Study Guide: ROMEO & JULIET by William Shakespeare

I. Never Go Against the Family! Who, What & Where
   - Setting: Verona, Italy, ca. 1595 (Maps of Verona & House of Capulet)

   ✓ The Families: Daddy Montague and Daddy Capulet have long hated each other and so do their servants. Both fathers are rich & powerful and have dedicated their lives to destroying the other.

   ✓ Romeo’s Problem: He’s 16(ish) and hates the violence and hostility that exist in his world. He’s a lover, not a fighter, and, boy, he does love the ladies. First, it’s Rosaline, then Juliet, who just so happen to be cousins.

   ✓ Juliet’s Problem: Her parents control her life, especially big daddy “C,” who wants Jules, 13, to marry Paris, who just happens to be really hot and really rich. Juliet, however, has the hots for Romeo (of course, no one but her nosy nanny knows). Problem is that Big Daddy “C” means business and will kick her out of “the family” if she doesn’t marry Paris. Ouch!

II. All You Need Is Love: Subject/Themes

   ✓ Forbidden Love: Romeo and Juliet aren’t allowed to love each other because their fathers/families hate each other. What do you think this makes them do? Reverse psychology, anyone?

   ✓ Adolescent Angst (anxiety): Ah, the drama of it all. Shakespeare pokes fun of teenager behavior - their hasty and often stupid decisions, their irrational feelings of love, and their idealism about their world and their future.

   ✓ Love Conquers All: After Romeo and Juliet die (newsflash, it’s a tragedy), their love for one another shows their families, who have been blinded by hate that love can indeed heal old wounds.

III. The Families & Friends:

   Montagues: Romeo’s Family
   - Lord Montague
   - Lady Montague
   - Romeo
   - Benvolio (Romeo’s cousin)
   - Peter (servant)
   - Abram (servant)
   - Balthasar (servant)

   Capulets: Juliet’s Family
   - Lord Capulet
   - Lady Capulet
   - Juliet
   - Tybalt (Juliet’s “super saucy” cousin)
   - Nurse (she has taken care of Juliet since her birth)
   - Sampson (servant)
   - Gregory (servant)

   Friends Caught in the Middle of the Mayhem:
   - Mercutio (Romeo’s best friend)
   - Paris (Lord Capulet’s choice for Juliet to marry)
   - Friar Laurence (the local priest, think Friar Tuck from Robin Hood)
   - Friar John
   - Apothecary (today’s version of a pharmacist)
   - The Citizens of Verona

IV. What Did He Say? Useful Shakespeare Vocabulary:

   - alack- gee (expression of dismay)
   - an- if
   - anon- in a minute
   - aside- little soliloquy
   - ere- before
   - ain- gladly
   - fair- pretty
   - fickle- can’t make up your mind
   - hither- here
   - humorous- fittful
   - idle- lazy
   - marry- indeed, to marry
   - methinks- I think
   - mickle- much
   - ne’er- never
   - o’er- over
   - rancor- hatred
   - sirrah- servant
   - soft- wait
   - suit(or)- proposal, one who proposes
   - thither- there
   - wherefore- why
   - woe- sorrow
   - woo- to date
   - zounds- “by God’s wounds”
V. Reading Questions:
Prologue (spoken by the Chorus):

Two households, both alike in dignity,
In fair Verona, where we lay our scene,
From ancient grudge break to new mutiny,
Where civil blood makes civil hands unclean.
From forth the fatal loins of these two foes
A pair of star-cross’d lovers take their life;
Whole misadventured piteous overthrows
Do with their death bury their parents’ strife.
The fearful passage of their death-mark’d love,
And the continuance of their parents’ rage,
Which, but their children’s end, naught could remove,
Is now the two hours’ traffic of our stage;
The which if you with patient ears attend,
What here shall miss, our toil shall strive to mend.

1. From the Prologue, explain the who, what, when, where and why about Verona’s social “scene.”
2. What does “star-cross’d lovers” mean? In other words, what do the stars control?
3. How long will the play last?
4. Who does the “Chorus” represent?
5. List 3 examples of diction (3 individual words) that let the audience know to bring lots o’ tissues to this play.
6. What type of poem by content and form is this?

