

# 'Romeo and Juliet' by William Shakespeare

## Knowledge Organiser

### Romeo and Juliet

Character Analysis

Montague (less wealthy)		Capulet (very wealthy)
Passionate		Witty
"Petrarchan Lover"		Intelligent
Angsty		Determined
Changeable		Vulnerable
Honor-driven		Sexually forward
Young (age not specified)		Thirteen (!!!)

### Social and Historical Context

**Staging:** The play was first performed around 1595. 16th- and 17th-century audiences watched Shakespeare's plays being performed at open-air London theatres during the day because there was no electricity to light the theatre at night. The stage had no scenery, few props, and women were played by boys with unbroken voices. The poorer groundlings stood nearer to the stage and wealthier spectators paid higher prices to watch from the seated galleries.

**Queen Elizabeth:** Reigned from 1533-1603. Her reign saw England prosper and become a major player in Europe, although not all citizens supported her. She chose not to marry, maybe due to her own infertility or to prevent political instability and loss of power through her choice of husband. She defied the expectations of a patriarchal society.

**Setting of the play:** 14th-century Verona, Italy. A successful and cultured city which suffered widespread violence involving deadly battles over trivial issues (e.g. the rivalry between supporters of the emperor and supporters of the Pope). The Montecchi and Capuleti were real families fighting for power in Verona at this time.

**Astrology:** In both 14th-century Italy and Elizabethan England stars linked to fate and fortune, were believed to predict and influence the course of human events. The ideas of Boethius, a 6th-century philosopher, were popular throughout this time: he asserted that Fortune (both good and bad) is part of life and, along with God, controls human destiny. He argued that Fortune is random and that bad fortune is a greater teacher than good fortune.

**Gender:** Both 14th-century Verona and Elizabethan England were patriarchal societies. Women were denied all political rights and considered legally subject to their husbands. Disobedience was seen as a crime against their religion. Women who did not marry for whatever reason were forced to live in under the control of a male relative in his home or in a convent, where a woman could become a nun. Aristocratic families often required their young daughters to marry successful older men. Girls were considered eligible at the age of 14 and had to give their consent to a marriage.

### Characters

**Romeo Montague:** Initially a typical Petrarchan lover, his love for Juliet is incredibly romantic, impulsive and passionate.

**Juliet Capulet:** Young and innocent, not yet 14. Her love for Romeo matures her and makes her bolder in her defiance

**Lord Capulet:** Juliet's father. Shows concern for Juliet's welfare but can be aggressive and tyrannical when he is disobeyed.

**Lady Capulet:** Juliet's mother. Cold and distant for most of the play, she expects Juliet to follow in her footsteps.

**Lord Montague:** Romeo's father. Can be drawn into conflict, but also has genuine concern for his son and is quietly dignified

**Lady Montague:** Peace-loving and dislikes the violence of the feud. She dies of grief when Romeo is banished

**Nurse:** Juliet's nursemaid, they have a close relationship. She acts as confidante and messenger for Romeo and Juliet

**Tybalt:** Juliet's ruthless, hot-tempered and vengeful cousin. Has a deep, violent hatred of the Montagues

**Mercutio:** A relative of the Prince and a high-ranking man. He is Romeo's best friend.

**Benvolio:** Cares about his cousin Romeo and tries to keep peace between the families

**Prince Escalus:** The symbol of law and order in Verona, yet his threats of punishment are unable to bring an end to the conflict

**Count Paris:** A rich and highly-regarded young man, kinsman to the Prince, who is determined to marry Juliet

**Friar Lawrence:** A caring, trusted, kind man of the Church who is optimistic, perhaps naively, about the possibility of peace

### Language

**Imagery:** Language which creates vivid sensory ideas in the reader's mind, such as a representation of a specific picture or sound

**Simile:** An explicit comparison between two things, using 'like' or 'as'

**Metaphor:** An implicit comparison between two things that describes an object or action in a way that isn't literally true

**Personification:** Attributing human-like qualities to objects, ideas or animals

**Prose:** Lines which use a natural, unstructured rhythm, similar to speech

**Blank verse:** Lines which follow the fixed, more poetic structure of iambic pentameter (10 beats, 5 stressed, 5 unstressed)

**Rhyming couplet:** Two successive rhyming lines, which usually signal that a character has left the stage or is falling in love

**Sonnet:** A poem of 14 lines with a strict rhyme scheme, usually associated with love and romance

**Oxymoron:** The combination of words or ideas which have opposite or very different meanings

**Pun:** A joke based on the different possible meanings of a word or the fact that there are words which sound alike but have different meanings

**Soliloquy:** When a character, thinking they are alone, speaks their thoughts aloud

### Key Themes

**Religion:** The impact of religion on the characters' attitudes and choices. How characters conform to expectations, and how they defy them.

