

## Romeo and Juliet: teachers' notes



### Synopsis of 'Romeo and Juliet'

Romeo and Juliet are the teenage children of two warring noble families in Verona – the Montagues and the Capulets (**Image 1**). Juliet's father wants his daughter to marry Count Paris, and holds a party to introduce them. Romeo goes to the party in disguise. He meets Juliet and they fall in love (**Image 2**). After the party, Romeo comes back to the Capulet house and speaks to Juliet when she appears on the balcony of her room. They arrange to meet in secret the next day, and are married by Friar Lawrence.

Romeo becomes involved in a fight, and kills Tybalt, Juliet's cousin. He is forced to leave Verona. Meanwhile, Juliet's parents arrange for her to marry Count Paris, not knowing of her secret marriage to Romeo.

To avoid going through with the marriage to Count Paris, Juliet takes a sleeping potion prepared by Friar Lawrence. Her plan is to fool her family into thinking she is dead, and then leaving Verona to meet Romeo.

Friar Lawrence sends a message to Romeo telling him of the plan, but it doesn't reach him. Instead, he hears that Juliet has died. On his way to her tomb, he buys some poison (**Image 3**). After seeing her on lying on the tomb, he drinks the poison and dies (**Image 4**).

Juliet awakes from her drugged state to find her husband's body lying next to her. She stabs herself with a dagger.

The Montague and Capulet families agree to make peace.

### 'Romeo and Juliet' for children and young people

The following versions of 'Romeo and Juliet' are designed to be read and enjoyed by a younger audience:

'Manga Shakespeare: Romeo and Juliet' by Sonia Leong, William Shakespeare, and Richard Appignanesi  
Published by SelfMadeHero, 2007  
ISBN-13: 978-0955285608

'Romeo and Juliet (Shakespeare Stories)' by Andrew Matthews and Tony Ross  
Published by Orchard, 2003  
ISBN-13: 978-1841213361

'Romeo and Juliet' (Usborne Young Reading) by Anna Claybourne  
Published by Usborne Publishing Ltd, 2006  
ISBN-13: 978-0746069332

'Romeo and Juliet' (The Shakespeare Collection) by Rebecca Lisle and Lucy Su  
Published by Hodder Children's Books, 2000  
ISBN-13: 978-0750029957

## Looking at pictures: Romeo and Juliet

The online resource includes four book illustrations from the story of Romeo and Juliet.

You might like to use the following questions as prompts for introducing the story of Romeo and Juliet, and some of the key scenes in the play. The questions are also designed to encourage pupils to start analysing visual sources to gather information.

### Image 1: Illustrated scene from Romeo and Juliet, based on a design by Frank Bindley, 1896

#### Question 1

What do you think is the relationship between the four people in this picture?

#### Question 2

Are there any signs that the four men in the picture might not get on with each other?

#### Question 3

What might each person be thinking, feeling, or saying?

#### Question 4

What do you think the man on the far right of the picture is preparing to do?

### Image 2: Illustrated scene from Romeo and Juliet by Sir Francis Bernard Dicksee, 1884

#### Question 1

Where do you think this scene is taking place?  
What's happening in the background of the picture?

#### Question 2

What time of day do you think this scene is taking place?

#### Question 3

Who do you think is the relationship between the two people at the front of the picture?

#### Question 4

Why might the man at the front of the picture be looking back over his shoulder?  
What do you think he's feeling or thinking?

**Image 3: Illustrated scene from Romeo and Juliet, based on a design by Frank Bindley, 1896**

**Question 1**

Where do you think this scene is taking place?  
Look carefully at the objects on the table and on the shelves. What might they be used for?

**Question 2**

What do you think is happening in this picture?  
Look at what both men are holding in their hands.

**Question 3**

What do you think the two men are saying to each other?

**Image 4: Illustrated scene from Romeo and Juliet by Sir Francis Bernard Dicksee, 1884**

**Question 1**

Where do you think this scene is taking place?  
What is the girl lying on?

**Question 2**

If you stepped in to this picture, how would you feel?  
Have you ever visited anywhere that looks like this place?

**Question 3**

What do you think might be happening in this picture?

**Question 4**

Imagine this scene coming to life.  
What do you think might happen next?

**Ideas for creative writing: Romeo and Juliet**

- Discuss the basic plot of 'Romeo and Juliet' with your class, perhaps using one of the suggested books above.

Ask the pupils to imagine that they are a journalist reporting on either:

- The deaths of Romeo and Juliet
- A public fight between members of the Montague and Capulet families

Encourage the pupils to think about this style of writing, and the intended audience. They might like to include eye-witness accounts or quotes from different characters in the play. They will also need to mention some of the events leading up to both incidents.

- The play ends with the deaths of both Romeo and Juliet. Encourage the class to think of some alternative endings for the story. Would they choose a happier ending, or do they prefer the existing ending? How might the story have been

different if Romeo had received the message from Friar Lawrence about Juliet's plan to fake her own death? What might have happened if Romeo and Juliet had both survived?

- Friar Lawrence plays a key part in the story. He agrees to secretly marry Romeo and Juliet. He also helps Juliet to fake her death by providing her with a sleeping potion, and he sends a message to Romeo (which never reaches him). At the end of the drama, he recounts what has happened to the Montague and Capulet families. He has inside knowledge of the story of the two young lovers, and helps them to be together.

Ask the pupils to write Friar Lawrence's version of the story. They might like to imagine that he is explaining what has happened to Romeo and Juliet's families.

This could also be adapted as a drama activity. Pupils could act out the scenes in the play as Father Lawrence recounts them.

## **Ideas for drama: Romeo and Juliet**

### **Speedy Shakespeare**

Discuss the basic plot of 'Romeo and Juliet' with your class, perhaps using one of the suggested books above.

Divide the class into small groups, and ask them to devise a 'reduced' three-minute version of the play. What are the key elements of the story? How will they compress the story into such a short space of time?

### **Modern contexts**

Discuss the basic plot of 'Romeo and Juliet' with your class, focusing on the key element of the two warring families.

Some contemporary film-makers and writers have chosen to set the story to modern-day contexts. For example, the musical 'West Side Story' sets the story in Puerto Rico. The two warring families are replaced by two teenage street gangs of different ethnic backgrounds, the Jets and the Sharks. Baz Luhrmann's film version of the story also uses the device of two rival gangs.

Ask the pupils to think of other contexts where two groups of people might be in opposition or conflict, for example: two countries during a war, two different political parties, two rival schools or sporting teams.

Encourage the pupils to think about the consequences of a person from one group befriending a member of the other group. What are the dangers or consequences for the two people involved? How might the other members of the two groups react to this friendship?

Divide the class into small groups, and encourage them to create a short piece of drama based on this theme.

## **Ideas for art: Romeo and Juliet**

### **Story Cards**

Discuss the basic plot of 'Romeo and Juliet' with your class, focusing on the key elements of the story and the scenes which help to move the action along.

Provide each pupil with an A3 piece of paper or card, and ask them to draw or paint one of the key scenes (which have been identified by the class). The pupils might also want to write a short piece of text which describes this part of the story. The text can be attached to the back of the picture.

When all of the story cards are complete, organise a class storytelling session. Each pupil takes it in turn to hold up their story card, and to tell part of the story.