

SHAKESPEARE'S
**ROMEO
AND
JULIET**
A GUIDE FOR SCHOOLS

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INTRODUCTION

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Before you begin your study of *Romeo and Juliet* it is important that you have read the text carefully. It will also help if you can see a performance of the play at the theatre, or failing that, watch a performance of it on video. There are two versions of it available on video that I would particularly recommend. The first is the film version made by Franco Zeffirelli in 1968 or the version made in the BBC Shakespeare series and produced on video in 1988. Either of these versions should be available through a local video shop or the public library will probably be able to obtain a copy for you. The thing to remember is that Shakespeare wrote his plays to be seen and heard and not to be read as a book, which is what we mostly do when we study a book. To really appreciate the play as Shakespeare meant it to be seen, therefore, you really do need to see it in performance. This, of course, will help you get a much clearer picture of what is happening too.

The sections that follow examine the key aspects of the play that you will need to be aware of in order to answer questions on the play in the GCSE exam. All the tasks are designed to help you look carefully at the play and to come to an understanding of it both as a play and a work of literature. In addition to working through the tasks in the sections that follow I would recommend that you keep your own notes on the various areas of study, noting down things that you find particularly interesting or effective and making a note of quotations or references to support your ideas.

At the end of this work book will find a number of specimen questions of the kind that you might find on a GCSE English Literature examination paper. It would be very useful in terms of preparing yourself for the examination if you practised on some of these. As you get closer to the examination date it would be helpful to you to try doing one or two of them under examination conditions too. In most examinations you would have about 40 minutes to answer one of these questions.

When we talk about the PLOT of a play what we are really talking about is what actually happens in it. In other words the storyline, the series of events and experiences that happen to the characters as the story moves from its beginning to its end.

The STRUCTURE of the play involves how the plot is actually put together and events structured in order to create its impact on the audience.

Now let's have a look at the key elements of the plot of Romeo and Juliet. At the end of each section of Act summaries you will find a series of questions. Answer these as fully as you can. You will find feedback on these questions at the end of the section on Plot and Structure.

The Prologue

The Chorus introduces the plot by telling us that in Verona (where the play is set) a feud existed between two families. We learn that this feud is only brought to an end through the death of two "...star crossed lovers."

Act 1. Scene i

The scene opens with the entry of Sampson and Gregory, two servants from the house of Capulet. It is clear from their conversation that they are ready for a fight and when two servants from the house of Montague enter, trouble soon breaks out. Benvolio, a friend of Romeo's and nephew to Old Montague enters and tries to stop the brawl but then Tybalt, nephew to Lady Capulet enters and attacks Benvolio. Old Capulet and Old Montague enter and join in the fight which is only stopped by the intervention of Prince Escalus who tells them that if there is any more trouble those involved will pay for it with their lives. The crowd disperses and Benvolio explains the cause of the trouble. Lady Montague asks after Romeo and we learn that for some reason he is sad and secretive and has been avoiding his friends. Romeo enters and speaks alone with Benvolio. We can see that he is melancholy because he is in love with a woman but she does not love him.

Act 1. Scene ii

Later on that day we see Capulet talking to the County Paris, a young nobleman and kinsman to Prince Escalus. He is keen to marry Capulet's daughter Juliet, but her father feels that she is still too young. He invites Paris to a feast to be held that night at his house. Capulet has sent one of his servants with a list to invite various people to his feast but unfortunately the servant cannot read. He meets Romeo and asks him to read the list for him. Romeo does so and learns of the feast that Capulet is holding.

It turns out that Romeo is in love with Rosaline, who is also a Capulet and so will be going to the feast. Benvolio tells Romeo that he should go to the feast himself where he will see Rosaline alongside many other beautiful women and so be cured of his infatuation. The pair agree to go together.

Act 1. Scene iii

We see Juliet for the first time as her mother speaks to her about marriage. Juliet's old nurse speaks affectionately of Juliet's early childhood but Juliet herself says little. She seems obedient to the wishes of her mother and agrees to study Paris at the feast to see what she thinks of him. The scene ends as the guests begin to arrive.

