

Scene notes and activities 2

Act 1 scene 1

The scene opens with two Capulet servants boasting that they are far better than the Montagues. Two of Montague's servants appear and they taunt each other, trying to start a fight.

Benvolio, from the house of Montague, tries to calm everyone down, but Tybalt, from the Capulets, insults the Montagues even more, enjoying the chance to fight. The fight begins and the watchmen come in to stop the fight. Both Capulet and Montague arrive and join in immediately. The Prince arrives to stop the fight and chastises both Capulet and Montague, vowing to sort out the problem. Benvolio then tells Montague what happened.

The subject moves on to Romeo, who is described as being depressed and wandering around in the middle of the night. No one has discovered why he is behaving like this as he shuts himself away during the day time.

Romeo arrives and Benvolio tries to find out why Romeo is behaving in such a sad, depressed manner. Romeo tells him he loves a girl but she does not love him. Benvolio advises Romeo to forget about her and to look for another woman.

Theme activities

- 1 This scene begins with the feud between the Capulets and the Montagues causing a riot in the streets. How, do you think, would Shakespeare have wanted his audience to react to this scene?

- 2 Discuss as a class why Shakespeare has chosen to begin the play with a riot.

- 3 In groups of four, act out the exchange at the beginning of Act 1 scene 1 between the servants. Think about how you will use your voice and body to irritate the servants from the other family group. Discuss and makes notes on how successful you thought your performance was.

Character activities

4 What do the following quotations tell you about the role of Benvolio in this scene?

a Put up your swords, you know not what you do. (56)

I do but keep the peace. Put up thy sword,
Or manage it to part these men with me. (59–60)

b I drew to part them: in the instant came
The fiery Tybalt, with his sword prepared, (99–100)

c ‘...an hour before the worshipped sun
Peered forth the golden window of the east,
A troubled mind drove me to walk abroad,’ (109–11)

d ‘I’ll know his grievance, or be much denied’ (148)

e ‘By giving liberty unto thine eyes,
Examine other beauties.’ (218–19)

f ‘I’ll pay that doctrine, or else die in debt.’ (229)

5 Describe what Tybalt is like in this scene. Use the following quotations to help you:

- a ‘What, art thou drawn among these heartless hinds?
Turn thee, Benvolio, look upon thy death.’ (57–58)
- b ‘What, drawn and talk of peace? I hate the word,
As I hate hell, all Montagues, and thee.
Have at thee, coward.’ (61–63)

6 Benvolio describes Tybalt to Montague:

‘The fiery Tybalt, with his sword prepared,
Which, as he breathed defiance to my ears,
He swung about his head and cut the winds,
Who, nothing hurt withal, hissed him in scorn...’ (100–03)

What does this tell the audience about how Tybalt is seen by other characters? Which words or phrases help to reveal his personality?

7 What is the role of the Prince in this scene?

8 How has Romeo been behaving according to those who speak about him in this scene? Write a brief diary extract, imagining you were Romeo, expressing your feelings at this stage of the play.

Language activities

9 What is the main difference in the style of speech Shakespeare uses for the servingmen and the higher ranked characters?

The servingmen use _____
while the higher ranked characters use _____

10 In pairs, look at the images of love in the conversation between Romeo and Benvolio in this scene.

Shakespeare uses a number of oxymorons to describe the contrasting sides to love. An oxymoron is a phrase that contains two contradictory words. The effect is often to show conflict in feelings.

What are the oxymorons and can you explain the qualities that love has in each image?

An example is provided for you. Add the others to the chart below:

Image	Explanation
'O heavy lightness!'	Love can make you feel heavy (sad) or light (happy and full of joy).

Dramatic devices

11 How does Shakespeare get the attention of his audience at the start of Act 1 scene 1?

Whole-text activities 4

Character: Nurse

The Nurse's main characteristics are shown below. As you explore each one through the activities, you should build up a clear idea of what you could best say about the Nurse if you were asked to write about her character in the examination.

- protects and supports Juliet but also could be seen to betray her
- helps Juliet
- is a comic character
- is seen as a gossip by Capulet

1 In pairs, read the section of Act 1 scene 3 from lines 17 to 63. Explain what the following lines tell us about the Nurse:

- a** For even the day before, she broke her brow,
 And then my husband – God be with his soul,
 'A was a merry man – took up the child.
 'Yea,' quoth he, 'dost thou fall upon thy face?
 Thou wilt fall backward when thou hast more wit,' (39–43)
-
-

- b** Yes, madam, yet I cannot choose but laugh,
 To think it should leave crying, and say 'Ay':
 And yet I warrant it had upon its brow
 A bump as big as a young cock'rel's stone... (51–54)
-
-

- c** Thou wast the prettiest babe that e'er I nursed.
 And I might live to see thee married once,
 I have my wish. (61–63)
-
-

2 How does the way in which the Nurse relates to Juliet compare with Lady Capulet? Who is more like a mother to Juliet and why?

