to all the elements.
- Shakespeare's plays served several purposes: they were the central form of entertainment for many people – remember that televisions and the cinema did not exist!
- Everyday, people would come and watch his plays so that they could experience the drama of love, humour, conflict and mystery.
- Shakespeare was excellent at making his plays comment on the important aspects of human life – even the most educated of people (including the King or Queen) would come to see his plays because of the important messages they contained.
- Shakespeare wrote 3 different types of play:
 - Tragedy – usually involving flawed characters and death.
 - Comedy – usually involving magic, love and marriage. 'The Tempest' is a comedy.
 - History – usually involving war and real-life events.

Shakespearean Tragedy

The word tragedy was derived from the Greek word *tragoidia*, which means '*the song of the goat*.'

Today in theatre and literature, a tragedy is a work that has an unhappy ending. The ending must include the main character's downfall.

Shakespearean tragedy has got its own specific features, which distinguish it from other kinds of tragedies. It must be kept in mind that Shakespeare is mostly indebted to Aristotle's theory of tragedy in his works.

The 9 Elements of Shakespearean Tragedy:

| Elements | Explanation |
|----------------------------------|--|
| Tragic hero | A main character is cursed by fate and possessed of a tragic flaw. |
| A struggle between good and evil | This struggle can take place as part of the plot or exist within the main character. |
| Hamartia | The fatal character flaw of the tragic hero. |
| Tragic waste | The good being destroyed along with the bad at the resolution (end) of the play. Often played out with the unnecessary loss of life, especially of 'good' characters. |
| Internal/ External conflict | Internal conflict – The struggle the hero engages in with their fatal flaw. External conflict – This can be a problem facing the hero as a result of the plot or a 'bad' character. |
| Catharsis | The release of the audience's emotions through empathy with the characters. |
| Supernatural elements | Magic, witchcraft, ghosts, etc. |
| Lack of poetic justice | Things end poorly for everyone, including the 'good' characters. |
| Comic relief | One or more funny characters who participate in scenes intended to lighten the mood. |

Christianity

- Religion was central to Elizabethan life and would have had a great influence on the considerations of the morality of Romeo and Juliet's affair. It is easy to compare Elizabethan religious life with modern religious life, but this would be inaccurate.
 - In the Medieval to Early Modern Era, religion was the entirety of one's life - religion was something one was.
 - Most could not imagine a life without religion, unlike today.
- The concept of sin also has its place in the play, with the idea of sin of Juliet's refusal to obey her father (a breaking of the 10 Commandments).

The Position of Women

- In the Elizabethan era women were seen as property and were therefore objectified (treated more like objects rather than people). Women were not allowed to own any property, in fact they were seen as property themselves.
 - Females always belonged to the closest male relative, when they were born they belonged to their father and then when they were married they became the property of their husbands.
 - This meant that the men could do whatever they wanted to their wives free of judgement or disapproval.

Gender Norms

- In marriage, women were expected to be passive and take on a domestic role. This contrasts to the men who were active creatures and meant to make money.
- Shakespeare's exploration of Romeo and Juliet's love affair challenges these gender norms as both characters are portrayed as active. In addition to this, Romeo's feminine tendencies go against the typically masculine traits men were supposed to have.
- It is clear to see that men had to be aggressive and were associated with violence as it was their role to protect their women, family and friends as well as their honour. It is possible that the feud between the Montagues and the Capulets is no longer about real fight or disagreement but one just based on male honour and pride.
- Within the play the grudge is so "ancient" no one remembers what it is really about.

Patriarchy and Hierarchy

- Elizabethan England was a fiercely patriarchal (look at the definition of this word on page 9 of this knowledge organiser) society with laws that heavily restricted what women could and could not do.
- Women were not allowed to attend school or university, which meant they couldn't work in professions like law or medicine.
- Most of the guilds, who trained skilled workers like goldsmiths and carpenters, did not officially admit women. Even acting was off limits to women.
- The only trades legally available to women were those that could be mastered and practised in the home, such as hat making and brewing.
- Women were also banned from voting, and though they could inherit property from their father or their husband, they could not themselves purchase property.
- Women were also bound by strict social expectations that did not apply equally to men.
- Sermons and books written during the Elizabethan era encouraged women to be silent and obedient to male authority, whether that of their father or their husband.

The Importance of Marriage

- Among richer families (e.g. the Montagues and the Capulets) the girls in the family were seen only as a means of making links with other rich families. Nevertheless, they follow similar noble practices such as the use of the dowry.
- The dowry was a central part of such marriages – this was the physical objects (property, money etc.) which were added to the woman to make her more attractive to possible suitors. This made the woman “part of the package”, being simply another object among many and thus contributing to the widespread objectification of women in Elizabethan society.
- Women of noble families were sold off as part of the dowry from a very early age, so Juliet’s young age would not have been so shocking to the contemporary audience.
- Marriage was looked at as an end goal and purpose for all women. If a woman didn’t marry then she was thought of as a deviant (someone who does not follow social norms and values). An unmarried woman would not just be ignoring her natural calling but also have been diverting from the will of God.
 - Lady Capulet tells Juliet that “I was your mother much upon these years” meaning that she was already married with a baby at Juliet’s age.
- However, the position of women had changed with the assumption of Queen Elizabeth I which defined (and, to an extent, introduced) the archetype of the strong female leader.
 - QEI’s famous statement that “I have the body but of a weak and feeble woman; but I have the heart and stomach of a king” (1588) highlights how patriarchal norms still predominated, and how she was fighting against them.