Act I
Act I, scene i:
1. As the play opens, what is the big insult between the servants? What are their attitudes about the law?
2. What do each of the following persons do when the fight breaks out: Benvolio, Montague, Capulet, and their wives.
3. Fed up with these fights, what does Prince Escalus decree if the fight should break out “once more”?
4. Where has Romeo been during the fight and why is he so depressed?
5. What behavior of Romeo’s has Ma & Pa Montague so worried? Be specific about what he’s been doing lately. What does Benvolio vow to do for Ma & Pa Montague?
6. While talking to Benvolio, how does Romeo describe the “yuk” side of love? Give 3 direct quotes (include line#).
7. Define allusion. Who are Cupid and Diana in Greek mythology? What do these two figures mean to Romeo and his attitude about love?
8. What advice does Benvolio give Romeo about getting hooked on just one girl?
9. What is Romeo’s reply?

In-Class Activity: Shakespearean Insult Slam.

Act I, scene ii:
1. When scene ii opens, Paris asks Lord Capulet, “What say you to my suit?” Define “suit,” which in this case does not mean clothing. Whom or what does Paris want?
2. What are Capulet’s reasons for refusal? What does he suggest that Paris do?
3. What “fatherly” advice does Capulet give Paris about love and marriage and jumping into both too quickly?
4. What’s going on at the Capulet home later that evening? How do Romeo and Benvolio find out?
5. Who’s going to be there?
6. What does Benvolio say he’ll do for Romeo at the party? What is Romeo’s dedicated reply?

Act I, scene iii:
1. According to the Nurse, when is Juliet’s birthday (holiday & include day and month)?
2. On what “theme” does Lady Capulet ask Juliet?
3. What is Juliet’s diplomatic response to this question?
4. To what does Lady Capulet compare Paris? What does she think of him?
5. What does Juliet agree to do make Mama Capulet happy?

Act I, scene iv:
1. On the way to crash the party, what is Romeo’s mood still?
2. What sassy advice does Mercutio give Romeo about love being “too rough, too rude, too boist’rous”?
3. About whom does Mercutio dream? Who is she? List three adjectives that describe your first impressions of Mercutio.
4. How does Romeo mean when he says, “I fear too early, for my mind misgives/Some yet consequence hanging in the stars”?

In-Class Activity: Most fairy tales suggest that love conquers all and that everyone lives happily ever after. However, Mercutio’s “Queen Mab” speech paints a much different picture. Complete the in-class handout for this activity.
Act I, scene v:
1. What is the purpose of this seemingly silly scene between the servants?
2. What happens at the party that causes Romeo to forget Rosaline?
3. What does Romeo mean when he says, “Forswear, it sight,/I ne’er saw true beauty till this night?” What’s up with the sudden change of heart by Romeo?
4. How does that “saucy boy” Tybalt react upon over-hearing Romeo? Why won’t Capulet let Tybalt attack/kill Romeo?  
5. What compliments does Capulet give Romeo?
6. What does Romeo call Juliet just before the big smooch? What does Juliet say the kiss is? What does lover-boy do again?
7. What tragic news do both Romeo and Juliet discover about their mystery kisser? Who’s helping Juliet? Who tells Romeo?

In-Class Activity: Sonnet identification and analysis.

Act I Activities: Literary Devices
1. Foreshadowing. Foreshadowing refers to the clues an author provides to suggest what will happen in the story. Shakespeare uses this device to create an ominous tone in the play.
   ✓ Find at least three (3) examples of foreshadowing of tragedy. (Provide Act, scene, and line numbers).
2. A simile is a figure of speech in which two unlike objects are compared using the words “like” or “as.” A metaphor is a direct comparison between two unlike objects without using “like” or “as.” Throughout the play, Romeo describes Juliet in terms of light (e.g., a star, the sun, a lantern, etc.). Examine Romeo’s first words upon seeing Juliet:
   O, she doth teach the torches to burn bright!
   It seems she hangs upon the cheek of night
   As a rich jewel in an Ethiop’s ear —
   Beauty too rich for use, for earth too dear!
   So shows a snowy dove trooping with crows
   As yonder lady o’er her fellow shows.
   To what has Romeo compared Juliet? Simile? Metaphor?
   ✓ Record (2) other similes and (2) other metaphors in this act (provide Act, scene, and line number).

