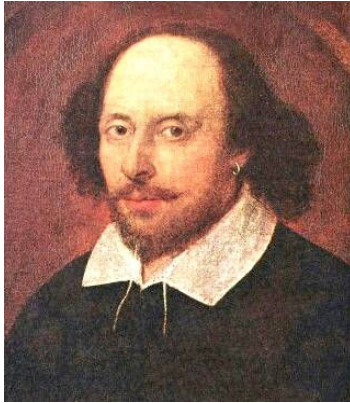


# ROMEO AND JULIET

by William Shakespeare



## THE AUTHOR

William Shakespeare (1564-1616) was born into the family of a prosperous tradesman in Stratford-upon-Avon, England. While in his mid-teens, he was forced to leave school because his family fell into a period of poverty, so that he had only a rudimentary education. In 1582, he married Anne Hathaway, eight years his senior and already three months pregnant. The marriage produced three children in three years, but in 1585, Shakespeare left Stratford to go to London to seek his fortune in the big city.

In London, he embarked upon a career on the stage, becoming a popular actor by the early fifteen nineties. In 1591, he penned his first play, *Love's Labour's Lost*. His early plays were comedies, and show nothing of the depth that characterized his later works. His plots were borrowed from a variety of sources, both ancient and contemporary. During his career, he wrote 37 plays, three narrative poems, and 154 sonnets.

His writing brought him fame and popularity, but he continued to act as well as write (critics love to speculate about which of the characters in his plays would have been played by the author). He eventually became a shareholder in the Lord Chamberlain's Men (later the King's Men when James I ascended the throne). Most of his plays were performed at local theaters like the Rose, the Globe, and the indoor Blackfriars. When the Globe burned to the ground in 1613 (a cannon misfired during a performance of *Henry VIII*), Shakespeare retired, and died in Stratford three years later on his fifty-second birthday.

*Romeo and Juliet* was written around 1596, and was thus one of Shakespeare's earliest tragedies (*Titus Andronicus* was written in 1594). His main source was Arthur Brooke's poem *Romeus and Juliet*, from which Shakespeare derives the main plot and most of the characters, though he alters some of those characters significantly. The play was written about a year after *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, with which it shares many common features, both in its romanticism (the struggles of the young lovers and the ridiculous performance of the similarly-themed "Pyramus and Thisbe" by the Mechanicals) and in the style of poetry used by Shakespeare. In many ways, despite its ongoing popularity, *Romeo and Juliet* is not a real

tragedy. The downfall of the protagonists is not the result of flaws in their characters (unless stupidity can be considered a tragic flaw), but rather comes upon them from the outside - circumstances and the actions of other people conspire against them, making the play a tragedy of fate rather than of character. In fact, the play does little with character development compared to the great tragedies of Shakespeare's more mature period. We see in *Romeo and Juliet* little in the way of introspection or inner struggle; they simply act immediately on what they feel at the moment. In this sense, the play gives a good picture of the impetuosity of youth and the innocent but ardent nature of young love; these qualities largely explain the popularity of a story whose plot seems to many critics to be preposterous in the extreme. Note also that references to the issues of Shakespeare's own time include allusions to the prohibition against dueling enacted by Elizabeth shortly before the writing of the play.

## MAJOR CHARACTERS

- Romeo - The young son of Montague, he falls in love with the daughter of his family's arch-enemy, the Capulets. The two marry secretly and plan their escape from Verona, but are foiled by fate and both commit suicide.
- Montague - Romeo's father, a wealthy nobleman engaged in a feud with his neighbor.
- Lady Montague - Romeo's mother, she dies of grief after Romeo's banishment.
- Mercutio - Romeo's friend, he is killed in a street fight by Tybalt.
- Benvolio - Romeo's cousin, he is a peacemaker who fails to stop the fights in which he intervenes.
- Juliet - The daughter and only child of Capulet, she is almost fourteen when the story begins. She falls in love with Romeo, refuses her father's demand that she marry Paris, and commits suicide after finding Romeo dead when she awakens from a drug-induced sleep.
- Capulet - Juliet's father, an old man who has seen all his children from a previous marriage die and is determined to have the best for his only remaining daughter. His insistence that Juliet marry Paris drives the rash actions that lead to the deaths of the young lovers.
- Lady Capulet - Capulet's second wife and Juliet's mother, she is only in her late twenties when the story takes place.
- Nurse - Juliet's nursemaid and constant companion, she provides much of the story's comic relief with her bawdy banter.
- Tybalt - Juliet's cousin, he kills Mercutio and is in turn killed by Romeo in a street brawl.