Act 1. Scene iv

Later that evening Romeo, Benvolio and Mercutio, a friend of Romeo's and a kinsman to the Prince, are in the street dressed and ready for the feast. Romeo is not enthusiastic about the ball and Mercutio teases him with witty repartee. Romeo is finally persuaded to go ahead with the plan to 'gatecrash' the feast even though he has a premonition that it will lead to tragic consequences.

Act 1. Scene v

The masked ball is about to start and Capulet encourages the guests to dance. Romeo catches sight of Juliet and is immediately captivated by her beauty and forgets all about Rosaline. Unfortunately, although it is dark and Romeo's face is hidden, Tybalt hears him speak and recognises his voice. He sends for his rapier and is all for fighting Romeo there and then but Capulet calms him down. Romeo is aware of all this and has approached Juliet. They talk and she allows him to kiss her but they are interrupted by the nurse. Romeo finds out that Juliet is a Capulet and soon afterwards she learns that he is a Montague.

REVIEW ACTIVITIES ON ACT 1

1. Look again at Act 1 Scene i Make a list of its strong points as an opening to the play.
2. In Act 1 Scene ii what do Romeo and Benvolio intend to do?
Explain why this is important in terms of the development of the plot.
3. We meet Juliet in Act 1 Scene iii. In this scene how are the seeds that contribute ultimately to the final tragedy sown?
4. Towards the end of the Act 1 Scene vi what is the effect of Romeo's lines -
"...my mind misgives
some bitter consequences yet hanging in the stars
shall bitterly begin his fearful date
with this night's revels...?"
5. In terms of the plot what does Tybalt's attitude and actions in Act 1 Scene v have?

Act 2. Scene i

Later on that night Romeo is alone outside the wall of the Capulet orchard. He feels he must see Juliet again and so climbs the wall and enters the orchard. He hears Mercutio and Benvolio calling him but ignores their calls and they go off without him.

Act 2. Scene ii

From the darkness of the orchard Romeo sees Juliet come out on to the balcony and, through speaking her thoughts out aloud, she reveals her love for him despite the fact he is a Montague. Romeo speaks to her and declares that he is ready to renounce his name and family for her. Juliet is startled by the voice from below but when she realises that it is Romeo they speak of their love for each other. They make arrangements to secretly marry and then, reluctantly, they part.

Act 2. Scene iii

Early the next day Friar Laurence is praying in his cell before going out to collect the herbs which he uses to make drugs and medicines. Romeo enters, tells the Friar of his love for Juliet and asks him to agree to marry them later that day. Friar Laurence reminds Romeo of his very recent infatuation with Rosaline and expresses his doubt this new romance. In the end, though, the Friar agrees to do as Romeo asks because he sees it as a way of bringing the two feuding families together.

Act 2. Scene iv

A little later that morning in Verona, Mercutio and Benvolio are talking about Romeo. We gather from their conversation that Tybalt has sent a letter to Romeo challenging him to a duel. However, as Romeo did not return home the previous night he has not received this letter. We learn from Mercutio's comments that Tybalt is an expert swordsman. Romeo enters and Mercutio teases him about his exploits the previous evening. The nurse then comes along and she becomes the butt of the humour. After Mercutio and Benvolio have left Romeo gives the nurse a message to pass to Juliet.

REVIEW ACTIVITIES - ACT 2

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Act 2. Scene v

Juliet is waiting eagerly for the nurse to return with Romeo's message. After much talkative banter the nurse finally gives Juliet Romeo's message that she is to meet him at Friar Laurence's cell where they will be married.

Act 2. Scene vi

Later on that afternoon Romeo and Friar Laurence wait for Juliet in the Friar's cell. Romeo is very excited but the Friar advises him to be more calm and less passionate in a warning that is almost a premonition of the tragedy that is to soon befall them. Juliet arrives and Friar calls them to their wedding.

REVIEW ACTIVITIES ON ACT 2 .