**Fate and free will:** The concept of an inevitable destiny and its relation to the characters' choices.

**Honour and loyalty:** The importance of kinship, one's responsibility to their family, views of masculinity and violence.

**Love:** Romantic, sexual, superficial and platonic forms of love are present in the play. This love can be volatile, brutal, and oppressive- or the opposite.

**The Individual versus society:** R&J struggle against their parents, authority, and society's expectations.

**Death:** How the certainty, fear, acceptance and welcoming of death is portrayed in the play.

**Youth:** The thrills and perils of adolescence.

**Time:** Characters' awareness of time and how it affects their decisions, the limitations of time, the importance of timing and its effect on the plot.

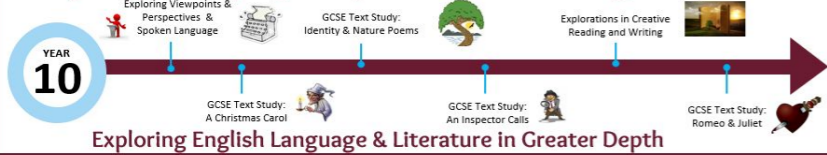
### Genre and Conventions

#### Shakespearean Tragedy

- The protagonists are in conflict with an overpowering force (their love against the feud of their families)
- Both protagonists can be considered to be tragic heroes: high status, sympathetic characters whose fatal flaws contribute to their inevitable downfall (their deaths)
- Uses a five-part structure: exposition (an initial incident), rising action (a growth in the tension), climax (the high point of the action), falling action (where the plot begins to unravel), denouement (the ending or resolution to the drama)

### Structure

- Contrast:** Scenes often contrast strongly with the one that follows them, highlighting the theme of conflict
- Timeframe:** The play begins on Sunday morning and ends just before daybreak the following Thursday, creating a rapid, whirlwind pace of action
- Foreshadowing:** Romeo's downfall is hinted at throughout the play, increasing suspense for the audience
- Dramatic irony:** Some things are revealed to the audience before the characters, increasing tension
- Juxtaposition:** The placement of two ideas, statements or events near each other to invite comparison or contrast



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## Knowledge Organiser – Revision Questions

### Social and Historical Context

1. In which year was the play first performed?
2. Why were plays performed during the day?
3. Name 2 details about the stage in an Elizabethan theatre.
4. Who played the female roles?
5. What type of people stood close to the stage, rather than being seated?
6. Who was the monarch at the time the play was first performed?
7. When and where is the play set?
8. What belief was shared by 14<sup>th</sup> Century Italy and Elizabethan England about the stars?
9. What is a patriarchal society?
10. At what age were girls considered eligible to marry?

### Characters

1. List 3 adjectives to describe Romeo's love for Juliet.
2. List 3 adjectives to describe Juliet.
3. How does Lord Capulet behave when he is disobeyed?
4. What 2 roles does the Nurse fulfil?
5. Who is Tybalt?
6. Who is Mercutio related to?
7. What is Prince Escalus a symbol of?
8. Who is Count Paris?
9. What is Friar Lawrence's occupation?
10. List 3 adjectives to describe Friar Lawrence?

### Language

1. What is the difference between a simile and a metaphor?
2. What is prose?
3. How many beats are there in a line of iambic pentameter?
4. What do rhyming couplets usually signal?
5. How many lines are in a sonnet?
6. What is the sonnet form associated with?
7. When would we hear a character speak a soliloquy?

### Themes

1. Name 3 key themes from the play.
2. Which theme is about characters' inevitable destiny?
3. Name 4 types of love which are evident in the play.
4. What do Romeo and Juliet struggle against?
5. What is another term for 'youth'?

### Genre and Conventions

1. 'Romeo and Juliet' is categorised as what type of play?
2. What is the conflict faced by the protagonists?
3. Why can Romeo and Juliet be classed as tragic heroes?
4. Name each part of the five-part structure used in the play.

### Structure

1. When does the play begin and end?
2. What is the effect of this short time-frame?
3. What is the technique used by Shakespeare which hints at Romeo's downfall throughout the play?
4. What is the technique when the audience knows more than the characters?