

Advanced Placement in
English Literature and Composition

Individual Learning Packet

Teaching Unit

Romeo and Juliet

by William Shakespeare

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Objectives

By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to:

1. identify characters as foils, static or dynamic, and flat or round, in particular Romeo, Juliet, Tybalt, and Mercutio.
2. trace the development of Romeo's character from his first mention in the play until his last, noting how and why he changes.
3. trace the mental and emotional maturity of Juliet from the first time she appears in the play until her death.
4. discuss the techniques Shakespeare uses to convey character and character relationships to his audience.
5. discuss the dramatic development of the play in terms of exposition, rising action, conflict, climax, falling action, and resolution.
6. analyze the importance of literary elements like dramatic irony and foreshadowing on the development of the play.
7. analyze Shakespeare's use of language (verse, prose, rhythm, rhyme) and its importance in setting mood and establishing character.
8. identify and analyze the use of comic relief.
9. define by example the terms tragedy and tragic hero.
10. respond to multiple choice questions similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition exam.
11. respond to writing prompts similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition exam.
12. offer a close reading of *Romeo and Juliet* and support all assertions and interpretations with direct evidence from the text, from authoritative critical knowledge of the genre, or from authoritative criticism of the play.

Romeo and Juliet

Introductory Lecture Notes

SHAKESPEARE AND HIS TIMES

William Shakespeare (1564 – 1616) was born to a fairly wealthy, prominent family in Stratford-on-Avon during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I. He was the third of eight children and lived the expected life for a child of his social standing, attending primary or “petty” school and then a Latin grammar school.

At age eighteen, Shakespeare wed Anne Hathaway, a woman six years his senior. The couple had three children: Susanna, and twins Judith and Hamnet. Little is known about Shakespeare’s life between the years of 1585 and 1592, but it is known that Shakespeare traveled to London some time between the ages of eighteen and twenty-eight and joined the theater. He debuted as a playwright with his first performance in 1590.

Shakespeare’s world was a very different one from that of today, and the differences are reflected clearly in his plays. For example, children in Shakespeare’s day had no rights except those allowed by their parents. Teenagers had to obey their parents’ every whim until they married. Marriages were commonly arranged by the parents for purposes other than love and affection between the parties involved. Daughters married young for the most part, often as early as fourteen or fifteen years of age. A father had a God-given obligation to choose a husband for his daughter who would be able to support her materially and protect her physically. The father’s right was not contingent upon the daughter’s agreement or approval, though certainly a father would want his daughter to be *happy* as well as provided for. Wives, just like children, were obliged to obey their husbands. These cultural tenets—pushed to extremes for dramatic purposes—can be witnessed in *Romeo and Juliet*.

Other ideas of the time that are evidenced in *Romeo and Juliet* are that of courtly love and Petrarchan conceit. Courtly love is a code and philosophy of love that flourished first in France and later in England and other countries. According to this philosophy, falling in love was by necessity accompanied by extreme emotional distress—helplessness, confusion, agitation, sleeplessness, loss of appetite, and a general agony over the situation. The lover engages in interminable reflections on the nature of love and his own part in the state. This code is seen clearly in Romeo’s afflicted state of being in love with Rosaline.

Petrarchan conceit was a type of conceit—an overblown, almost ridiculous metaphor comparing two almost irreconcilably different things—used by Petrarch in his Italian love sonnets. Conceits are characterized by the use of oxymoron and paradox. Romeo utilizes this in his descriptions of his forlorn state to his friends.

Romeo and Juliet

Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Do a detailed character analysis for each of the following characters. Indicate both their actions and their motives. Also, point out their state of mind and what significant actions of their own, or others, affected them.
 - Romeo
 - Juliet
 - Lord Capulet
 - Mercutio
 - Friar Laurence
2. Prove or disprove the following statement by referring to incidents in the play: “Violence begets more violence.”
3. To what extent is Romeo an example of Aristotle’s tragic hero? Try to see both sides of the question. What qualit(ies) prevent him from being a prime example of such?
4. In many of his plays, Shakespeare presents the idea that “the course of true love never did run smooth” (from *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*). This is true of Romeo and Juliet’s love affair, as well. Examine the course of true love in *Romeo and Juliet*. How does it fail to run smoothly? What is ultimately responsible for this failure?
5. One theme present in *Romeo and Juliet* is that disobedience to recognized authorities invariably results in punishment. Discuss how this is the case in *Romeo and Juliet*. Which characters are rebellious to authority? What retribution do they pay?
6. Shakespeare deviates from Aristotle’s definition of the tragic hero in that it is not the hero who experiences recognition of the whole tragic situation, but other characters, instead. Who are these characters? Explain their epiphany as it relates to the tragedy.
7. Revisit Juliet’s conversation with her mother concerning Romeo in Act III, Scene V, and discuss the dramatic irony that makes the Scene so powerful. Choose another Scene and do the same.
8. One motif developed throughout the play is the contrast between light and dark (or day and night). What do darkness and light represent? Consider, in your response, the many instances in which Romeo and Juliet seek to turn day to night, or the shun the light in favor of darkness.

Romeo and Juliet

Prologue

1. What is the purpose of the Prologue?

2. What events does the Prologue foreshadow?

Act I, Scenes I – II

1. How effective is the law in preventing and controlling violence, as evidenced in this scene?

2. To what does the expression “purple fountains” refer?

3. What poetic device is used in the description of the sun? Quote and explain.

4. Romeo describes love as “a smoke raised with the fume of sighs; / Being purged, a fire sparkling in lovers’ eyes. / Being vexed, a sea nourished with lovers’ tears. / What is it else? A madness most discreet, / A choking gall, and a preserving sweet.” What does this description of love tell you about Romeo and his feelings?

5. Capulet gives Juliet’s age and his plan for her future to Paris. What does he tell him? At this point, what is Capulet’s attitude toward his daughter?

Act II, Scenes I - II

1. Quote and restate Romeo's metaphor involving Juliet.

2. In Scene II, the play begins to explore the meaning of identity. Explain how.

3. When Juliet speaks about "light love" or her "light" behavior, what does she mean by the word "light"?

4. What "stony" limits, besides the orchard wall, separate the young lovers? How do they dismiss these obstacles?

5. What troubles Juliet about the arrangement she makes with Romeo?

Act III, Scene I

1. Look back at Benvolio’s appearance in Act I, Scene I, and compare it to his appearance here. What role does he seem to be playing throughout the play?

2. What is Romeo’s response to Tybalt’s goading? Explain his meaning.

3. Why does Mercutio become involved in the altercation? What irony is present in his fate?

4. What dramatic function does Mercutio’s death serve?

Act IV, Scene I

1. Briefly state the Friar's solution and plan.

2. Analyze the Friar's motivations. Why is he willing to become involved in solving Romeo and Juliet's marriage problems?

3. When Juliet tells Paris, "That may be, [happily met] sir, when I may be a wife," how would Paris and the audience have interpreted her meaning differently?

4. Explain the dramatic irony in the following exchange between the Friar and Paris:

FRIAR: My lord, we must entreat the time alone.
PARIS: God shield I should disturb devotion!
Juliet, on Thursday early will I rouse ye.

5. Study the imagery present in Scene I. What is notable about it? What purpose does this imagery serve?

Act V, Scenes I and II

1. Why does Romeo think the apothecary will sell him poison?

2. What does the speed with which Romeo immediately makes his drastic plans tell you about his character?

3. What prevents Friar John from delivering Friar Laurence's letter to Romeo? What device is this an example of?