1. What do you think is the purpose of the Act 2 scene i ?
2. Why do you think that Act 2 scene ii is a very important scene in terms of the development of the plot ?
3. Look carefully at Friar Laurence's reaction to Romeo's news in scene iii. What do you think of his attitude here ?
4. What ominous note is introduced in scene iv and how does this ominous note contrast with other elements of the scene ?
5. How do you respond to the Nurse's attitude in scene v and what is Juliet's state of mind ?
6. Do you see any significance in terms of later developments in the plot in the Friar's words in scene iv lines 1-15 ?

Act 3. Scene i

Later that afternoon Mercutio and Benvolio are talking in the street. It is very hot and Benvolio suggests that they retire as the Capulets are about and if they meet up with them there is sure to be a fight. Mercutio is scornful of Benvolio's caution and teases him. At that point Tybalt enters with his men. He is looking for Romeo and asks Mercutio if he knows where he is. Mercutio is irritated by Tybalt's attitude and he and Tybalt are about to fight when Romeo enters and Tybalt turns on him. However, none present know that Romeo has just been married to Juliet and so now is related to Tybalt by marriage. He refuses to fight Tybalt and this angers Mercutio who fights Tybalt himself. Romeo tries to come between them but as he does so Tybalt stabs Mercutio under Romeo's arm. Mercutio is mortally wounded and is helped away, but he dies a few moments later. Romeo blames himself for Mercutio's death and when Tybalt returns Romeo attacks him in an uncontrolled rage. They fight and Tybalt is killed. Benvolio urges Romeo to flee before the Prince arrives as what he has done warrants the death sentence. Romeo takes Benvolio's advice. The Prince enters together with others including Montague and Capulet and their wives. Benvolio gives his account of what happened and the Prince, rather than sentence Romeo to death, banishes him from Verona.

Act 3. Scene ii

Juliet has recently returned from her wedding and is in a joyful mood. She longs for night so that she can be with Romeo but then the Nurse enters having heard the news that Tybalt has been killed by Romeo. Instead of telling Juliet straight away she speaks in a rambling way so that Juliet is not clear what is going on. When she finally hears of Romeo's banishment she is distraught and the Nurse offers to go to Friar Laurence's cell to tell Romeo to come to Juliet that night. This calms Juliet down and gives her some hope.

Act 3. Scene iii

Romeo is hiding in Friar Laurence's cell and has not yet heard the Prince's sentence on him. The Friar tells Romeo he is to be banished and points out how much worse his position could be. Romeo is in despair, but he calms down when the Nurse arrives and tells him he is to go and comfort Juliet before leaving Verona for Mantua.

REVIEW ACTIVITIES - ACT 3

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Act 3.Scene iv

Later that evening at the Capulet's house Capulet, Lady Capulet and Paris discuss the arrangements for his marriage to Juliet. It is decided to set the date for the following Thursday. Juliet does not appear but Capulet assures Paris that his daughter will be obedient to his wishes

Act 3.Scene v

Romeo and Juliet are together just before dawn. It is time for Romeo to leave but they are reluctant to part. Juliet is suddenly seized by a foreboding of the tragic events that are to come. Romeo comforts her and then leaves for Mantua. Lady Capulet enters and gives Juliet the news that she is to marry Paris in two days time. When Juliet refuses to entertain the idea of marriage to Paris, her father flies into a rage and turns on her. He tells his daughter that if she does not marry Paris he will cast her into the streets. Juliet turns to her mother for help and sympathy but her attitude is equally heartless. Juliet's only remaining hope of comfort and support lie in the Nurse but she advises Juliet to marry Paris (even though she is already married) and forget Romeo. Juliet realises that she can no longer trust the Nurse and so she tells her mother that she is going to Friar Laurence's cell to make confession.

REVIEW ACTIVITIES ON ACT 3

1. Scene i. is a key in the development of the plot. Why do you think this is ?
2. How does the Nurse cause confusion in scene ii. and why do you think she behaves as she does?
3. Make a list of the key points of scene iii. as they affect the development of the plot.
4. Scene iv. is very significant even though it is short. Explain why?
5. What dilemma does Juliet face in scene v. and what are the various pressures that she faces ?

Act 4. Scene i.

