Knowledge Organiser: Romeo and Juliet

Writer's Intent

Romeo and Juliet is a play about love and conflict and how fate and free will govern our lives. Romeo and Juliet fall quickly in love, but the ongoing grudge between their families creates a barrier that they cannot overcome. The tragic downfall of both characters allows Shakespeare to highlight the need for careful consideration of your actions.

Key Characters

Romeo Montague
Intense, impulsive, intelligent, quick witted, and loved by his friends.

Juliet Capulet
Naïve and sheltered at the beginning, develops into a woman with strength.

Mercutio
Romeo's best friend and kinsman to Prince Escalus. Wild, playful and sarcastic.

Tybalt
Juliet's cousin. Consumed by issues of family honour. Hates the Montagues.

Benvolio
Romeo's cousin. Tries to keep the peace.

Nurse
Juliet's nanny, friend and confidante.

Friar Lawrence
A Franciscan monk and a friend to both Romeo and Juliet.

The County Paris
Lord Capulet's chosen husband for Juliet.

Prince Escalus
Leader of Verona. Concerned with keeping order between the warring families.

Lord Capulet
Head of the Capulet Household- Juliet's father. A patriarchal figure.

Lady Capulet
Wife of Lord Capulet and Juliet's mother.

Key Ideas

Love	An intense feeling of deep affection.	The play explores different types of love and the consequences of such loves. Courtly Love is portrayed by Romeo's expression of love for Rosaline at the start of the play and is juxtaposed with the love Romeo and Juliet share which is beautiful and passionate, pure, exhilarating and transformative.
Fate	The Development of events outside a person's control, regarded as predetermined by a supernatural power.	No matter what the lovers do, their struggles against fate only help to fulfil it. But defeating or escaping fate is not the point. No one escapes fate. It is Romeo and Juliet's determination to struggle against fate in order to be together, whether in life or death, that shows the fiery passion of their love, making that love eternal but also destructive.
Individual vs society	The phrase refers to a conflict between an individual – one person- and the society in which they live.	Society is a group of people living together in a community which is ordered to a certain degree. Romeo and Juliet are forced into conflict with the social world around them because of their individual choice to love each other and to act on this love as individuals. This puts them in conflict with: family; friends; political authority, and even religion.
Violence and conflict	Violence is the action of physical force to inflict injury or cause damage to people or property. Conflict is a serious disagreement or argument, typically long-lasting.	Conflict is one of the key driving forces of the play and it occurs between a range of characters- within families; within friendship groups; between warring households and between members of the communities. This conflict results in a huge amount of violence-violence opens the play in scene one and concludes the play with the deaths of the two lovers.
The role of women in a patriarchal society	The expectations of how girls and women should act and behave in a society where men have the social and political power.	It is clear that Lord Capulet expects all the women in his household (Lady Capulet, Juliet. Nurse) to be subservient to him. Socially and legally he has power over them. The patriarchal structure of Verona is also seen in the rulership of The Prince and in the stereotypically masculine atmosphere of anger and violence on the streets of Verona.

Writer's Methods

Method	Definition	Example	Purpose
Foreshadowing	A warning or indication of a future event.	Shakespeare foreshadows the tragedy of Romeo when Juliet has a vision of him 'As one dead in the bottom of a tomb'.	It creates suspense, a feeling of unease, a sense of curiosity, or a mark that things may not be as they seem.
Dramatic Irony	When the full significance of words or actions is clear to the audience but unknown to the character.	Dramatic Irony is particularly apparent in the play once Romeo and Juliet are married as the majority of characters have no idea this has happened.	Dramatic irony often causes humour or heightens tension for the audience as they have a superior position of knowledge but no power to prevent or advance the action.
Soliloquy	A speech where an actor speaks their thoughts aloud usually when alone.	Act 1, Scene 5: 'O, she doth teach the torches to burn bright! It seems she hangs upon the cheek of night. Like a rich jewel in an Ethiope's ear'	Soliloquys reveal a character's inner thoughts and emotions and reveal their inner monologue.
Imagery	Figurative language to represent objects, actions and ideas so it appeals to our physical senses.	The imagery of Romeo and Juliet as 'A pair of star-crossed lovers' symbolises that they've gone against fate.	Imagery can make something abstract, like an emotion or theory, seem more concrete.

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Key Word Glossary		
Word	**Definition**	**Example**
Tragedy	A play dealing with tragic events and having an unhappy ending, especially one concerning the downfall of the main character.	The tragedy of Romeo and Juliet is that they are victims of the rules of the society that they live in.
Tragic Hero	The protagonist of a tragedy.	Romeo is a romantic tragic hero.
Tragic Victim	Innocent bystanders who get caught up in the action and suffer as a result	Paris is a tragic victim who dies protecting Juliet's tomb.
Tragic Villain	A character who, although acting for primarily 'evil' or selfish goals, is not in full control of their actions or emotions.	The audience can feel sympathy for the tragic villain, Tybalt as he could be viewed as a victim of circumstance.
Hubris	Excessive pride or self-confidence.	The hubris of Lord Capulet leads to the death of his only child.
Hamartia	Fatal/ tragic flaw leading to the downfall of a tragic hero/ heroine.	Romeo's hamartia is his impulsiveness.
Pity	Feeling of sorrow and compassion caused by the suffering and misfortunes of others.	The audience feel great pity when Mercutio dies.
Catharsis	The process of releasing, and thereby providing relief from, strong or repressed emotions.	Friar Lawrence's end monologue provides catharsis.
Tragic Structure	Also known as the five act structure, is made up of the exposition (introduction to the characters), rising action, climax, falling action and the resolution.	The play follows a traditional tragic structure.
Elizabethan	Shakespeare wrote his plays when Elizabeth First and James 1STruled England. We refer to the time that Elizabeth was on the throne from 1558-1603 as the Elizabethan Era and the time that James was on the throne as the Jacobean Era.	Elizabethan England was a society controlled by men. Women were seen as the weaker sex and were expected to be ruled over by men. However, there was a powerful Queen on the throne so some of these traditional views of girls and women were being challenged.
The Great Chain of Being	A hierarchical structure of all matter and life, thought by medieval Christianity to have been decreed by God. The chain begins with God and descends through angels, humans, animals, and plants, to minerals.	Juliet is described by Romeo as 'the sun' and an 'angel' placing her in his eyes at the top of The Great Chain of Being. By doing this Shakespeare is symbolizing Juliet's purity and Romeo's passion nature.
Masculinity	qualities or attributes regarded as characteristic of men or boys	The representation of male characters is stereotypical of Elizabethan expectations of masculinity.
Patriarchal	A system of society or government controlled by men.	Verona is patriarchal.
Setting	The place or type of surroundings where something is positioned or where or when an event takes place	The setting of the play is violent and not civilised.
Prologue	A separate introductory section to a literary, dramatic, or musical work.	Romeo and Juliet starts with a prologue which foreshadows the events of the play