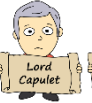
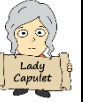

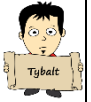


Love and Marriage

- Marriage in Elizabethan England replicated society’s patriarchal structure. Legally a girl could marry as young as 12 with her parents’ consent, though young women typically married in their late teens or early twenties.
- When a woman’s father deemed her ready to marry, he had a large degree of control of who she married.
- Among the aristocracy (the richest/most powerful within society), where marriages were often more about politics than love, women often had no say at all in who they married.
- Upon entering marriage, a woman stopped being her father’s responsibility, and her husband became her legal master.
- Courtly love (like royalty) should be polite, ceremonious, restrained, intellectual, courteous and those involved should be in love with the idea of being in love.
- There was no contact, just an exchange of gifts, letters and poems.
- Divorce was impossible.



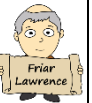
Types of love

- It’s worth noting the different kinds of love and to what extent Romeo and Juliet’s affair embodies them.
 - Shakespeare’s time saw a move towards marriages formed from love rather than out of duty to one’s family. The play may be seen as the epitome of this ideal.
 - These changing motivations for marriage meant a change in the way men went about obtaining a woman. This led to the notion of ‘wooing’ a woman. Wooing is the process of impressing a woman so she wants to be with you.

Characters in 'Romeo and Juliet'

| Montagues | Capulets |
|--|---|
| Romeo  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Romeo is sensitive and is caught in the middle of the feud. At the beginning of the play, Romeo is saddened by his unrequited love for Rosaline. He is a loyal friend and kills Tybalt as Mercutio was murdered. He is banished to Mantua but returns to Verona on believing that Juliet is dead. | Juliet  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A teenager who ends up falling in love with Romeo. She has no power and is controlled by her father. She relies on the Nurse for help and advice. She is closer to the Nurse than her mother. Juliet commits suicide for her deep-rooted love for Romeo. |
| Lord and Lady Montague   <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Romeo's parents; head of the Montague household. At the beginning of the play, Lord Montague is concerned about his son's unhappiness. At the end of the play, Lady Montague dies of grief. | Lord and Lady Capulet   <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Juliet's parents; head of the Capulet household. Both characters love their daughter but do not take into consideration her thoughts and feelings. Lord Capulet commands respect. Lady Capulet relies on the Nurse for moral support. Both wish for their daughter to marry Paris. |
| Benvolio  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Romeo's cousin and thoughtful friend. Benvolio makes a genuine effort to defuse violent scenes in public. Mercutio accuses Benvolio of having a nasty temper in private. He spends most of the play trying to distract Romeo from Rosaline, even after Romeo falls in love with Juliet. | Tybalt  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Juliet's cousin; he is honourable to the Capulet name. Tybalt has a temper but is proud of who he is. Tybalt seeks to fight members of the Montague family. Tybalt is killed by Romeo and Tybalt had killed Mercutio. |
| Mercutio  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A kinsman to the Prince and Romeo's close friend. His volatile nature, quick wit and wordplay serve as comic relief throughout the play. He attends the Capulet's party with Romeo and Benvolio. When Tybalt challenges Romeo but he refuses to fight back, Mercutio immediately attacks Tybalt. Mercutio is killed by Tybalt. | The Nurse  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Juliet's 'nanny' who has cared for Juliet her entire life. The Nurse helps Juliet to marry Romeo. Her long-winded stories, raunchy comments and distaste for men generally serve as comic relief throughout the play. The Nurse defends Juliet when her family cuts her off. |

Other key characters

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| Paris  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A kinsman of the Prince. He is the man the Capulets want Juliet to marry. Once Lord Capulet promises Paris that he can marry Juliet, he becomes very presumptuous towards her, acting as if they are already married. | The Prince  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Prince of Verona; Prince Escalus. He is concerned about public peace. |
| Friar Laurence  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A friar and friend to both Romeo and Juliet. The Friar represents a paternal figure in Romeo's life. He is always ready with a plan. It was the Friar's idea for Juliet to fake her own death but it did not go to plan. The Friar wishes for peace between the Montague and Capulet families. | |