Paris is in the Friar's cell talking to him about his forthcoming marriage. The Friar is perturbed about the news that the marriage is to take place so soon. Juliet arrives and interrupts the conversation. Paris wants her to say that she loves him and wants to marry him but Juliet is careful to avoid committing herself. Paris leaves and Juliet reveals her true despair to the Friar. The Friar tells her that he has a plan that may allow Juliet to escape from her predicament. He then outlines the plan that will involve Juliet drinking a potion that will make it seem as though she is dead. She will remain in a deep sleep for forty-two hours by which time she will have been interred in the Capulet vault. The Friar will send word to Romeo and he will arrive in time to be there when she awakens. Juliet readily agrees to this plan and returns home.

Act 4. Scene ii.

A little later the same day Capulet is supervising the preparations for the wedding feast. Juliet returns and, pretending to be cheerful, she asks her father's forgiveness and promises to obey him. Capulet is so happy at this that he decides to bring the wedding forward a day so that it will now take place on Wednesday. He goes off to tell Paris about the change in arrangements.

Act 4. Scene iii.

Juliet is in her room surrounded by the clothes chosen for her wedding. Lady Capulet enters to see if she can help but Juliet persuades her mother and the Nurse to leave her alone. Once alone Juliet faces the frightening task of drinking the potion. Many troubled thoughts run through her mind but in the end she drinks the potion and falls upon the bed.

Act 4. Scene iv.

Early next morning preparations are well under way for Juliet's marriage which is to take place that day. Paris arrives and the Nurse goes to wake Juliet.

Act 4. Scene v.

The Nurse enters Juliet's bedroom to waken her but she finds her apparently dead. She shouts for help and Lady Capulet arrives followed closely by Capulet and they are grief-stricken as it is confirmed that their daughter is dead. Friar Laurence and others enter and all lament the 'death' of Juliet (the Friar, of course, knows she is not really dead).

REVIEW ACTIVITIES ON ACT 4

1. Make notes explaining the plan the Friar puts forward in scene i.
What is Juliet saying in a) lines 50-67 (from “Tell me not Friar...” to “...speak not of remedy.”) b) lines 77-88 (from “O, bid me leap...” to “...my sweet love.”).
2. In scene ii. why does Capulet change the day of the wedding?
What significance does this have for the development of the plot?
3. Explain in detail Juliet’s speech in scene iii. lines 14-58 (from “Farewell...” to “...I drink to thee!”).
4. What effect does scene iv. have on the plot?
5. What is your response to scene v.?

Act 5. Scene i.

In Mantua Romeo is cheerful as he thinks of Juliet but then his servant, Balthasar arrives with news of her death. It is obvious that no word has reached him about the Friar's plan and he thinks that she is really dead. Balthasar leaves to get horses so that they can return to Verona. Romeo goes to an apothecary and buys phial of poison and it is clear that he intends to end his life at Juliet's burial place.

Act 5. Scene ii.

This scene explains why Romeo received no word from Friar Laurence about the plan. His letter failed to get to Romeo because his messenger was not allowed out of Verona for fear that he was carrying plague. For this reason no one else would take the message either.

Act 5. Scene iii.

This final scene takes place in the Capulet vault where Juliet has been interred. It is now night and Paris arrives and sees the body of Juliet lying on a tomb. Romeo then arrives and Paris hides to see what he intends to do. Paris believes that Romeo is up to no good and comes out to confront him. Romeo does not recognise him and the two fight. Romeo kills Paris but when he discovers who he is he lays his body beside Juliet's tomb and then looks at Juliet's body. Romeo gives his final speech and then drinks his poison, kisses Juliet and dies. Friar Laurence arrives and finds the bodies of Paris and Romeo. Juliet awakens and the Friar tries to persuade her to leave but she refuses. The Friar dare stay no longer and leaves Juliet. Left alone she turns to Romeo and resolves to join him in death. She tries to drink the remainder of the poison in the phial but it has all gone. She then takes Romeo's dagger and stabs herself and dies. The Watch enter and finds the bodies. The Friar has been caught in the churchyard and is brought before the Prince, the Montagues and the Capulets who have arrived by now. He explains everything to them and the play ends with the reconciliation of the two families.

