

The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet

Drama by William Shakespeare

Is **LOVE** stronger than **HATE**?

It sounds like a story ripped from the tabloids. Two teenagers fall in love. Then they learn that their parents hate each other. Murder and suffering follow, and by the end, a whole town is mourning. What love can—and cannot—overcome is at the heart of *Romeo and Juliet*, considered by many to be the greatest love story of all time.

DEBATE People say that love conquers all. Is this true? In a small group, talk about times when love has brought people together and when hate has driven them apart. At left, write your answer to the question *Is love stronger than hate?* and list some reasons for your opinion. Then form two teams and debate the question.

Is love stronger than hate?

Why or why not?

Text Analysis: Shakespearean Drama

You can probably guess that a **tragedy** isn't going to end with the words "and they all lived happily ever after." Shakespearean tragedies are dramas that end in disaster—most often death—for the main characters. The conflicts in a tragedy are caused by both the actions of the characters and by fate. As you read *Romeo and Juliet*, pay attention to the specific characteristics of Shakespearean drama.

CHARACTERISTICS OF SHAKESPEAREAN DRAMA

Soliloquy

- is a speech given by a character alone on stage
- lets the audience know what the character is thinking or feeling

Aside

- is a character's remark, either to the audience or to another character
- reveals the character's private thoughts

Dramatic Irony

- occurs when the audience knows more than the characters—for example, the chorus reveals Romeo and Juliet's tragic fate in the prologue
- helps build suspense

CHARACTERISTICS OF SHAKESPEAREAN DRAMA, *continued*

Allusion

- is an indirect reference to a famous person, place, event, or literary work
- adds an extra layer of meaning to certain passages

Blank Verse

- is unrhymed poetry written in **iambic pentameter**: each line has five pairs of syllables; an unstressed syllable is usually followed by a stressed syllable
- resembles the rhythm of natural speech

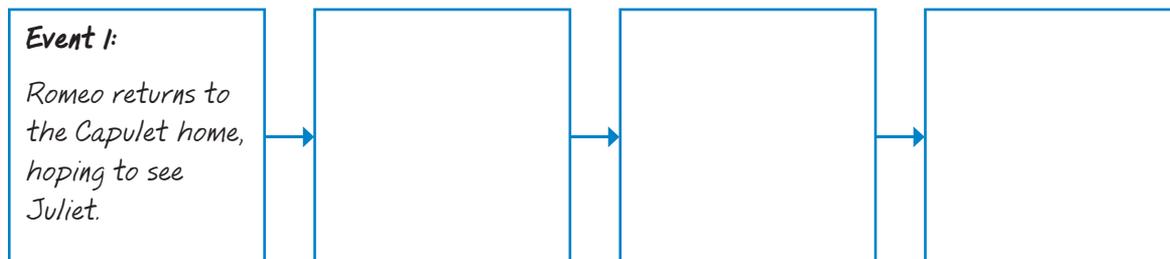
Figurative Language

- is language that communicates ideas beyond the ordinary, literal meaning of the words
- used to create effects, to emphasize ideas, and to evoke emotion

Reading Strategy: Reading Shakespearean Drama

Shakespeare's English is sometimes hard for modern readers to understand. Use the following strategies to help you read the excerpt from the play:

- Read the background notes and the summary notes set in italics to get important information about the structure and main conflict in the play.
- Use the footnotes to figure out the meanings of unfamiliar words, unusual grammatical structures, and allusions.
- As you read, use the prompts in the text to take note of the events that move the plot along. You may want to take notes about the order of events in a chart like the one below.



**SET A PURPOSE
FOR READING**

Read the Prologue to see how the tragedy is introduced to the audience. Then, read one of the most famous scenes in all of Shakespeare's works.

