

1. Plot: 10 key scenes in the play

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| Act 1 Scene 1 | Montague and Capulet servants clash in the street, the Prince threatens dire punishment if another such brawl should take place, and Romeo tells his friend, Benvolio, of his obsession with Rosaline. | Act 3 Scene 5 | Romeo and Juliet spend their wedding night together . They are immediately parted though, as Romeo must leave for banishment in Mantua or die if he is found in Verona. Juliet's father tries to cheer Juliet by arranging her immediate marriage to Paris . He threatens to disown her when she refuses to agree to the marriage. She runs to the Friar for advice and help. |
| Act 1 Scene 4 | Romeo is persuaded to attend a masked party at the Capulet household. Not knowing who she is, he falls in love with Juliet the moment he sees her and she, equally ignorant that he is a Montague, falls just as instantly for him. | Act 4 Scene 1 | Juliet arrives at the Friar's. She is so desperate that she threatens suicide . The Friar instead suggests that she takes a poison that will make her appear to be dead . He promises to send a message to Romeo , asking him to return secretly and be with Juliet when she wakes. |
| Act 2 Scene 1 | When everyone has left the party, Romeo creeps into the Capulet garden and sees Juliet on her balcony . They reveal their mutual love and Romeo leaves, promising to arrange a secret marriage and let Juliet's messenger, her old Nurse, have the details the following morning. | Act 5 Scene 1 | Romeo's servant, Balthasar, reaches Mantua before the Friar's messenger and tells Romeo that Juliet is dead . Romeo buys poison and leaves for Verona, planning to die alongside Juliet's body . |
| Act 2 Scene 5 | Juliet tells her parents she is going to make her confession to Friar Laurence, meets Romeo there and, despite some personal misgivings, the friar marries them immediately. | Act 5 Scene 3 | Romeo breaks into the Capulet crypt and in the process kills Paris . He drinks the poison, kisses his wife for the last time and dies . The Friar comes to the crypt to be with Juliet when she wakes; but when she revives, he cannot persuade her to leave her dead husband and runs away in fear. Juliet takes Romeo's knife and stabs herself to death with it. |
| Act 3 Scene 1 | Romeo meets Tybalt in the street, and is challenged by him to a duel . Romeo refuses to fight and his friend Mercutio is so disgusted by this 'cowardice' that he takes up the challenge instead. As Romeo tries to break up the fight, Tybalt kills Mercutio and, enraged, Romeo then kills Tybalt . The Prince arrives and, on hearing the full story, banishes Romeo rather than have him executed. | Act 5 Scene 3 | The watchmen discover the gruesome sight and call the Prince, to whom the Friar confesses everything . Having heard the full story, the Montagues and Capulets are reconciled . Peace has been achieved , but the price has been the lives of two innocent young lovers. |

3. Structure and form of a Shakespearean Tragedy

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| Act 1: Here, the audience learns the setting (Time/Place), characters are developed, and a conflict is introduced. Known as the exposition . | Act 2: The rising action of this act leads the audience to the climax. It is common for complications to arise , or for the protagonist to encounter obstacles . | Act 3: This is the turning point of the play. The climax is characterised by the highest amount of suspense. This is often referred to as the peripeteia . |
| Act 4: The opposite of rising action , in the falling action the story is coming to an end and any unknown details or plot twists are revealed and wrapped up . | Act 5: The denouement or the resolution of the play. Often leads to a moment of self-revelation for the protagonist , and a moral lesson or catharsis for the audience. | |

2. The characters

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| Lord Montague | Romeo's father. Can be drawn into conflict , but also has genuine concern for his son and is quietly dignified . |
| Lady Montague | Peace-loving and dislikes the violence of the feud. She dies of grief when Romeo is banished. |
| Romeo | A typical Petrarchan lover, his love for Juliet is incredibly romantic, impulsive and passionate . |
| Benvolio | A foil to Romeo. Cares about his cousin Romeo and tries to keep peace between the families. |
| Balthasar | Romeo's kinsman who brings news of Juliet's death to Romeo. |
| Friar Lawrence | Romeo's mentor . A trusted, kind man of the Church who is optimistic about the possibility of peace . |
| Lord Capulet | Juliet's father. Shows concern for Juliet's welfare, but can be aggressive and tyrannical when he is disobeyed . |
| Lady Capulet | Juliet's mother. Cold and distant for most of the play, she expects Juliet to follow in her own footsteps. |
| Juliet | Young and innocent , not yet 14. Her love for Romeo matures her and makes her bolder in her defiance . |
| Tybalt | Juliet's ruthless and vengeful cousin. Has a deep, violent hatred of the Montagues and a strong sense of honour and loyalty . The antagonist . |
| The Nurse | Juliet's nursemaid, they have a close relationship . She acts as confidante and messenger for Romeo and Juliet. |
| Prince Escalus | The symbol of law and order in Verona, yet his threats of punishment are unable to bring an end to the conflict. |
| Mercutio | A relative of the Prince. Romeo's loyal best friend. Can be volatile, provocative and is often bawdy about love and women . |
| County Paris | A rich and highly-regarded young man, kinsman to the Prince, who is determined to marry Juliet . |