REVIEW ACTIVITIES ON ACT 5

1. How does Romeo seem to change in the course of scene i.
2. What information do you gain in scene ii? Why is this information of key importance to the plot?
3. How does the final tragedy in scene iii. come about as a result of bad timing?

You should now have a reasonable idea of what happens in *Romeo and Juliet* and so you are familiar with the plot. Now let's have a closer look at how the plot is put together. In other words we are going to look at the structure of the play. You will have noticed that through the action of the play there are some very tense moments and there are also some quieter sections where not very much seems to be happening in terms of moving the story forward. This is the case in most plays (films, television dramas included). You don't very often find dramas where the tension or action is at fever pitch all the way through otherwise it would lose some of its effect. Tension and excitement in an audience needs to be built up until it hits a climax and then, after its release, it is often followed by a lull until it begins to build up to the next high spot.

In *Romeo and Juliet* there are also a number of key scenes which, in themselves, may not contain a lot of excitement or tension but in which something very important happens that will have a great bearing on how the plot works out. For example in Act 4 scene ii where Capulet brings forward the day of the wedding. This may *appear* relatively insignificant in itself but it has tremendous implications for the plot and for Juliet's position.

I would like you now to think carefully about the play and make a plan of each Act highlighting what you see as the high points and key scenes. I have done Act 1 for you to use as an example on the next page.

OVERVIEW OF ACT 1

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ACT 1

The play begins quietly but there is a sense of tension present with the talk of fighting

Fighting breaks out between supporters of Montague and Capulet families

Entry of Tybalt and the fighting increases

Romeo is seen to be in love

Prince Escalus declares that anyone else who starts trouble will be put to death

Plans for the Capulet banquet

Romeo finds out about the banquet and decides to go

Lady Capulet tells Juliet of Paris's marriage proposal

That evening at the Capulet feast Romeo and Juliet meet and immediately fall in love with each other

Tybalt recognises Romeo and is furious at what he takes to be a personal insult

In studying the characters in the play it is first of all important to understand just who they are and what role they play in the drama.

Draw up a chart which shows clearly those characters in the play who belong to the Montague family, and those who are kinsmen of Prince Escalus. You will find some characters who do not fit into any of these categories so devise another heading to include these under.

When you have drawn up your chart mark those characters that you would classify as MAJOR CHARACTERS and those you would classify as MINOR CHARACTERS. You may find it difficult to make up your mind about some of them so you will have to trust to your judgement here.

Now you are clear in your own mind just who the characters are let's have a closer look at them.

When you examine a character it is a good idea to work to a plan so that you consider all aspects of the character and do not miss any points that might be important. Here are some points that you might consider when looking at a character:

- * When the character first appears in the play.
- * What the character looks like (physical appearance, clothing etc.)
- * What the character says and how it is said.
- * What the character *thinks* (watch out for soliloquies - a speech where a character is alone but speaks out loud. This *thinking aloud* is a dramatic device that playwrights often use to let the audience know what is in a character's mind).
- * How the character acts - watch for reactions to different situations.
- * What others say about the character.
- * How the character changes as the play goes on.
- * How the character compares to other characters in the play.

Here are my notes in preparation for a character sketch of Lord Capulet:

- Lord Capulet is Juliet's father and first appears in scene i when the brawl breaks out.
- He joins in the brawl and calls for his 'long sword', although his wife tells him that 'a crutch' would be more suitable.
- One of his main concerns is that Juliet marries well and he does much to encourage a match with the County Paris.
- He is a little inconsistent over her marriage because at first he says she is too young and 'hath not seen the change of fourteen years'. Later, though, he wants her to marry in just a few days and then even brings those arrangements forward a day.
- He doesn't act very sympathetically when Juliet does not agree to his wishes and he calls her 'baggage' and 'green-sickness carrion'. He threatens to throw her out on the street unless she agrees to do as he says.
- He is happy so long as he has things his own way but he is very easy to anger when things don't go as planned.
- He does seem to be concerned with outward appearances. He is anxious that Juliet does nothing to offend Paris. Also, at the banquet, he deals with Tybalt sharply - he is prepared to overlook Romeo's presence rather than cause a scene in front of his guests.
- At the end of the play, though, he is obviously genuinely shocked and grief-stricken by the death of his daughter. Perhaps here we begin to feel that, in his own way, he did love her after all.