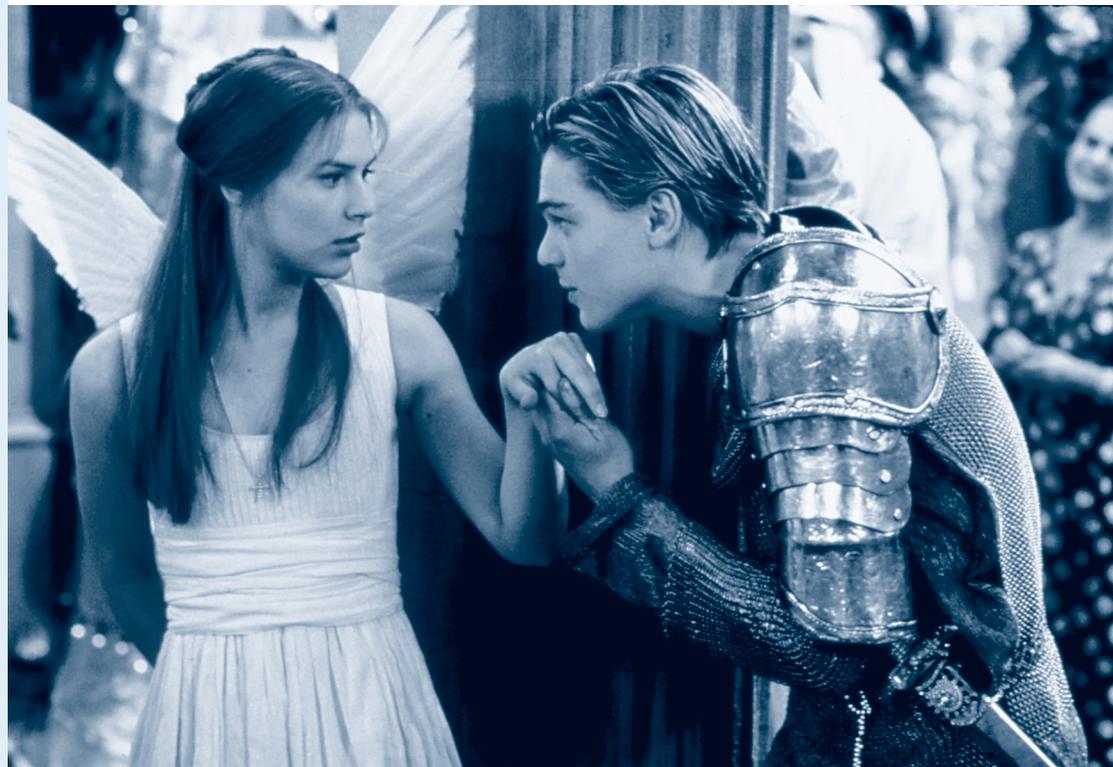
THE TRAGEDY OF
Romeo & Juliet

Prologue and Act 2, Scene 2

Drama by

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

BACKGROUND Although Shakespeare wrote *Romeo and Juliet* in the 1590s, its themes are still relevant today. This timeless drama tells the story of two teenagers who dare to risk everything for love. They live in a society torn apart by violence. In this tense setting, Shakespeare explores which force is stronger—love or hate.



TIME

The 14th century

PLACE

Verona (və-rō'nə) and Mantua (măn'chōō-ə) in northern Italy

CAST

THE MONTAGUES

Lord Montague (mŏn'tə-gyōō')

Lady Montague

Romeo, son of Montague

Benvolio (bĕn-vō'lĕ-ō), nephew of Montague and friend of Romeo

Balthasar (bäl'thə-sär'), servant to Romeo

Abram, servant to Montague

THE CAPULETS

Lord Capulet (kăp'yōō-lĕt')

Lady Capulet

Juliet, daughter of Capulet

Tybalt (tĭb'əlt), nephew of Lady Capulet

Nurse to Juliet

Peter, servant to Juliet's nurse

Sampson, servant to Capulet

Gregory, servant to Capulet

An Old Man of the Capulet family

OTHERS

Prince Escalus (ĕs'kə-ləs), ruler of Verona

Mercutio (mĕr-kyōō'shĕ-ō), kinsman of the prince and friend of Romeo

Friar Laurence, a Franciscan priest

Friar John, another Franciscan priest

Count Paris, a young nobleman, kinsman of the prince

Apothecary (ə-pŏth'ĭ-kĕr'ĕ)