Act II, Prologue:
Prologue (Chorus):

   Now old desire doth in his death-bed lie,
   And young affection gapes to be his heir;
   That fair for which love groan’d for and would die,
   With tender Juliet match’d, is now not fair.
   Now Romeo is beloved and loves again,
   Alike betwitched by the charm of looks,
   But to his foe supposed he must complain,
   And she steal love’s sweet bait from fearful hooks:
   Being held a foe, he may not have access
   To breathe such vows as lovers use to swear;
   And she as much in love, her means much less
   To meet her new-beloved any where:
   But passion lends them power, time means, to meet
   Tempering extremities with extreme sweet.

1. What past problems does the Chorus review?
2. What future problems does the Chorus envision for our Romeo and Juliet?
3. Define sonnet. The rhyme scheme of a Shakespearean sonnet is ababcdcdefefgg, which uses letters to represent end words that rhyme the same. Does the Act II, Prologue follow the definition and rhyme scheme of a Shakespearean sonnet?
4. Define blank verse. Compose an original rhyming couplet in blank verse about you.

   I like to make subtle compositions
   To match my Shakespearesque disposition.

Act II
Act II, scene i:
1. What do Mercutio and Benvolio think of Romeo’s love of “Rosaline’s bright eyes”?
2. Dramatic irony means that the audience or the audience of some of the characters on the stage know something that other characters are ignorant. What is an example of dramatic irony in this scene? In other words, what information do we, the audience, know that Mercutio and Benvolio know not?

Act II, scene ii (famous balcony scene): Questions continue to next page.
1. While eavesdropping on Juliet at her balcony, what does Romeo fancy about Juliet? Is this love or infatuation?
2. Define “aside.” What does Romeo call Juliet in his aside because she is above him on her balcony?
3. What does Juliet mean when she says, “Deny thy father and refuse they name?”
4. How does Juliet rationalize that love between Romeo and her could actually work?
5. Initially embarrassed because Romeo has overheard her most intimate thoughts, how does Juliet play “hard to get”?
6. Why does Juliet ask Romeo to “swear not by the moon”?
7. After professing their love for each other, what does Juliet tell Romeo she will do tomorrow (be specific with details)?
8. What is ironic about Juliet’s farewell when she says, “Yet I should kill thee with much cherishing/Good night, good night. Parting is such sweet sorrow”?

Act II, scene iii:
1. Define personification. Find three (3) examples of personification in Friar Lawrence’s opening soliloquy.
2. According to Friar Lawrence, how are plants and people alike? In other words, what power do we have in us that plants have as well?
3. In Romeo’s rant about the events of the night before, what does he hastily ask Friar Lawrence to do?
4. What are the reasons for Friar Lawrence serious concern about Romeo’s sudden change of heart?
5. Why does Friar Lawrence agree to Romeo’s request?

Act II, scene iv:
1. What news does Benvolio tell Mercutio about Tybalt? How do they think Romeo would do against Tybalt? Why?
2. What does Mercutio think of Tybalt (there’s a compliment in there somewhere)?
3. How does Mercutio tease Romeo? The Nurse?
4. What does Romeo tell the nurse to tell Juliet? Give specific details of his plan.
5. Do you think the nurse is wise to act as a go-between for Romeo and Juliet? Why?

Act II, scene iv:
1. What is Juliet’s state of mind as she waits for the Nurse to return? How does Juliet not so nicely explain the Nurse’s delay?
2. Upon her return, how does the Nurse innocently tease the now spastic Juliet?
3. Where does Juliet go at the end of this act? What must the Nurse do?

Act II, scene V:
1. What is Romeo’s mood as he waits?
2. What does Friar Lawrence mean when he says, “Violent passions have violent ends”? What is his rather late-in-coming advice to Romeo about love?
3. What do we know happens at the end of this act?
4. At this point in the relationship between Romeo and Juliet, which of the two seems to be in control of the wedding plans? Explain your answer.

Act II Activities: Literary Devices
1. Simile and Metaphor: In this act, Romeo continues to describe Juliet metaphorically in terms of light.
   ✓ Skim through the act and list three instances when Juliet is associated with light. (Provide Act, scene, and line numbers).
   ✓ What does this repeated “light” image reveal about Juliet and Romeo’s feelings toward her?
2. Allusion: Allusion in literature is a reference to a presumably familiar person, place, or event. For example:
   Bondage is hoarse and may not speak aloud,
   Else would I tear the cave where Echo lies
   And make her airy tongue more hoarse than mine
   With repetition of ‘My Romeo!’
   ✓ Who is Echo in Greek mythology? Why is this allusion to Echo, a mythological nymph, appropriate for Juliet as she talks to Romeo in Act II, scene ii? Check in book or online.