Make notes on the following characters and then write them up into full character sketches of each of them: Romeo; Juliet; Mercutio; Benvolio; Paris; Friar Laurence; Tybalt; the Nurse. Remember to use some quotations to back up your ideas where it seems appropriate but keep the quotations short. On the next page I have listed some references to the text that might help you to think about each character.

Line references that might help you when thinking about the characters. (There may be slight variations in line numbers depending on the edition you are using).

ROMEO:

Act 1 scene i. lines 117-end
scene ii. lines 91-96
scene iv. lines 11-39, 106-113
scene v. lines 44-53, 93-110
Act 2 scene ii
Act 3 scene i. lines 62-89, 118-134
scene iii.
scene v. lines 1-59
Act 5 scene i.
scene iii. lines 21-120

JULIET:

Act 1 scene iii.
scene v. lines 93-110, 128-end
Act 2 scene ii.
scene v.
Act 3 scene ii.
scene iii. lines 99-102
scene v.
Act 4 scene i. lines 6-14, 17-end
scene ii. lines 16-38
scene iii.
Act 5 scene iii. lines 160-167

MERCUTIO:

Act 1 scene iv.
Act 2 scene i. lines 3-end
scene iv. lines 1-139
Act 3 scene i. lines 1-107

BENVOLIO:

Act 1 scene i. lines 58-end
scene ii. lines 46-end
scene iv.

Act 2 scene i. lines 3-end
scene iv. lines 1-139

Act 3 scene i.

PARIS:

Act 1 scene ii. lines 1-37
scene iii. lines 75-95

Act 3 scene iv.
scene v. lines 217-225

Act 4 scene i. lines 1-43

Act 5 scene iii. lines 1-21, 49-73

TYBALT:

Act 1 scene i. lines 58-71
scene v. lines 54-92

Act 2 scene iv. lines 18-34

Act 3 scene i. lines 32-88,120-130

FRIAR LAURENCE:

Act 2 scene iii.
scene vi.

Act 3 scene iii.

Act 4 scene i.

scene ii. lines 31-32

scene v. lines 33-95

Act 5 scene ii.

scene iii. lines 121-160,223-270

THE NURSE:

Act 1 scene iii.
scene v. lines 111-end

Act 2 scene iv. lines 108-end
scene v. lines 20-end

Act 3 scene ii. lines 32-end

scene iii. lines 80-164

scene v. lines 126-end

Act 4 scene ii.

When we talk about the setting of a play we are really referring to the location or the surroundings against which background the action is set. The atmosphere refers to the mood that is created in the scene by the writer.

In *Romeo and Juliet* the action of the play takes place in a variety of settings, each of which has its own particular atmosphere. Sometimes, of course, the atmosphere of a particular setting changes in the light of events as they unfold or when a different character enters or new information is revealed.

You will notice in *Romeo and Juliet* how some scenes in the play take place in public streets and others in more private settings. For example, in Act 1, it is possible to trace the changes in setting and atmosphere in this way:

Public street in Verona

Tense atmosphere as servants exchange words - tension increase as Tybalt enters and fighting breaks out.

Public street in Verona

Relaxed atmosphere - Capulet speaks with Paris. Romeo finds out about feast

Room in Capulet's house

Light-hearted and relaxed atmosphere as idea of marriage is put to Juliet - banter with Nurse.

A street in Verona

Relaxed and light-hearted atmosphere centred on Mercutio's witty exchange with Romeo. Atmosphere becomes briefly sombre as Romeo has premonition of disaster.

The Capulet's house

Party atmosphere - intensity of emotion increases as Romeo and Juliet see each other for the first time. An element of tension is introduced as Tybalt recognises Romeo and wants to confront him.

Now make similar notes of your own on the remaining four acts.