Page to Paris

Chief Watchman

Three Musicians

An Officer

Chorus

Citizens of Verona, **Gentlemen** and **Gentlewomen** of both houses, **Maskers**, **Torchbearers**, **Pages**, **Guards**, **Watchmen**, **Servants**, and **Attendants**

BACKGROUND When we first meet Romeo, who is a Montague, he is pining for a girl named Rosaline, who does not return his affections. To distract Romeo, his friends Mercutio and Benvolio take him to a party at the home of the Capulets. It's a masquerade, so the boys wear masks. There, Romeo and Juliet, who is a Capulet, fall in love at first sight. Only after they talk and share their first kiss do they discover they have fallen in love with an enemy. Following the party, Romeo makes his way to Juliet's room, where he hides in the orchard, hoping to catch a glimpse of his new love. His friends have just left him. They have been teasing him for being in love—but they think he still loves Rosaline.

Act 2

SCENE 2 *Capulet's orchard.*

The following is one of the most famous scenes in all literature. The speeches contain some of the most beautiful poetry Shakespeare ever wrote.

Juliet appears on the balcony outside her room. She cannot see Romeo, who stands in the garden just below. At the beginning of the scene, both characters are speaking private thoughts to themselves. Romeo, however, can hear Juliet as she expresses her love for him despite his family name. Eventually, he speaks directly to her, and they declare their love for each other. Just before dawn Romeo leaves to make plans for their wedding.

[Enter Romeo.] **A**

Romeo. He jests at scars that never felt a wound.¹

[Enter Juliet above at a window.]

But soft! What light through yonder window breaks?

It is the East, and Juliet is the sun!²

Arise, fair sun, and kill the envious moon,

5 Who is already sick and pale with grief

That thou her maid art far more fair than she. **B**

-
1. **He jests . . . wound:** Romeo has overheard Mercutio and comments that Mercutio makes fun of love because he has never been wounded by it.
 2. **But soft . . . the sun:** Romeo sees Juliet at the window.

A SHAKESPEAREAN DRAMA

Reread the background note and the summary of Scene 2. Underline the reason Romeo has gone to the Capulets' orchard. Then complete the organizer below.

Scene 2 Setting



Conflict

B SHAKESPEAREAN DRAMA

Reread lines 3–6. Circle what Romeo compares Juliet to. Why is the moon envious?

Juliet. 'Tis but thy name that is my enemy.
Thou art thyself, though not⁷ a Montague.

40 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 name would smell as sweet.

45 So Romeo would, were he not Romeo called,
Retain that dear perfection which he owes
Without that title. Romeo, doff⁸ thy name;
And for that name, which is no part of thee,
Take all myself. **PAUSE & REFLECT**

Romeo. I take thee at thy word.

50 Call me but love, and I'll be new baptized;
Henceforth I never will be Romeo.

Juliet. What man art thou that, thus bescreened⁹ in night,
So stumblest on my counsel?¹⁰

Romeo. By a name
I know not how to tell thee who I am.

55 My name, dear saint, is hateful to myself,
Because it is an enemy to thee.
Had I it written, I would tear the word. **E**

Juliet. My ears have yet not drunk a hundred words
Of that tongue's utterance, yet I know the sound.

60 Art thou not Romeo, and a Montague?

Romeo. Neither, fair saint, if either thee dislike.

Juliet. How camest thou hither, tell me, and wherefore?
The orchard walls are high and hard to climb,
And the place death, considering who thou art,

65 If any of my kinsmen find thee here. **PAUSE & REFLECT**

PAUSE & REFLECT

Reread lines 40–41. Then restate Juliet's lines in your own words.

E SHAKESPEAREAN DRAMA

Why is Romeo's name "hateful" to him?

PAUSE & REFLECT

Why does Juliet warn Romeo?

7. **though not:** even if you were not.

8. **doff:** get rid of.

9. **bescreened:** hiding.

10. **counsel:** private thoughts.

F SHAKESPEAREAN DRAMA

Reread lines 71–73. Circle the phrase that tells how Romeo feels about the risk he has taken. What does this reveal about his character?