Mid-Reading Comprehensive Exam: ALL Background and Acts I & II

Act III, scene i:
1. What does Benvolio suggest they do because “the Capels [are] abroad”? What is Mercutio’s response to this sensible suggestion?
2. How does Romeo, who enters all happy and in love, respond to Tybalt’s insults? How does Tybalt ignorantly interpret Romeo’s declaration that he loves Tybalt for reason he doesn’t understand?
3. In the sword fighting frenzy, what happens to Mercutio? Tybalt?
4. When the fighting ends and the families arrive on the scene, whom does Prince Escalus ask to tell the truth of “this bloody fray”? Does this person tell the truth? What does the prefix “bene” mean in Latin?
5. What punishment does Lady Capulet demand for Romeo?
6. What does Lord Montague say should happen?
7. What punishment does Prince Escalus decree for Romeo (be specific)?
Act III, scene ii:
1. What is Juliet’s mood when the scene opens? What and whom does she want to hurry and arrive? Why?
2. What is Juliet’s confusion when the nurse tries to tell her about Tybalt and Romeo?
3. When does Juliet’s first response to hearing the news of Tybalt’s death? How does she defend her husband against the Nurse’s “shame” on Romeo?
4. In Juliet’s long monologue, what conflicting thoughts/emotions does she have?
5. Where does Juliet send the Nurse? What does she give the Nurse to give to Romeo?

Act III, scene iii:
1. How does Romeo react to the news of his punishment?
2. According to Friar Lawrence, what are the reasons why Romeo should see “the dear mercy” in his punishment?
3. In the throes of desperation what does Romeo try to do?
4. What if the Friar’s plan? Be specific, listing each step of the plan.

Act III, scene iv:
1. What agreement do Lord Capulet and Paris make? What does Capulet assume about Juliet’s response to his request?
2. What day works for Capulet? Why does he suggest a small gathering?
3. What does Lord Capulet instruct his wife to do?

Act III, scene v:
1. After Romeo and Juliet have their “honeymoon,” what is your opinion of their love – real or infatuation?
2. What news does Lady Capulet give to Juliet? What does Lady Capulet instruct her to do?
3. What does Lord Capulet react to his daughter’s refusal to obey him? How does he threaten her – physically, emotionally, and financially?
4. What advice does the nurse give Juliet? After this, how does Juliet feel about the Nurse, her “counselor”?
5. Whose advice does Juliet decide to seek?
6. Why does Juliet agree to do that which her father has asked?

Act III Activities: Literary Devices
1. Paradox: A paradox is a statement that seems to contradict itself. It seems absurd or impossible but is really founded in truth. For example, when Juliet looks forward to her wedding night with Romeo, she speaks the following paradox:
   
   
   Come, civil night,
   Thou sober-suited matron, all in black,
   And learn me how to lose a winning match

   ✓ What is a matron (define)? Can a matron wear black? Can a winning match be lost? Can a night be civil? What is the seeming contradiction in this statement?

2. Dramatic Irony: Dramatic irony is a device, occurring most often in plays or films, when some of the players are ignorant of facts of which the audience, or the audience and other characters, are fully aware. For example, early in the play Romeo overhears Benvolio and Mercutio joking about his love for Rosaline when the audience knows he has forgotten about her.
   ✓ How is Juliet’s speech at the beginning of Act III, scene II, an example of dramatic irony?

3. Oxymoron: An oxymoron is a figure of speech combining seemingly contradictory expressions. For example: cruel kindness, benign neglect or falsely true.
   ✓ Juliet’s speech in Act III, scene ii, lines 73-85, reflects her conflicting emotions upon learning of the murder of Tybalt by Romeo. Shakespeare has emphasized the conflict within Juliet by providing language filled with contrasts. List at least five (5) oxymorons in this speech.
   ✓ Look back at Romeo’s first speech in Act I, scene i, to find at least five (5) oxymorons in his speech.