When we examine the style of a piece of writing we are really looking at the way in which the writer uses language in order to achieve particular effects. The term covers a whole range of language features but in *Romeo and Juliet* it might be useful to consider the following:

- * Verse and prose
- * Imagery
- * Humour and wit and wordplay
- * Dramatic Irony

VERSE AND PROSE

The main part of *Romeo and Juliet* is written in verse form but there is much variety within this form depending on the circumstances and the speaker. For example, in many of the exchanges between Romeo and Juliet it takes the form of love poetry and the language is imbued with a dignity and lyrical quality that reflects the depth of their love for one another. There are also what might be called 'set pieces' such as Mercutio's 'Queen Mab' speech (Act 1 scene iv. 53-95) and Juliet's soliloquies (Act 3 scene 21-31, Act 4 scene iii. 14-59) for example.

Some of the verse in the play is written in blank verse (unrhymed lines with five stresses) which in his later plays became the standard verse form that he used. However, *Romeo and Juliet* is one of his earlier plays and here he uses much more rhymed verse than in his later works. Obviously rhymed verse sounds more artificial and less like ordinary speech but it can emphasise and add a certain dignity to parts of the action, such as when Romeo sees Juliet for the first time, for example (Act 1 scene v. lines 44-53).

In addition to verse form some parts of the play are written in prose. Very often in the plays of Shakespeare prose is used by the comic characters in the play or those of a low social standing. For example, the servants, Gregory and Sampson speak in prose at the opening of the play. However, prose is also sometimes used in a much more subtle way to suit a particular mood or atmosphere and you will find characters that fluctuate between verse and prose depending on their tone and mood. For example, in Act 2 scene iv, where Mercutio teases first Romeo and then the Nurse, his banter is in prose. Similarly, at the beginning of Act 3 scene i. where Mercutio jokes with Benvolio he speaks in prose but this changes to verse when Tybalt enters and the mood takes a serious turn. After Mercutio has been mortally wounded he tries to make light of it and switches back to prose (lines 96-103) before returning to prose for his dying words.

Choose TWO sections from the play, one written in prose the other in verse. Look at them carefully noting the way that language is used in each of them. How does the way that the language is used in each reflect the character(s) speaking and the mood and tone of the scene?

IMAGERY

Within the language of *Romeo and Juliet* Shakespeare makes use of a great variety of imagery which adds a great deal of power and impact to the play overall. As we have already seen there are a number of images in the play that are to do with the idea of 'fate' or 'fortune' but there are also other images which are used in the play. Here are some others that I noted:

- * contrasting images of light and darkness
 - * imagery involving stars
- * lightning and explosion imagery
 - * death/marriage imagery

An example of the death/marriage imagery can be found in Act 1 scene v. lines 133-134, where Juliet asks the Nurse to find out Romeo's name when she meets him for the first time -

“Go ask his name. If he be married,
My grave is like to be my wedding bed.”

A little later when Juliet is speaking on her balcony she uses an image centred on the idea of lightning when she speaks of her love for Romeo -

”...Although I joy in thee,
I have no joy of this contract tonight:
It is too rash, too unadvis’d, too sudden,
Too like the lightning, which doth cease to be
Ere one can say ‘It lightens’.”

(Act 2 scene ii. 116-120)

You may notice that many of the images you find have connotations of ill-fortune or are foreboding in some way.

Now find FIVE examples of imagery from the play. Note down where each occurs and make notes on how the imagery is used and what its significance is.

HUMOUR, WIT AND WORDPLAY

Although *Romeo and Juliet* is obviously a tragedy, not all of the play is solemn and serious. In fact there is a good deal of humour and lighter moments in the play too. Most of what the Nurse has to say, for example, is amusing or comic. Mercutio too adds a great deal of humour to the play and the scene where he and the Nurse combine is one of the comic high spots of the play. Much of the humour of Mercutio derives from his quick wit and his plays on words (puns). A close examination of his famous ‘Queen Mab’ speech (Act 1 scene iv. 54-94) will show the real subtlety of his wit and use of language.

Choose THREE scenes from the play that you think comic or that contain elements of humour. Examine each of them carefully and make notes on how the humour works in each scene.

DRAMATIC IRONY

Dramatic irony in a play occurs when an event, or situation or the words spoken hold more meaning for the audience than they do for the character involved. The audience may know something that the character speaking the lines does not. For example, in Act 2 scene ii. when Juliet is on her balcony speaking aloud of her love for Romeo, we know that he is there below, and can hear her words but Juliet is completely unaware of his presence.