- Escalus - The Prince of Verona, he declares that dueling is illegal, then banishes Romeo for engaging in it. His warnings about the possible consequences of the feud between the leading families go unheeded, leading to the tragedy that ensues.
- Paris - A kinsman of the Prince, he is the husband that Capulet desires for his daughter. He is killed in a fight with Romeo outside of Juliet's tomb.
- Friar Laurence - A Franciscan monk to whom Romeo goes for advice about his love life; he secretly marries Romeo and Juliet and arranges for the supposed death of Juliet in order for the two to make their escape from Verona after Romeo's exile.
- Friar John - His failure to deliver a message to Romeo is a critical part of the final tragedy.
- Apothecary - He sells Romeo the poison that he uses to kill himself beside Juliet's body in the mausoleum.

### NOTABLE QUOTATIONS

"Compare her face with some that I shall show,  
And I will make thee think thy swan a crow." (Benvolio, Iii, 88-89)

"I'll look to like, if looking liking move." (Juliet, Iiii, 97)

"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!" (Romeo, Iv, 44-47)

"Did my heart love till now? Forswear it, sight!  
For I ne'er saw true beauty till this night." (Romeo, Iv, 52-53)

"My only love, sprung from my only hate!  
Too early seen unknown, and known too late!" (Juliet, Iv, 138-139)

"He jests at scars that never felt a wound." (Romeo, Iiii, 1)

"But soft! What light through yonder window breaks?  
It is the East, and Juliet is the sun!  
Arise, fair sun, and kill the envious moon,  
Who is already sick and pale with grief  
That thou her maid art far more fair than she." (Romeo, Iiii, 2-6)

"See how she leans her cheek upon her hand?  
O that I were a glove upon that hand,  
That I might touch that cheek!" (Romeo, Iiii, 23-25)

“O Romeo, Romeo! Wherefore art thou Romeo?  
Deny thy father and refuse thy name;  
Or, if thou wilt not, be but sworn my love,  
And I’ll no longer be a Capulet.” (Juliet, IIIi, 33-36)

“What’s in a name? That which we call a rose  
By any other name would smell as sweet.” (Juliet, IIIi, 43-44)

“I have no joy of this contract tonight.  
It is too rash, too unadvised, too sudden.” (Juliet, IIIi, 117-118)

“Good night, good night! Parting is such sweet sorrow  
That I shall say good night till it be morrow.” (Juliet, IIIi, 185-186)

“Women may fall when there’s no strength in men.” (Friar Laurence, IIIii, 80)

“Wisely and slow. They stumble that run fast.” (Friar Laurence, IIIii, 94)

“Do thou but close our hands with holy words,  
Then love-devouring death do what he dare -  
It is enough I may but call her mine.” (Romeo, IIvi, 5-7)

“A plague a both your houses.” (Mercutio, IIIi, 89)

“Ask for me to-morrow, and you shall find me a grave man.” (Mercutio, IIIi, 96)

“O, I am fortune’s fool!” (Romeo, IIIi, 134)

“Mercy but murders, pardoning those that kill.” (Prince, IIIi, 195)

“O, I have bought the mansion of a love,  
But not possessed it; and though I am sold,  
Not yet enjoyed.” (Juliet, IIIii, 26-28)

“My husband lives, that Tybalt would have slain;  
And Tybalt’s dead, that would have slain my husband.  
All this is comfort.” (Juliet, IIIii, 105-107)

“Methinks I see thee, now thou art so low,  
As one dead in the bottom of a tomb.” (Juliet, IIIv, 55-56)

“Would none but I might venge my cousin’s death.” (Juliet, IIIv, 87)

“I would the fool were married to her grave!” (Lady Capulet, IIIv, 141)