Act IV
Act IV, scene i:
1. How does Juliet treat Paris when they see each other at Friar Lawrence’s cell?
2. What is Friar Lawrence’s plan to fix this awful mess? Give step-by-step details.

Act IV, scene ii:
1. What lie does Juliet tell her father when he asks where she has been? What is Daddy Capulet’s reaction to Juliet’s changed attitude?
2. Does Juliet tell the nurse of her plan? Why (not)?
3. Why do you think the wedding day is pushed ahead from Thursday to Wednesday?

Act IV, scene iii:
1. What does Juliet plan to do if the potion doesn’t work?
2. What does Juliet worry briefly about before she drinks the potion?

Act IV, scene iv: Questions continue to next page.
1. In a somewhat comical scene between Lord and Lady Capulet, what does Lady mean when she tells Lord Capulet, “you have been a mouse-hunt in your time, /But I will watch you from such watching now”? 

Romeo & Juliet / Livesay
2. Who discovers Juliet’s body? Describe the reactions of Lord Capulet, Lady Capulet, Prince, and the Nurse to Juliet’s “death”? Do you believe each person’s reaction in honest?
3. What does Friar Lawrence say to comfort the Capulets?
4. What is yet another one of Friar Lawrence’s plans about what the Capulets should do for Juliet?
5. Why would Shakespeare insert a silly, nonsensical scene immediately after such a sorrowful few scenes?

**Act IV Activities: Literary Devices**

1. **Soliloquy:** A soliloquy is a speech by a character, thinking aloud; it allows the audience to “listen in” to the private feelings and thoughts of a character. Consider Juliet’s soliloquy before she swallows the sleeping potion.
   - What inner fears are communicated to the audience through the soliloquy?
   - Locate one (1) example a soliloquy in Acts I-IV and explain what inner thoughts the speaker expresses to the audience.
   - Give Act, scene, and lines numbers for the soliloquy you choose.
2. **Irony:** Irony is the contrast between appearance and reality, between expectation and fulfillment. Act IV contains many examples of irony -- from the impending marriage of the already-wed Juliet to the wedding preparations of the Capulets while their daughter lies “dead” in the next room.
   - Find other three (3) examples of irony in this act. Explain what is ironic about each one.

**Act V**

**Act V, scene i:**
1. What news does Balthasar bring to Romeo? What is it about Romeo’s “look s” that alarms Balthasar?
2. What does Romeo ask Balthasar to get and then deliver?
3. Whom does Romeo go see? What does Romeo want?
4. Why does this person hesitate to fulfill Romeo’s request? How does Romeo convince this person to give him what he so desperately wants?
5. Where does Romeo plan to go? What does he risk by doing this?

**Act V, scene ii:**
1. What does Friar Laurence discover in this scene that makes him declare, “Unhappy fortune”?

**Act V, scene iii:**
1. What does Romeo want from Juliet? Why?
2. What final instructions does Romeo give Balthasar? What does Balthasar decide to do?
3. Why does Paris think Romeo is there to do? Because of this does Paris try to do to “this felon”?
4. What happens to Paris? What does Romeo promise to do?
5. While looking at Juliet, what does Romeo notice about her less-than-dead appearance? Why can’t he “see” the truth?
6. What happens to Romeo? What are his famous final words (quote them)?
7. What does Balthasar inform Friar Lawrence? What is his immediate reaction to this news?
8. What does Friar Lawrence tell Juliet she should do now that “a greater power” has “thwarted [their] intents”? What do you think of the Friar now?
9. While looking upon her dead love, what does Juliet do to go the same way?
10. How does Juliet choose to join Romeo? What are her famous final lines (quote them)?
11. When the Prince and family members finally arrive, what does Lord Capulet think Romeo has done to Juliet?
12. What does Lord Montague say has happened to Lady Montague? How or why did this happen?
13. In his explanation of events, how does the Friar attempt to justify his actions? How does he implicate the Nurse? What do you think of the Friar at play’s end?
14. What does Prince Escalus read that “make[s] good the Friar’s words”? Whose is it? What does it say?
15. What do each of the heads of the families promise to do?
16. Who does the prince say is to blame?