PAUSE & REFLECT

Why is Juliet embarrassed that Romeo has overheard her?

Romeo. With love's light wings did I o'erperch these walls;
For stony limits cannot hold love out,
And what love can do, that dares love attempt.
Therefore thy kinsmen are no let to me.¹¹

70 **Juliet.** If they do see thee, they will murder thee.

Romeo. Alack, there lies more peril in thine eye
Than twenty of their swords! Look thou but sweet,
And I am proof against their enmity.¹²

Juliet. I would not for the world they saw thee here.

75 **Romeo.** I have night's cloak to hide me from their sight;
And but thou love me, let them find me here.
My life were better ended by their hate
Than death prorogued,¹³ wanting of thy love. **F**

Juliet. By whose direction foundst thou out this place?

80 **Romeo.** By love, that first did prompt me to enquire.
He lent me counsel, and I lent him eyes.
I am no pilot, yet, wert thou as far
As that vast shore washed with the farthest sea,
I would adventure for such merchandise.

85 **Juliet.** Thou knowest the mask of night is on my face;
Else would a maiden blush bepaint my cheek
For that which thou hast heard me speak tonight.
Fain would I dwell on form—fain, fain deny
What I have spoke; but farewell compliment!¹⁴

PAUSE & REFLECT

90 Dost thou love me? I know thou wilt say "Ay";
And I will take thy word. Yet, if thou swearst,
Thou mayst prove false. At lovers' perjuries,

11. **With . . . me:** Love helped me climb (**o'perch**) the walls. Neither walls nor your relatives are a hindrance (**let**) to me.
12. **Look . . . enmity:** Smile on me, and I will be defended against my enemies' hatred (**enmity**).
13. **prorogued:** postponed.
14. **Thou . . . compliment:** Had I known you were listening, I would have gladly (**fain**) behaved more properly, but now it's too late for good manners (**farewell compliment**).

They say Jove¹⁵ laughs. O gentle Romeo,
If thou dost love, pronounce it faithfully. **G**

- 95 Or if thou thinkst I am too quickly won,
I'll frown, and be perverse, and say thee nay,
So thou wilt woo; but else, not for the world.
In truth, fair Montague, I am too fond,
And therefore thou mayst think my 'havior light;
100 But trust me, gentleman, I'll prove more true
Than those that have more cunning to be strange.¹⁶
I should have been more strange, I must confess,
But that thou overheardst, ere I was ware,
My true love's passion. Therefore pardon me,
105 And not impute this yielding to light love,
Which the dark night hath so discovered.¹⁷

Romeo. Lady, by yonder blessed moon I swear,
That tips with silver all these fruit-tree tops—

- Juliet.** O, swear not by the moon, the inconstant moon,
110 That monthly changes in her circled orb,
Lest that thy love prove likewise variable. **H**

Romeo. What shall I swear by?

- Juliet.** Do not swear at all;
Or if thou wilt, swear by thy gracious self,
Which is the god of my idolatry,
115 And I'll believe thee.

Romeo. If my heart's dear love—

- Juliet.** Well, do not swear. Although I joy in thee,
I have no joy of this contract¹⁸ tonight.
It is too rash, too unadvised, too sudden;
120 Too like the lightning, which doth cease to be
Ere one can say "It lightens." Sweet, good night!
This bud of love, by summer's ripening breath,
May prove a beauteous flow'r when next we meet.

15. **Jove:** Jupiter, Roman king of the gods.

16. **strange:** aloof or cold.

17. **discovered:** revealed.

18. **contract:** declaration of love.

**G SHAKESPEAREAN
DRAMA**

An **allusion** is a passing reference to something else with which the audience would be familiar. Underline the allusion Juliet uses in lines 92–93. When does Jove laugh at lovers?

**H SHAKESPEAREAN
DRAMA**

Reread lines 107–111. Restate the dialogue between Romeo and Juliet in your own words.

Romeo



Juliet

I SHAKESPEAREAN DRAMA

Reread lines 116–124. Circle words and phrases that show Juliet’s attitude about her and Romeo’s romance. Why does she seem uneasy about their relationship?