Key Terminology

| | Term | Definition |
|----|-------------|--|
| 1 | Monologue | A long speech by one actor in a play or film, directed to a specific audience. |
| 2 | Dialogue | A conversation between two or more people in a book, play, or film. |
| 3 | Prologue | The preface or introduction to a literary work, or a speech often in verse addressed to the audience by an actor at the beginning of a play. |
| 4 | 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. |
| 5 | Fate | A power or agency that predetermines and orders the course of events. |
| 6 | 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. |
| 7 | Feud | A prolonged and bitter quarrel or dispute. |
| 8 | Forbidden | Not allowed; banned. |
| 9 | Tragedy | A play dealing with tragic events and having an unhappy ending, especially one concerning the downfall of the main character. |
| 10 | 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. |
| 11 | Honourable | Bringing high respect or worthiness to something or someone. |
| 12 | Dominant | Most important, powerful or influential. |
| 13 | Subservient | Prepared to obey others unquestioningly. |
| 14 | Duel | A contest with deadly weapons arranged between two people in order to settle a point of honour. |
| 15 | Spontaneous | Performed or occurring as a result of a sudden inner impulse of inclination and without premeditation or external stimulus. |
| 16 | Unrequited | A feeling, especially love, which is not returned. |
| 17 | Banishment | The act of sending someone away from a country or place as an official punishment. |
| 18 | Pivotal | Of high importance. A pivotal scene in the play and affects the outcome of the plot; a turning point. |
| 19 | Downfall | a loss of power, prosperity, or status. |
| 20 | Suit | the process of trying to win a woman's affection with a view to marriage. |

Additional Terminology

| | Term | Definition |
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Example analytical writing

How does Shakespeare present Romeo in 'Romeo and Juliet'?

Shakespeare presents Romeo's feelings towards Juliet as an all-encompassing, blinding love, but a love that is fickle and fleeting and that causes only death and violence to all who come near them.

Romeo believes that "Juliet is the sun" and continues to use the semantic field of light with words such as "twinkle" and "the fairest stars". This shows how Romeo becomes completely oblivious to all the problems as he believes that his love will conquer all. The light also gives Romeo and Juliet's love a heavenly quality as he describes her like an angel. The idea of their love being angelic is also further presented in adaptations such as Baz Luhrmann's adaptation where Juliet is depicted wearing angel wings. This makes her seem untouchable by corruption and violence only for the audience to be jarringly brought back to reality by her eventual death. By describing her this way, Romeo places her and his love on a pedestal which, while it may on the surface seem like him treasuring something that he sees as more precious than everything else, it also implies a more sinister interpretation – where by placing his love on this pedestal, his idea of it becomes unattainable, suggesting that he is doomed to chase after his unrealistic ideals of love forever. Romeo however is blind to this as he sees his love to Juliet as beautiful and perfect like "the fairest stars" when in reality, up-close, "stars" are cold, unemotional balls of gas and he is blind to this because of his need to romanticise his feelings. The audience then pities Romeo as they are fully aware from the prologue that his love is in the end, unattainable and yet he continues to reach for it throughout the play, demonstrating the blinding all-encompassing love that he feels for Juliet.

In the rest of the play, it is made clear that Romeo's feelings are often changeable in a second and that his love for Juliet is no different. In Act One – the very same act he declares his love for Juliet – he describes Rosaline using the sun. This is the very same metaphor that he then uses for Juliet when picturing her as "the all-seeing sun" which just goes to show the shallow nature of his love as it cannot be based on any truly meaningful connection when his feelings change so quickly. Romeo is shown throughout the play to be a very self-centred character – for example when he refuses any advice from the Friar on the grounds that he doesn't think the Friar could possibly understand his feelings: "thou canst not speak of that thou dost not feel". Similarly, in the adaptation by Dominic Dromgoole, Romeo ends up crying on the floor after killing Tybalt – once again making the situation about him instead of confronting his actions. This self-centred, narcissistic attitude is clearly extended to his love for Juliet as well as it is implied that he loves the idea of being in love rather than the reality as the Friar points out of the men's love lies not in the hearts but "their eyes". This has the potential to make the audience then somewhat satisfied when the consequences of his actions do catch up to him as the fickle and fleeting nature of Romeo's love to Juliet is clearly shown through the events it caused.

The love that Romeo feels for Juliet in the play is also shown to cause only death and violence to those around them, and eventually themselves. Juliet, on the verge of suicide, describes her weapon as a "happy dagger", along with declarations of "O loving hate!" which serves to show how Romeo's love for her has tricked her into believing that the violence is necessary to prove their love. The use of the oxymorons comes as a startling juxtaposition to audience as it is made clear to them how twisted and intertwined Romeo's love has become with violence. Romeo also claims that Juliet's "beauty hath made [him] effeminate" where the subtle accusatory tone demonstrates how the violence was always present – his love had just acted as a disguise, making it seem as though it was all a necessary act of love. His revelation also shows how his love has only increased the intensity of the violence as instead of turning away at this point, he ends up only furthering the violence in the play on his quest for love until it ultimately leads to their deaths. This leads the audience to question the nature of their love and whether it is truly as pure as they believe or whether there is underlying toxicity and insinuation of violence. This violence and death that is so closely linked to Romeo and Juliet's actions demonstrates the violent consequences that Romeo's love for Juliet brings.