Another example of dramatic irony can be found in Act 3 scene 5, lines where Juliet says, when speaking to her mother after Romeo has killed Tybalt, that -

“Indeed I never shall be satisfied
With Romeo till I behold him - dead -
Is my poor heart so for a kinsman vexed.
Madam, if you could find out but a man
To bear a poison, I would temper it -
That Romeo should, upon receipt thereof,
Soon sleep in quiet. O, how my heart abhors
To hear him named and cannot come to him,
To wreak the love I bore my cousin
Upon his body that slaughtered him.”

Here Juliet’s words contain a double meaning but her mother only recognises one of them in that she thinks that Juliet is expressing her hatred for, rather than her love for Romeo. Her words here also contain a further ironic meaning for the audience because the next time she will see Romeo he will be dead.

Make a list of as many examples of dramatic irony as you can think of. Pick THREE of them and examine these in more detail showing how they contribute to the overall impact of the play.

Viewpoint involves looking at the play from different perspectives. One aspect of this is the writer's viewpoint (in this case Shakespeare's) of the play and the ideas and issues that are put forward and explored. (these ideas or issues are sometimes called themes).

In *Romeo and Juliet* Shakespeare explores a number of ideas but it seems to me that at the centre of the play are the key themes of love and hate. At the heart of the play is the love that Romeo and Juliet hold for one another but Shakespeare's examination of the idea of love is much broader than this alone. In fact the play presents us with a range of attitudes towards love as exhibited by different characters.

Examine carefully and make notes on the attitudes towards love by the following characters:

- * Romeo (remember Rosaline too!)
- * Mercutio
- * Capulet
- * Juliet
- * The Nurse

Hate is also a powerful force within the play. It is the hate generated by the feud that drives the action towards its final tragedy and effects so many characters in the play. In many ways it is the opposite to that which draws Romeo and Juliet together and sets their love for one another in context.

Make notes on the various ways in which the feud between the Capulets and the Montagues influences the action of the play and effects a variety of characters. What view of this feud and the nature of hate itself do you think that Shakespeare is inviting his audience to consider?

Another aspect of viewpoint involves looking at the action of the play from the point of view of different characters in order to try to understand more clearly why they act as they do. For example, the behaviour of Friar Laurence in the play is often questioned and he undoubtedly contributes to the tragedy as it is his plan that goes wrong. However, it is also possible to argue that he thought he was acting for the best in that he saw the union of Romeo and Juliet as a way of bringing the feuding families together.

Think carefully about the following characters and make notes on why you think they behave as they do in the play:

- * Romeo
- * Juliet
- * Mercutio
- * Tybalt
- * Friar Laurence
- * Capulet
- * The Nurse

REVISION QUESTIONS

CHARACTERISATION

1. With close reference to the play compare and contrast the characters of Romeo and Juliet.
2. Consider the presentation of Mercutio and his contribution to the overall effect of the play.

PLOT AND STRUCTURE

3. The action of the play begins on Sunday morning and by Thursday morning Mercutio, Tybalt, Romeo and Juliet are all dead. Why do you think the time-scheme of the play is so short and what effect does it have on the action?
4. Examine the view that the tragedy which befalls Romeo and Juliet comes about as a result of simple 'bad luck'.

SETTING AND ATMOSPHERE

5. Choose two incidents from the play and examine how the setting and atmosphere of each contribute to the overall impact of the play.
6. Remind yourself of the final scene of the play (Act 5 scene iii.) from the point where Paris enters at the beginning of the scene to the point where Romeo kills himself (line 120 in most editions). What kind of atmosphere does Shakespeare create here and what effect does it have on the conclusion of the play?

STYLE

7. Examine the ways in which Shakespeare uses dramatic irony in *Romeo and Juliet*. What effect does this have on the play?
8. Write about Shakespeare's use of poetry and prose in the play.

VIEWPOINT

9. Why do you think that Mercutio acts as he does in the play?
10. What do you think Shakespeare has to say about the nature of love and hate in *Romeo and Juliet*?