J SHAKESPEAREAN DRAMA

Reread lines 142–148. Underline the couple’s plans for tomorrow. Given what the audience learned in the Prologue, how is this an example of **dramatic irony**?

Good night, good night! As sweet repose and rest
Come to thy heart as that within my breast! **I**

125 Romeo. O, wilt thou leave me so unsatisfied?

Juliet. What satisfaction canst thou have tonight?

Romeo. The exchange of thy love’s faithful vow for mine.

Juliet. I gave thee mine before thou didst request it;
And yet I would it were to give again.

130 Romeo. Wouldst thou withdraw it? For what purpose, love?

Juliet. But to be frank¹⁹ and give it thee again.

And yet I wish but for the thing I have.

My bounty²⁰ is as boundless as the sea,

My love as deep; the more I give to thee,

135 The more I have, for both are infinite.

I hear some noise within. Dear love, adieu!

[Nurse calls *within*.]

Anon,²¹ good nurse! Sweet Montague, be true.

Stay but a little, I will come again.

[*Exit*.]

Romeo. O blessed, blessed night! I am afeard,

140 Being in night, all this is but a dream,

Too flattering-sweet to be substantial.

[*Re-enter Juliet, above*.]

Juliet. Three words, dear Romeo, and good night indeed.

If that thy bent of love be honorable,

Thy purpose marriage, send me word tomorrow,

145 By one that I’ll procure to come to thee,

Where and what time thou wilt perform the rite;²²

And all my fortunes at thy foot I’ll lay

And follow thee my lord throughout the world. **J**

Nurse [*within*]. Madam!

19. **frank**: aloof or cold.

20. **bounty**: revealed.

21. **Anon**: right away.

22. **If that . . . rite**: I’ll send a messenger to you tomorrow. If your intention is to marry me, tell the messenger where and when the ceremony will be.

150 **Juliet.** I come, anon.—But if thou meanst not well,
I do beseech thee—

Nurse [*within*]. Madam!

Juliet. By-and-by I come.—
To cease thy suit and leave me to my grief.
Tomorrow will I send.

Romeo. So thrive my soul—

Juliet. A thousand times good night!

[*Exit.*]

155 **Romeo.** A thousand times the worse, to want thy light!
Love goes toward love as schoolboys from their books;
But love from love, towards school with heavy looks. **K**

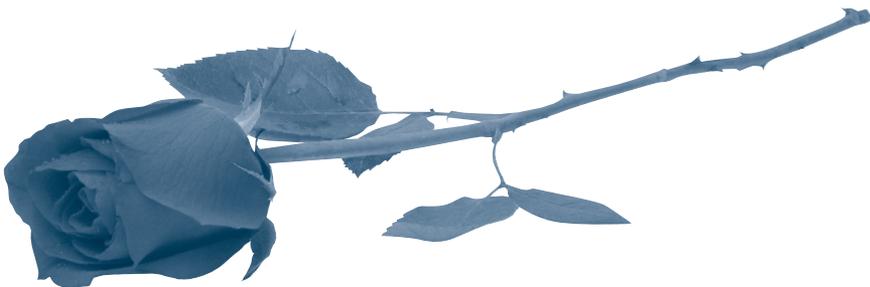
[*Enter Juliet again, above.*]

Juliet. Hist! Romeo, hist! O for a falc'ner's voice²³
To lure this tassel-gentle²⁴ back again!

160 Bondage is hoarse²⁵ and may not speak aloud;
Else would I tear the cave where Echo²⁶ lies,
And make her airy tongue more hoarse than mine **L**
With repetition of my Romeo's name.
Romeo!

165 **Romeo.** It is my soul that calls upon my name.
How silver-sweet sound lovers' tongues by night,
Like softest music to attending ears!

Juliet. Romeo!



23. **falc'ner's:** A falconer is a person who hunts with falcons.

24. **tassel-gentle:** male falcon.

25. **Bondage is hoarse:** Juliet is in "bondage" to her parents and must whisper.

26. **Echo:** In Greek mythology, a girl who could only repeat others' words.