KS3 READING MARK SCHEME [Y7, 8, 9]

| Success Criteria | Nothing to reward (0 marks) | (1 mark) | (2 marks) | (3 marks) | |
|---|-----------------------------|---|---|--|--|
| 1 – Task and Big Ideas | <i>Not evidenced</i> | Some relevance to big ideas and task. Simple approach to task and discussion. | Clear, relevant and supported approach to task and big ideas. | Thoughtful, developed approach to task and big ideas. Engages fully with the task. | |
| 2 – Quotations and references | <i>Not evidenced</i> | Some quotations and/or references used but will be limited. | Relevant, clear quotations that are embedded into sentences. | Fully embedded, judicious quotations and consistent references with more than one explored per paragraph. | |
| 3 – Subject Terminology and writers' methods | <i>Not evidenced</i> | Identification of some methods used by the writer with some possible use of subject terminology. | Subject terminology is used to explore a range of writers' methods. | Sophisticated and ambitious use of subject terminology to explore writers' methods. Consideration of language, structure and form. | |
| 4 – Zoom on key words + discuss effect | <i>Not evidenced</i> | Some exploration and discussion exploring single words. | Clear exploration and discussion considering the connotations of single words. | Perceptive and insightful exploration linked clearly to the big ideas. | |
| 5 – Analysis of writer's purpose/ intentions | <i>Not evidenced</i> | Some understanding although often explains rather than analyses. Simple comment on writer's intentions. | Clear understanding and analysis shown. Clear and relevant ideas and comments on writer's intentions. | Developed interpretation of the text. A considered and exploratory approach where layers of meaning and links between context and text are consistent. | |
| 6 – Focus on the question | <i>Not evidenced</i> | Little focus on the argument throughout – tends to drift off topic at times. | Some clear focus on the argument throughout – although this is not sustained and can lose focus at times. | Consistent focus on the argument throughout – clearly addresses the question. | |

Example analytical writing: the reading mark scheme

Homework.

Knowledge is power, so the more you know, the more secure you will be in your learning.

| Year 7: Unit 4 Homework: <i>Romeo and Juliet</i> | | |
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| Task 1: <u>Week 2</u> | Due date: | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Read 'Wider Reading 1' starting on page 14.• Complete the reflection activities on page 17.• Answer the 10 knowledge retrieval questions on page 18. These questions will be peer assessed in class and your teacher will check that you have completed your homework. |
| Task 2: <u>Week 4</u> | Due date: | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Read 'Wider Reading 2' starting on page 19.• Complete the reflection activities on page 22.• Answer the 10 knowledge retrieval questions on page 23. These questions will be peer assessed in class and your teacher will check that you have completed your homework. |
| Task 3: <u>Week 6</u> | Due date: | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Read 'Wider Reading 3' starting on page 24.• Complete the reflection activities on page 28.• Answer the 10 knowledge retrieval questions on page 29. These questions will be peer assessed in class and your teacher will check that you have completed your homework. |

If you have 'no homework', or you have finished all of the above, try these tasks on a weekly basis to ensure your understanding of the poems is secure.

1. Research Shakespeare and make some revision notes on him and his works.
2. Research the characters from the 'Romeo and Juliet', the plot and the themes.

Wider reading 1: Tragedy Then and Now

<https://www.englishandmedia.co.uk/e-magazine/articles/35106>

Dr Sean McEvoy examines what the term tragedy meant to Shakespeare and his contemporaries – an important context for thinking about the plays both within their genre(s) and as they would have been viewed at the time of their production.

When people used the word ‘tragedy’ in around 1600 it didn’t carry anything like the baggage it can do now. Philosophers (principally in Germany in the nineteenth century) hadn’t yet seized on the idea and tried to define it as something deep, universal and important about the human condition. Instead, in Shakespeare’s time they saw ‘tragedy’ as a much more straightforward, if somewhat fuzzy descriptive term. They did think that tragedy was about human suffering, of course, but the plays they wrote set out to consider the complex reasons why it happens. Shakespeare’s tragedies are very interested in those reasons, and in particular how power and language operate in the world in relation to suffering, without being hung up on any precise definition of what ‘tragedy’ might mean. In that, their view of it is much more like tragedy as it written today than what is proposed by any of the definitions which philosophers – both earlier and later than Shakespeare – have tried to apply.

Was Shakespeare Interested in Aristotle?

For a start Shakespeare almost certainly hadn’t read the Greek philosopher Aristotle’s famous definition of what a tragedy was supposed to be. He may well have known about that definition (in Aristotle’s Poetics) filtered through Italian versions (such as that of Ludovico Castelvetro in 1570) and through the English poet Sir Philip Sidney’s Apology for Poetry (1595), but he clearly didn’t think it ought to have any bearing on what he was writing. And why should he? Shakespeare was a commercial playwright who needed to be able to sell plays that large audiences wanted to see. His friend Ben Jonson wrote two tragedies set in ancient Rome that went along with the classical rules, Sejanus(1603) and Catiline(1611). Neither were successes, and one was ‘hissed from the stage’, in Jonson’s own words. Rather than being set on one day, in one place, with one plot, as Aristotle’s followers demanded, Shakespeare’s successful and popular tragedies range over time and space and include ordinary people interacting with kings and nobles, not just the upper classes as in seventeenth-century French tragedies. Nor do they always just have one protagonist, a main character who, according to Aristotle, is neither wholly good nor wholly bad, who makes an error of judgement which leads to his downfall. Romeo and Juliet and Antony and Cleopatra have pairs of protagonists. Weighing up the moral positives and negatives of Coriolanus, Macbeth or Lear as characters seems to be missing the point of what is happening to whole societies in these plays. As for that tired old distortion of Aristotle which says that the tragic protagonist has a ‘fatal flaw’ in his or her character which leads to the tragedy, well, in the words of the critic Colin Burrow (one of whose essays I have drawn on in the first part of this article),

this is the recipe for drama which could only appeal to those who simply want to see the bad bleed, and have a clear idea of what ‘bad’ is.