**Act V Activities: Literary Devices**

1. **Apostrophe** is a direct address of an inanimate object, a person not present or living, or an abstract quality. “Death, lie thou there,” is an example from Act V, as Romeo addresses Death itself.
   - What are the subjects of apostrophe in Romeo’s following statement, “Eyes, look your last! Arms, take your last embrace!”?
   - Act V is rich with apostrophe. Find at least five (5) other examples of apostrophes.

**VI. Discussion Questions:** Questions continue to next page.

1. Do you believe in love at first sight? Discuss Romeo in love. Was Romeo really in love with Rosaline? Why or why not? How is it different from his love of Juliet? Was Romeo really in love with Juliet? Why or why not?
2. Can death lead to peace? At the end of the play, the two families reconcile. What do each of the families promise to do? Discuss whether this reconciliation and these promises will actually heal the deep wounds.
3. Discuss Romeo and Juliet’s relationships with each of her parents. How do their parents treat them? How do they behave around their parents? Examine both positive and negative that exists between each parent and each child. What advice could these families use?
4. There is much star imagery in the play. What role do the “heavens” or stars have in the play? Cite example from the play where the stars and/or Fate are mentioned. Remember the Prince says, “Heaven finds means to kill your joys with hate.” Do you think “heaven” (i.e., Fate/Destiny) is responsible for the deaths? How much of what we do is the result of Fate? How much is the result of our own “free will” to make decisions?

5. Love vs. hate -- Which of these wins out in the story? Support your answer, taking into consideration the events of the story, consequences and any long-term effects the deaths might have.

VII. Group Discussion Questions

Directions: With your group members discuss & individually record responses to the following questions. Answers in NB.

1. Many names in the play lend the reader/viewer some understanding of this plot. After examining each character’s name origin, discuss how the character does/does not exemplify his name.
   A. Mercutio: From the messenger god of the classical Romans. Known as the god of communication and speech. Extension origins, from the periodic element, Mercury (Me), and adjective, mercurial.
   B. Benvolio: Roughly translates from the Italian as “I want the good.”
   C. Tybalt: From the mythical King of Cats.
   D. Escalus: “scales,” as in the scales held in the hand of the traditional figure of Lady Justice.
   E. Paris: In Greek mythology, Paris, the Prince of Troy, who started the Trojan war by abducting and marrying the already married Helen, Queen of the Greeks.

2. What is the role of the intermediaries (Friar Lawrence, Nurse) in Romeo and Juliet’s relationship? Examine their various “plans,” advice, and underlying motives for helping Romeo and Juliet.

3. Discuss the role of the social expectations and constraints (e.g., parental authority, honor, and sexual morality) acting on the lovers.

4. Describe the various instances of foreshadowing throughout the play (e.g., Chorus, Romeo on the way to the masque, Juliet after the lover’s night together, etc.). How does seeing “the signs” along the way add to the tragedy of Romeo and Juliet?

5. Describe the three letters written and their significance in the play.

6. According to Aristotle in Poetics, the purpose of tragedy is to arouse pity and fear, thus producing a catharsis (spiritual purge) of these emotions in the audience. How does Shakespeare’s The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet fulfill Aristotle’s purpose of tragedy?

7. Also, in Aristotle’s discussion of tragedy, the play’s tragic hero/heroine must be of noble birth (or high character), and it is this character’s tragic flaw (personality defect) brings about his/her ultimate destruction. Examine Romeo as the play’s tragic figure. Identify his tragic flaw and explain how this flaw brings about his downfall.

8. According to Aristotle’s traditional definition of tragedy, tragedy should adhere to the three unities of action, time, and place. Examine Shakespeare’s play and discuss how Romeo and Juliet does and does not fit this classical definition.
   - Action: Action stems from and centers round one single conflict
   - Time: Action takes place in 24 hours
   - Place: Action limited to one single place (e.g. town, city)

10. At play’s end Prince Escalus concludes:

    A glooming peace this morning with it brings;  
    The sun for sorrow will not show his head:  
    Go hence, to have more talk of these sad things;  
    Some shall be pardon’d and some punished:  
    For never was a story of more woe  
    Than this of Juliet and her Romeo.

   ✅ Whom you would punish and whom you would pardon? Defend your answer.

VIII. THE FAMOUS BALCONY: Verona, Italy

But soft, what light through yonder window breaks?  
It is the East and Juliet is the Sun.