K SHAKESPEAREAN DRAMA

Reread lines 156–157. Describe the **figurative language** Romeo uses to describe lovers.

L SHAKESPEAREAN DRAMA

Reread lines 158–159. Falconry and Greek mythology were both popular during Shakespeare's time. Juliet uses a **metaphor** to describe how desperately she wants to call out Romeo's name. Restate her lines in your own words.

M SHAKESPEAREAN DRAMA

Reread lines 177–182. What fear does Juliet express to Romeo as she parts from him? Underline the statement that expresses this fear.

PAUSE & REFLECT

Describe your reactions to this scene. What do you predict will happen next?

Romeo. My sweet?

Juliet. What o'clock tomorrow
Shall I send to thee?

Romeo. By the hour of nine.

170 **Juliet.** I will not fail. 'Tis twenty years till then.
I have forgot why I did call thee back.

Romeo. Let me stand here till thou remember it.

Juliet. I shall forget, to have thee still stand there,
Rememb'ring how I love thy company.

175 **Romeo.** And I'll still stay, to have thee still forget,
Forgetting any other home but this.

Juliet. 'Tis almost morning. I would have thee gone—
And yet no farther than a wanton's bird,
That lets it hop a little from her hand,

180 Like a poor prisoner in his twisted gyves,
And with a silk thread plucks it back again,
So loving-jealous of his liberty.²⁷ **M**

Romeo. I would I were thy bird.

Juliet. Sweet, so would I.
Yet I should kill thee with much cherishing.

185 Good night, good night! Parting is such sweet sorrow,
That I shall say good night till it be morrow.

[*Exit.*]

Romeo. Sleep dwell upon thine eyes, peace in thy breast!
Would I were sleep and peace, so sweet to rest!
Hence will I to my ghostly father's²⁸ cell,

190 His help to crave and my dear hap²⁹ to tell. **PAUSE & REFLECT**

[*Exit.*]

27. **I would . . . liberty:** I know you must go, but I want you close to me like a pet bird that a thoughtless child (**wanton**) keeps on a string.

28. **ghostly father:** spiritual father or priest.

29. **dear hap:** good fortune.

Text Analysis: Shakespearean Drama

Shakespeare uses **soliloquies**, **dramatic irony**, **figurative language**, and **allusion** in this scene from Act Two. Complete the chart below by identifying passages that contain these elements. Identify who is speaking, describe the passage, and include line numbers.

Dramatic Convention	Example
Soliloquy	
Dramatic irony	
Figurative language	
Allusion	

Review your notes for *Romeo and Juliet* and your completed chart above. Which of these conventions helps you understand the tragedy of the play best? Explain.

Reading Strategy: Reading Shakespearean Drama

Look back at the notes you made as you read. Complete the chart with the most important details from the selection.

Prologue
Scene 2
Romeo's Soliloquy:
Juliet's Soliloquy:
Dialogue Between Romeo and Juliet:

Is LOVE stronger than HATE?

What consequences can arise from hating someone?

Academic Vocabulary in Speaking

characteristic critical influence motivate resolve

TURN AND TALK How does the feud between Romeo's and Juliet's families **influence** their actions? Discuss their actions and what you think about them with a partner. Use at least one Academic Vocabulary word in your conversation. Definitions for these terms are listed on page 415.

Assessment Practice

DIRECTIONS Use *The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet* to answer questions 1–4.

- In lines 26–32, Romeo compares Juliet to —
 - a bird
 - the sun
 - an angel
 - the moon
- In the aside in line 36, Romeo considers —
 - leaving the orchard
 - revealing his presence
 - giving up his family name
 - continuing his conversation
- In line 133, when Juliet says, “My bounty is as boundless as the sea,” she means —
 - her ability to love Romeo is endless
 - her father's fortune is vast like the ocean
 - her riches will keep them happy for eternity
 - her love for Romeo will cause incessant bloodshed
- Romeo and Juliet's wedding plans are ironic because —
 - the audience knows they will die
 - the arrangements are made in secret
 - the scene begins with another celebration
 - the union will bring peace to their families