- 3 The Nurse helps Juliet throughout the play. Make a list of the things she does to help her and comment on whether you feel her help was a positive or a negative thing.

- 4 Imagine you are the Nurse and you are talking to a friend about the events of the play. What would you tell them about what has happened? What opinion would you have on the tragic ending? Improvise this conversation with someone after making notes on a separate sheet of paper.

- 5 In Act 3 scene 5 line 174, Capulet tells the Nurse to keep her thoughts at her 'gossip bowl'. Why does he call her a gossip?

- 6 List two moments that make the Nurse seem a comic character and explain why.

1

2

Extension activity

- 7 On a separate sheet of paper, write an essay on the Nurse's significance in the play. Include:
- how she helps Juliet
 - the way she talks about Juliet
 - her relationship with Capulet and Lady Capulet
 - her comic moments
 - the way she interacts with the Friar and Peter

Exam practice 3

Assessment Objective 2

This is the second Assessment Objective that you need to meet in order to get good marks in the exam. Here is how it is defined:

- **AO2:** Explain how language, structure and form contribute to writers' presentation of ideas, themes and settings.

Explain how language, structure and form contribute to writers' presentation...

The word '**language**' refers to Shakespeare's use of words. For example, consider the use of imagery in Capulet's speech expressing his grief for Juliet's death:

Death is my son-in-law, Death is my heir,
 My daughter he hath wedded... (4.5 38–39)

Shakespeare could have made him say 'My daughter is dead', but this would not have been as effective at showing how sad Capulet is about Juliet's death.

The word **structure** refers to how the play is put together, the order of events and the introduction of characters, as well as the length of various sections and scenes, including what is juxtaposed with what.

The word **form** is significant as *Romeo and Juliet* is a play and Shakespeare uses a mixture of verse and prose throughout. The play is divided up into five acts with a varied number of scenes in each act. There is also a mixture of comedy and tragedy throughout. This form allows the writer to create a text that will have a visual impact, making it appealing to an audience by exciting and involving them in the action and playing on their emotions. Shakespeare uses the form of *Romeo and Juliet* to contrast a scene of violence, such as the deaths of Tybalt and Mercutio in Act 3 scene 1, with a scene of relative calm where Juliet waits impatiently for Romeo's appearance in her bedroom in Act 3 scene 2.

...ideas

Shakespeare is trying to say many things during the play. In exploring his ideas, you need to think about what they were supposed to mean when he was writing the play. For example, you could look at what Shakespeare's ideas were about conflict and how these are presented in the play. Conflict in the play can be thought of on many levels and in many ways:

- the family feud
- language of conflict
- father–daughter conflict over marriage
- the servants' conflict in Act 1 scene 1 and social status
- our destructive nature
- how humans can be very cruel to each other

- how conflict affects the young lovers
- how humans can be primitive

If you develop these ideas into a coherent argument, with examples from the text to support what you are saying, then you will produce a good answer.

...themes

The word ‘**themes**’ refers to the ideas that Shakespeare explores in more detail. The main themes in *Romeo and Juliet* include:

- love and marriage
- fate and destiny
- light and darkness
- families
- friendship and enemies

...settings

This refers to the places in which the play happens.

The setting of *Romeo and Juliet* is Verona, a foreign setting that would have promised to engage the English audience of Shakespeare’s day in a new and exotic location. But in actual fact there is very little mention of Verona’s customs or of actual places in Verona beyond some very generalised descriptions such as ‘fair Verona’ in the Prologue.

By setting the play in Verona, Shakespeare creates a society very much like England, using the foreign setting to show the audience a society that is very similar to their own. This enables him to be more critical, highlighting many negative elements of English customs, such as arranged marriages and the over-passionate nature of the young, without directly criticising England and making him any enemies.

1 How does Shakespeare’s use of animal imagery **contribute to the meaning of the text**? (For example, look at the use of the ‘lark’ and the ‘toad’ in Act 3 scene 5 lines 21–35.)

Lark

Toad

2 Comment on Shakespeare’s choice of **language** in the following:

a With love’s light wings did I o’erperch these walls,
For stony limits cannot hold love out, (2.2 66–67)

b ...Love’s heralds should be thoughts,
Which ten times faster glides than the sun’s beams,
Driving back shadows over low’ring hills;
Therefore do nimble-pinioned doves draw Love,
And therefore hath the wind-swift Cupid wings. (2.5 4–8)

c The brightness of her cheek would shame those stars,
As daylight doth a lamp; her eyes in heaven
Would through the airy region stream so bright
That birds would sing and think it were not night. (2.2 19–22)

3 Describe the basic **structure** of this play. For example, look at Act 1 scene 1. This is a fast-moving fight scene that is immediately followed by a quiet conversational scene between Capulet and Paris. List the remaining scenes in the play and say how they contrast and compliment each other.