Are Tragedies Histories and Vice Versa?

The title pages of the plays when originally printed call some plays which are usually classified as histories (such as Richard II) tragedies, and those we now call tragedies, histories (such as the first, ‘quarto’, paperback edition of King Lear in 1608). Is Richard III a tragedy or a history? Both, maybe. Not much was resting on the definition. It seems clear that an earlier idea of tragedy in England, which can be found, for example, in Chaucer’s ‘Monk’s Tale’ (1400), did have currency for Shakespeare: the idea that tragedy is about the fall of a great man into adversity. In fact, Shakespeare’s protagonists are often men on the way up (Macbeth) or down (Antony) or insecure where they are (Hamlet, Othello). But rather than see such a fall as

the inevitable result of the cosmic 'wheel of fortune' and reflect on the vanity and brevity of earthly prosperity in contrast with heaven which awaits the good Christian, Shakespeare is interested in showing how the acts and beliefs of people in the real world lead to terrible events which hurt many more people than just the main character.

Bad Rulers and Tyrants

One proposition in Sidney's *Apology for Poetry* that seems to have some application for him may be the idea that tragedy serves as a warning to bad rulers about the consequences of tyranny:

excellent tragedy [...] showeth forth the ulcers [corruption, wickedness in the state] that are covered with tissue [flesh, but maybe also rich cloth, an image Shakespeare uses in King Lear, 4.5.161]; that maketh kings fear to be tyrants, and tyrants manifest [show] their tyrannical humours [feelings, tendencies].

We know that what was performed on public stages could upset those in power in England because they put censorship in place to control the most obviously provocative material. Tragedy had this in common in ancient Athens and in early modern London: it challenged its audience to think about the causes of pain and suffering in a society where power and access to justice is distributed unevenly.

Those causes are never simple and often contradictory. Hamlet is responsible for seven deaths, the wiping out of the Danish royal family and the handing over of the country to a dubious adventurer, Fortinbras. Is the word of his father's ghost from the feudal Catholic past obviously of more weight than his duty to a modern, effective king who is also a Machiavellian murderer? What way of thinking about women could link his disgust at his mother's remarriage to his treatment of Ophelia? Is there any divine justice at work anywhere in the play? In *Othello*, what ideas does Othello have about himself as a noble warrior of royal birth who is also a Muslim convert in capitalist, imperialist Venice which Iago is able to exploit? Why do those ideas make him think his wife's adultery should be punishable by death? And what is it about Iago that enables his evil to flourish in this society for so long? How can Desdemona be both so brave and independent in the first part of the play yet so naïve in what she does and says in the second? What, exactly, is admirable about the murderous protagonists of either of these tragedies, and if so why do we find it admirable?

Tragedy – Resolving Contradictions?

In a recent book about English tragedy today, looking at the work of contemporary tragic writers such as Jez Butterworth, Edward Bond, Caryl Churchill, David Hare and Sarah Kane, the critic Sean Carney describes tragedy as

the interrogation of human suffering from a dialectical perspective.

As it happens this is another definition of tragedy that draws on a philosopher, perhaps the most influential in this respect of those nineteenth-century Germans, G.W.F. Hegel (1770-1831). 'Interrogation' clearly means subjecting human suffering to some hard questioning. 'Dialectics' is at the core of Hegel's thinking. It means a way of thinking that finds a tension between conflicting forces, contradictions, in any point of human history. Hegel thought tragedy pointed to ways in which those conflicts can lead to a resolution, even if only temporary, which will produce a better situation overall. That may well be to discount the actual suffering tragedy entails. The twentieth-century critic Raymond Williams, for example, found at the heart of tragedy the terrible contradiction that so many attempts to make the world a place where everyone's human potential is respected have involved the violent denying of other people's lives and liberties.

Overcoming Pain and Suffering

But my point here is that modern tragedy and Shakespearean tragedy are both exploring tangled conflicts in which pain and suffering are intrinsic in similar ways. Considering the continuing influence of Shakespeare on modern playwrights through our education system and theatre, this shouldn't perhaps be surprising. But neither Aristotle nor Hegel are adequate guides to tragedy in these plays: Shakespeare's tragedies have their own take on what a modern tragedian, Edward Bond, called

the causes of human suffering and the sources of human strength.

As part of homework task 1, you will be completing a knowledge retrieval quiz based on your understanding of the wider reading. Before you complete the quiz, consider the following questions to help your knowledge of the text.

1. How does wider reading 1 fit with the 'Romeo and Juliet' unit so far? Do you notice any overlaps or similarities to the content you have been learning in class?

