

# Romeo & Juliet - Knowledge Organiser

## Context

**Shakespeare's Time** - Shakespeare wrote his plays at the time of two monarchs: Queen Elizabeth I and James I. Romeo and Juliet was written relatively early in Shakespeare's career (the bulk of his tragedies were written in the 17th century) yet was extremely popular in his lifetime, as it is now. Shakespeare borrowed heavily from two texts: The Tragical History of Romeo and Juliet (1562) and Palace of Pleasure (1567)



**Elizabethan England and Italy** - Shakespeare frequently engaged with Italy in his plays, leading many to believe that he travelled there between the late 1580s and early 1590s. Italy was a place that Shakespeare's contemporaries would have had a keen interest in; it was already an advanced and beautiful place for travel. Shakespeare's depictions of many areas of Italian life at the time are deemed largely accurate.



**Religion** - The heavy religious presence is evident across several parts of Romeo and Juliet. This is reflective of a society across Europe that was deeply religious (predominantly catholic or protestant). Several characters demonstrate their commitment to the church, such as Romeo and Juliet who choose to marry rather than fornicate, and the Capulets, who are quick to contemplate that Juliet is in a better place (heaven) after she is found 'dead.'



**Patriarchal Society** - Society throughout the Middle Age and at Shakespeare's time was patriarchal - women were considered inferior to men. This was also the case in much of Europe, including Italy. Women belonged to their fathers (or brothers if their fathers had died) and then their husbands, so Juliet would be expected to obey her father. Women were not permitted to own land or enter most professions. They were instead expected to bear children, be gentle and womanly.



**Astrology the Supernatural** - At the time of Shakespeare, the belief in both astronomy and the supernatural was far more preeminent than in society today. The reference to 'star-cross'd lovers demonstrates the large role of horoscopes and planet positions in being used to predict fate. Also, Romeo and Juliet make reference to the fact that they feel they are being guided by a supernatural force (e.g. 'fortune's fool').



**Healthcare and Medicine** - Healthcare and medicine were not as advanced in Shakespeare's age as they are today - there were numerous ailments and diseases that were not yet understood. This makes it much more believable for both the Capulets and Romeo that Juliet could have died so suddenly and so young. The high death count in the play would seem slightly more common in those days!



## Themes

**Love** - In Romeo and Juliet, love is an extremely overpowering force that supersedes all other values, emotions, and loyalties. Through their love, Romeo and Juliet conspire to go against the forces of their entire social world. Romeo returns to visit Juliet at points, even though he is well aware of the threat of death. At times, love is presented as fickle (Mercutio's speeches, Romeo + Rosaline).

**Individual vs Society** - Romeo and Juliet are forced to undermine the oppressive rules of society at the time. For example, rules of the patriarchal family force Juliet to be subservient to her parents, rules of religion mean that they must marry in haste, and rules of masculinity force Romeo into conflict with Tybalt.

**Violence** - Extreme violence takes place sporadically throughout the play. The feud between the two families is so bitter that the mere sight of each other can be the cause of a fight to the death. Unchecked violence is personified through the character of Tybalt. The violence culminates in Act 3 Scene 1, in which both Mercutio and Tybalt are murdered.

**Fate** - In the first address to the audience, the Chorus states that Romeo and Juliet are 'star-cross'd' lovers, meaning that fate had intended for their paths to cross, and that fate controls their actions. A series of unfortunate accidents towards the end of the play thwart Friar Laurence's plan and eventually manifest in both Romeo and Juliet committing suicide, thus adding to the sense of fate.

## Dramatic Devices in Romeo & Juliet

<b>Dramatic Irony</b>	Mercutio and Benvolio think Romeo is still pining over Rosaline, but the audience knows he has moved on to Juliet. A2 S1
<b>Soliloquy</b>	Juliet's opening speech in A3 S2 in which she pours her heart out over her love for Romeo.
<b>Aside</b>	Juliet secretly hopes for the 'villain' Romeo: Villain and he be many miles asunder God pardon him! A3 S5.
<b>Foreshadowing</b>	Friar Laurence: These violent delights have violent ends, And in their triumph die, like fire and powder. A2 S6