4. Context of the play

| A: Setting: | B: Religion | C: Patriarchal Society |
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| <p>14th-century Verona, Italy. A successful and cultured city which suffered widespread violence involving deadly battles over trivial issues (e.g. the rivalry between supporters of the emperor and supporters of the Pope). The Montecchi and Capuleti were real families fighting for power in Verona at this time.</p> | <p>The play is set in Italy which was a Catholic country. Religion was extremely important, and marriage vows were sacred – once made, they could not be broken. England was no longer a Catholic country, but religion played an important part in everyday life and the presence of religion in the text reflects the domination of the Church.</p> | <p>Elizabethan England and Medieval Italy were both societies controlled by men. Women were seen as the weaker sex and were expected to be ruled over by men. Women needed to be meek and mild, and most importantly, obedient to their fathers and later their husbands.</p> |
| D: Fate and Fortune | E: The Great Chain of Being | F: Courtly Love |
| <p>In both 14th-century Italy and Elizabethan England stars linked to fate and fortune, were believed to predict and influence the course of human events. Most people believed that their fate was predestined by God and fixed. Shakespeare explores a more humanist perspective – can individuals change the course of their own fate and exercise free will?</p> | <p>Elizabethans believed that God set out an order for everything in the universe. This was known as the Great Chain of Being. On Earth, God created a social order for everybody and chose where you belonged. The Elizabethans were very superstitious. They believed that if you disturbed this divine and social hierarchy, you threw things into uproar causing chaos and tragedy.</p> | <p>Courtly love, was a highly conventionalised code that prescribed the behaviour of ladies and their lovers. It had a strict set of rules that the lovers followed that were almost like a game. Anne Boleyn popularised it during the reign of Henry VIII, but it was typically viewed as an out-moded and juvenile convention during the reign of Elizabeth I.</p> |
| G: Duelling and Honour | H: Suicide | I: Arranged Marriages |
| <p>Honour was hugely important at the time, and maintaining the honour of your family name was crucial. If you were challenged to a duel and you refused, you would be deemed a coward, thus damaging your honour and the status of your family. Ironically, duelling was banned under Elizabeth I due to the increased violence seen on the street of London.</p> | <p>Suicide in Shakespeare's time was a paradoxical issue. On the one hand, Christian doctrine held suicide to be a mortal sin. Life was a gift from God and those who committed suicide had despaired God's mercy. Those who attempted or successfully committed suicide were treated and charged like a criminal. On the other hand, it was seen as a noble and courageous act in the growing Renaissance tradition of secular, gentlemanly honour.</p> | <p>Marriages amongst the wealthy were arranged by parents, and were not about love. Mostly the marriages were arranged for the purposes of status and power, and improving the social standings of families. Girls were considered eligible at the age of 14 and had to give their consent to a marriage. They were often required to marry a successful, older man. Girls who did not marry, often were sent to convents to become nuns or "brides of Christ."</p> |

6. Themes and ideas

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| <p>Love and compassion: romantic, sexual, superficial, paternal and platonic forms of love are present in the play. This love can be volatile, brutal, and oppressive- or the opposite: metaphysical, pure and transformative. Shakespeare explores the power of love and if it can make an impact in a violent and hostile world.</p> | <p>Hate and violence: key driving forces in the play. The hateful feud results in tragic violence – violence opens the play in scene one and it also concludes the play with the deaths of the two lovers. We question what is stronger – love or hate?</p> | <p>Young and old: the play depicts the different attitudes to love, marriage and honour between the generations. Romeo and Juliet's love defies the standards of an older generation who believe in family duty, obedience and reputation. It is rebellious and reckless as they struggle against anachronistic attitudes.</p> |
| <p>Fate and free will: fate is a dominant theme presented in the Prologue. We know the lovers will die, but engage with their story and explore how their decisions and acts of free will contribute to their tragedy. Can they defy the stars? Is fate or free choice to blame for their death?</p> | <p>Men and women: the play depicts a patriarchal society, where men are violent, assertive and controlling. In contrast, women are often objectified and controlled by them. Shakespeare explores the destructive side of masculinity and the innate sexism of the Elizabethan period.</p> | <p>Honour and disobedience: characters like Tybalt place honour and reputation above all else. His rigid adherence to rules and form can be seen as just as destructive as the reckless love of Romeo and Juliet. Shakespeare explores the impact of loyalty at all costs, rebelling against the status quo and the importance of the rule of law.</p> |

5. Key Terminology

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| 1 | tragedy |
| 2 | Elizabethan |
| 3 | antithesis |
| 4 | oxymoron |
| 5 | allusion |
| 6 | imagery |
| 7 | prose |
| 8 | sonnet |
| 9 | iambic pentameter |
| 10 | rhyming couplet |
| 11 | protagonist |
| 12 | antagonist |
| 13 | foil |
| 14 | foreshadowing |
| 15 | simile |
| 16 | metaphor |
| 17 | soliloquy |
| 18 | dramatic irony |
| 19 | dialogue |
| 20 | hyperbole |