2. How would you define a Shakespearean tragedy?

3. In your opinion, do tragedies still exist today?

Additional note space:

Homework Task 1

| | Write your answer in the box below each question. | ✓✗ |
|-------|---|----|
| 1 | How was tragedy defined in Shakespeare's time? | |
| | | |
| 2 | What do Shakespeare's tragedies set out to show? | |
| | | |
| 3 | Who also wrote tragedies at the same time as Shakespeare? | |
| | | |
| 4 | What happened to that playwright's plays? | |
| | | |
| 5 | What did Aristotle's followers demand from a tragedy play? | |
| | | |
| 6 | How many protagonists does 'Romeo and Juliet' have? | |
| | | |
| 7 | What was Shakespeare interested in showing in his plays? | |
| | | |
| 8 | According to Hegel, what is 'dialectics'? | |
| | | |
| 9 | What did Hegel believe tragedy to be? | |
| | | |
| 10 | What do Shakespearean tragedies and modern tragedies both have in common? | |
| | | |
| TOTAL | | |

Wider reading 2: Character analysis – Romeo and Juliet

<https://www.bl.uk/shakespeare/articles/character-analysis-romeo-and-juliet>

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

JULIET 'Tis but thy name that is my enemy:
Thou art thyself, though not a Montague.
What's Montague? It is nor hand nor foot,
Nor arm nor face, nor any other part
Belonging to a man. O, be some other name!
What's in a name? That which we call a rose
By any other word would smell as sweet;
So Romeo would, were he not Romeo call'd,
Retain that dear perfection which he owes
Without that title. Romeo, doff thy name,
And for thy name, which is no part of thee,
Take all myself. (2.2.38–49)

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.

42 However, the surprising arrival of Romeo makes Juliet momentarily retreat into a more conventional role:
43 that of the frightened, modest female. She becomes consumed with anxiety that her 'kinsmen' may discover
44 and 'murder' Romeo (2.2.69–70). Though concealed by the darkness of night, she claims that her cheeks
45 'blush' at the idea that Romeo heard her earlier, emotional outpouring. Equally, she is desperate for
46 assurances about Romeo's feelings towards her; there is an almost imploring quality to her voice when she
47 describes how she can change her behaviour until it meets Romeo's approval:

48 Or if thou thinkest I am too quickly won,
49 I'll frown and be perverse, and say thee nay,
50 So thou wilt woo, but else not for the world. (2.2.95–97)

51 But this submissiveness is short-lived, and Juliet soon regains a sense of stridency. As the scene progresses
52 and Romeo begins to offer Juliet oaths as a way of demonstrating his affection, Juliet controls his smooth
53 talking. Like a much more worldly and experienced woman, one tired of hackneyed 'chat up lines', she
54 interrupts and edits his words:

55 **ROMEO** Lady, by yonder blessed moon I vow
56 That tips with silver all these fruit-tree tops—

57 **JULIET** O, swear not by the moon, th' inconstant moon,
58 That monthly changes in her circled orb,
59 Lest that thy love prove likewise variable.

60 **ROMEO** What shall I swear by?

61 **JULIET** Do not swear at all;
62 Or, if thou wilt, swear by thy gracious self,
63 Which is the god of my idolatry,
64 And I'll believe thee.

65 **ROMEO** If my heart's dear love—

66 **JULIET** Well, do not swear. (2.2.107–116)

67 Interestingly, Juliet's linguistic fussiness here returns us to our earlier analysis of her conceptual
68 dissatisfaction with the limitations of language more generally.

69 This more controlled Juliet is the one also responsible for the sharp rebuttal to Romeo's suggestive, saucy
70 complaint that he leaves their encounter 'so unsatisfied' (2.2.125). Equally, this Juliet is keen for the
71 relationship's breakneck speed to be stilled, sharing the audience's view that the pair's love is

72 too rash, too unadvis'd, too sudden,
73 Too like the lightning, which doth cease to be
74 Ere one can say it lightens. (2.2.118–119)

75 It is also this more composed, mature Juliet who, towards the end of the extract, adopts a practical outlook
76 in her attempt to make level-headed plans for the lovers' next course of action.

77 **How does Shakespeare present Romeo here?**

78 Romeo's impulsive nature is in full evidence in this exchange. The very fact of his location – Romeo has
79 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). 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?

[...]
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.

As part of homework task 2, you will be completing a knowledge retrieval quiz based on your understanding of the wider reading. Before you complete the quiz, consider the following questions to help your knowledge of the text.

1. How does wider reading 2 fit with the 'Romeo and Juliet' unit so far? Do you notice any overlaps or similarities to the content you have been learning in class?

2. How would you describe Romeo and Juliet's relationship?

3. Both characters know that they are forbidden to love each other. How do they both react to this knowledge?

Additional note space:

Homework Task 2

| | Write your answer in the box below each question. | ✓✗ |
|-------|---|----|
| 1 | What is Act 2: Scene 2 famously referred to as? | |
| | | |
| 2 | In which household's grounds is Act 2: Scene 2 set? | |
| | | |
| 3 | Before Romeo reaches the orchard below Juliet's balcony, what is Juliet doing? | |
| | | |
| 4 | During Act 2: Scene 2, Romeo and Juliet declare their love for each other. However, what are they both scared of? | |
| | | |
| 5 | Juliet chooses to marry Romeo. How does Juliet's decision go against Elizabethan expectation? | |
| | | |
| 6 | What is Juliet worried that her kinsmen will do to Romeo if they found out that they have been talking? | |
| | | |
| 7 | What inflates Romeo's ego? | |
| | | |
| 8 | At the end of Act 2: Scene 2, Romeo describes himself as Juliet's "pet 'bird'" – why does Shakespeare choose to refer to Romeo like this? | |
| | | |
| 9 | Name one of the key ideas/themes presented in Act 2: Scene 2. | |
| | | |
| 10 | Choose 2 adjectives that Ellie Kendrick (who once played Juliet on stage) uses to describe Juliet. | |
| | | |
| TOTAL | | |

Wider reading 3: Character analysis – Benvolio, Mercutio and Tybalt

<https://www.bl.uk/shakespeare/articles/character-analysis-benvolio-mercutio-and-tybalt-in-romeo-and-juliet#:~:text=The%20fight%20which%20breaks%20out,in%20a%20few%20short%20lines.>

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)

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.

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

Mercutio is unpredictable. He starts the scene in prose and slips in and out of meter at will. Through this verbal movement Shakespeare indicates his volatile and erratic temperament; he seems impossible to define or pin down. This is what makes Mercutio such an appealing character: we cannot predict what he will do next.

His name, derived from mercury, reflects this. It symbolises his role as both a messenger, like the god Mercury, and his unpredictable instability, like the chemical element (also known as 'quicksilver'). These qualities clearly play out in this scene. Mercutio is the messenger for the ultimate tragedy: in his final lines

82 he repeats 'A plague a' both your houses!' (3.1.99–100) as both a fatal prediction and curse. Equally, his
 83 unpredictability, volatility and impulsiveness are shown as both reckless and entertaining. His 'quicksilver'
 84 wit and hot-temper are highlighted through clever puns and aggressive, audacious behaviour.

85 Here, as in Act 1, Scene 4, Mercutio takes centre stage. He demands to be looked at:

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

88 This quotation sums Mercutio up: it conveys that he thrives on public admiration. The verb 'gaze' depicts
 89 the crowd as amazed, unable to look away, and implies that he imagines they see him as unique and
 90 spectacular. In many ways he is; Shakespeare wants the audience to admire and enjoy his reckless and
 91 irrepressible behaviour. Because of the clever, witty and complex speeches Shakespeare gives him, Mercutio
 92 is often the character actors want to play, despite having a relatively limited role.

93 In this example, Shakespeare also reveals Mercutio's confidence, arrogance and power. He refuses to
 94 'budge' and affirms forcefully his status by asserting that he 'will not' change or adapt to anyone, 'for no
 95 man's pleasure'. He behaves as if he doesn't care what others think of him. Shakespeare repeats the
 96 pronoun 'I' at the beginning and end of the line to emphasise Mercutio's show of arrogant confidence. It
 97 makes him seem egotistical and communicates his absolute refusal to back down or submit. Whilst this
 98 conforms to our expectations of Mercutio, who seems to fear nothing, we could interpret this self-
 99 importance as a necessary tactic to help protect his reputation and high status by avoiding a loss of public
 100 face.

101 As in earlier scenes, Shakespeare presents Mercutio as fiercely clever and humorous, despite the danger of
 102 the conflict. His brain is so swift, moving like mercury, that other characters and the audience often struggle
 103 to keep up with his endless puns and jests. Even in death he continues to play on words, 'Ask for me
 104 tomorrow, and you shall find me a *grave* man' [italics my emphasis] (3.1.96–97). This double meaning of
 105 'grave' characterises his role as entertainer, a quality which ensures the audience, like his friends, grieve
 106 over his death. Whilst aspects of Mercutio's behaviour may seem arrogant, it is important to remember that
 107 he ultimately acts in defence of his friend, demonstrating courage, loyalty and honour by standing in for
 108 Romeo when he refuses to fight Tybalt.

109 Themes

110 Fate

111 Benvolio's certainty that a conflict will occur adds to the overriding and universal power of fate within the
 112 plot.

113 Honour

114 Honour is a central theme in the play and particularly in this scene. Tybalt, Mercutio and Romeo (in
 115 revenging Mercutio's murder) all act to maintain a personal or public sense of honour and reputation.
 116 Whilst Romeo is less concerned with his public face, he sees his friend's death as his fault and acts to
 117 revenge it. Mercutio dies confused and disgusted by Romeo's apparent cowardice and dishonour in refusing
 118 to fight Tybalt.

119 Loyalty

120 Ties of family and friendship drive and restrict the behaviour of the main characters. Ironically, in marrying
 121 Juliet prior to this scene, Romeo's loyalties are now split, and this conflict of interests leads to Mercutio's
 122 death.

Interpretations

Some modern directors interpret the friendship between Romeo and Mercutio as in conflict with Romeo's new love for Juliet. This interpretation infers that Mercutio's mocking of Romeo's 'love', his pursuit of him after the ball and his determination to stand and fight for him in this scene is evidence of his jealousy or possessiveness. Sometimes Mercutio is shown as a jealous friend who feels as if he has been overlooked, but in some more controversial interpretations Mercutio is implied to have sexual feelings for Romeo. When playing Mercutio in the Globe's 2004 production, James Garnon initially dismissed this interpretation of Mercutio's sexuality, describing it as 'unhelpful' to approaching the role. Later, however, he reflected: 'Mercutio may well be in some sort of love with Romeo ...what I've [found] really impressive is the scale and intensity of his love'. He concluded by suggesting, 'At the moment, I think it might be quite useful to play Mercutio as someone who is not entirely certain about his sexual orientation. Uncertainty is more interesting, especially with Mercutio'.

As part of homework task 3, you will be completing a knowledge retrieval quiz based on your understanding of the wider reading. Before you complete the quiz, consider the following questions to help your knowledge of the text.

1. How does wider reading 3 fit with the 'Romeo and Juliet' unit so far? Do you notice any overlaps or similarities to the content you have been learning in class?

2. How would you describe the character of Tybalt?

3. Honour is an important theme within the play. In your opinion, who is the most honourable character and why?

Additional note space:

Homework Task 3

| | Write your answer in the box below each question. | ✓ ✗ |
|-------|--|-----|
| 1 | Who is the fight between in Act 3: Scene 1? | |
| | | |
| 2 | Who starts the fight? | |
| | | |
| 3 | Why is Tybalt searching for Romeo? | |
| | | |
| 4 | How does Benvolio react to the confrontation and arguing? | |
| | | |
| 5 | How is Mercutio's reaction to the Capulets different to Benvolio's? | |
| | | |
| 6 | Does Tybalt challenge Mercutio to a fight? | |
| | | |
| 7 | According to the writer, what makes Mercutio such an appealing character to an audience? | |
| | | |
| 8 | What does Benvolio believe is fate? | |
| | | |
| 9 | How are Romeo's loyalties split? | |
| | | |
| 10 | Why might Mercutio be jealous of Romeo? | |
| | | |
| TOTAL | | |



Wider reading list

Fictional books about love and relationships

- **'Artichoke Hearts'** by Sita Brahmachari – A spectacular coming of age story where different cultures collide and combine. Through evocative and lyrical prose, the reader will see Mira's unlikely friendship with Jide, learn of tightly guarded secrets, and empathise with Mira's awakening despite a difficult home life.
- **'Watership Down'** by Richard Adams – Fiver has a sixth sense for danger and he persuades Hazel to lead a group of rabbits to escape certain disaster and search for a new home.
- **'Some Places More Than Others'** by Renee Watson – Almost 12-year-old Amara desperately wants to visit family in New York and find out more about her father's roots. But when she finally gets there, the family relationships and situations are far from her idealised expectations.
- **'Across the Barricades'** by Joan Lingard – Kevin and Sade live in Belfast, and the two of them being seen together isn't an option.
- **'The Indian in the Cupboard'** by Lynne Reid Banks – Omri is disappointed with his birthday present – a little red plastic Indian figure – until it comes alive and becomes a real person.
- **'Cue for Treason'** by Geoffrey Trease – Two young runaways become actors in London, where they meet William Shakespeare. They then help to foil a plot to kill the Queen.
- **'Journey to the River Sea'** by Eva Ibbotson – It is 1910 and Maia, tragically orphaned at thirteen, has been sent from England to start a new life with distant relatives in Manaus, hundreds of miles up the Amazon. She is accompanied by an eccentric and mysterious governess who has secret reasons of her own for making the journey.
- **'Flyaway'** by Lucy Christopher – Whilst visiting her father in hospital, 13-year-old Isla meets Harry, the first boy to understand her and her love of the outdoors. But Harry is ill and, as his health fails, Isla is determined to help him. Together, they watch a lone swan struggling to fly on the lake outside Harry's window. Isla believes that if she can help the swan, she can help Harry. And in doing so, she embarks upon a magical journey of her own.
- **'Beauty'** by Robin Mckinley – When the family business collapses, Beauty and her two sisters are forced to leave the city and begin a new life in the countryside. However, when their father accepts hospitality from the elusive and magical Beast, he is forced to make a promise to send one daughter to the Beast's castle, with no guarantee that she will be seen again. Beauty accepts the challenge, and there begins an extraordinary story of magic and love that overcomes all boundaries.
- **'Running Wild'** by Michael Morpurgo – For Will and his mother going into Indonesia is not just a holiday. It is a chance to put things behind them; things like the death of Will's father. It seems to be just what they both needed. But, when Will is riding Oona the elephant on the beach, a tsunami comes crashing in and Oona begins to run. When the tsunami has gone, Oona just keeps on running. With nothing to sustain him but a bottle of water, Will must learn to survive deep in the jungle.
- **'Turtle Boy'** by M Evan Wolkenstein – Meet Will Levine. Here are three things Will loves: turtles, the nature reserve behind the school, being left alone. And one thing Will really hates: his nickname. Kids at school call Will 'Turtle Boy' because of his funny-looking chin. But when Will meets RJ, he learns not everyone is his enemy.