“There is thy gold - worse poison to men’s souls,  
Doing more murder in this loathsome world,  
Than these poor compounds that thou mayst not sell.  
I sell thee poison; thou hast sold me none.” (Romeo, Vi, 80-83)

“Death, that hath sucked the honey of thy breath,  
Hath had no power yet upon thy beauty.” (Romeo, Viii, 92-93)

“Why art thou yet so fair? Shall I believe  
That unsubstantial Death is amorous,  
And that the lean abhorred monster keeps  
Thee here in dark to be his paramour?” (Romeo, Viii, 102-105)

“O churl! Drunk all, and left no friendly drop  
To help me after? I will kiss thy lips.  
Haply some poison yet doth hang on them  
To make me die with a restorative.” (Juliet, Viii, 163-166)

“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 pardoned, and some punished;  
For never was a story of more woe  
Than this of Juliet and her Romeo.” (Prince, Viii, 305-310)

## NOTES

**Prologue** - As was often the case in Elizabethan theater, the Prologue lays out the entire plot of the play - no surprise endings here (cf. Prologue at the beginning of the Mechanicals’ skit in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*).

**Act I, scene 1** - The play begins with Gregory and Sampson, two servants of the house of Capulet, engaging in bawdy banter about the feud between their master and the Montagues. Abram and Balthasar, servants of Montague, come on the scene, and the four exchange insults, then begin to fight. Benvolio, a nephew of Montague, enters and tries to break up the fight. Tybalt, Capulet’s nephew, enters, sees Benvolio with drawn sword, and challenges him, and despite Benvolio’s attempts to explain that he is trying to keep the peace, they begin to fight as well. Citizens and officers break up the fight, and soon Montague and Capulet and their wives appear and begin exchanging verbal jousts. The Prince comes on the scene and threatens anyone who dares to fight in the streets again with death, then summons Montague and Capulet to appear before him that afternoon. Montague asks Benvolio where Romeo is, and is told that he is in a nearby sycamore grove, overcome with lovesickness. When Romeo arrives, he tells Benvolio that he is in love with the greatest beauty in the world, but is in despair because his love is unrequited. Benvolio advises him to find another love.

**Act I, scene 2** - Paris wants to marry Juliet, but Capulet thinks she is too young - not quite fourteen. Paris presses his suit, and Capulet agrees to give his consent if Juliet is willing. Capulet then invites Paris to a party he is planning that night and suggests he try to win Juliet's heart then. He then sends his servant out to invite the people on a list he gives him. The servant, however, cannot read, and when he encounters Romeo and Benvolio in the street, asks them for help. Among the invited guests is Rosaline, the girl with whom Romeo is in love. Benvolio suggests they crash the party to see if Romeo can find a new lover who will make him forget Rosaline. Romeo denies that anyone could compare with Rosaline, but agrees to go to the party nonetheless.

**Act I, scene 3** - Lady Capulet and the Nurse are reminiscing about Juliet's childhood. When Juliet enters, her mother tells her about the desire of Paris for her hand and encourages her to accept his offer.

**Act I, scene 4** - Capulet's ball is ready to begin, and Romeo, Benvolio, and their friend Mercutio approach, wearing masks. The other two try to cheer Romeo up, but he will have none of it, speaking instead of an ominous dream he had the night before. Mercutio speaks slightly of Queen Mab, a fairy who controls dreams, but Romeo fears that this night will open the door on events that will lead to his premature death.

**Act I, scene 5** - Shortly after the ball begins, Romeo catches sight of Juliet and is smitten. He goes over to her, flirts with her (their dialogue consists mostly of an Elizabethan sonnet), and the two kiss. While all this is going on, Tybalt spots Romeo and is ready to draw his sword, but Capulet stops him, not wanting to have his party disrupted by violence. By the time the party ends, Romeo and Juliet are both convinced that they have found their true loves, even when they discover that they have fallen in love with one who is on the other side of the Veronese feud.

**Act II, scene 1** - The Chorus first speaks of the difficulties faced by Romeo and Juliet in pursuing their newfound love. Meanwhile, Benvolio and Mercutio are looking for Romeo, who has disappeared into a grove of trees. Mercutio jokes about conjuring him up in the name of Rosaline, not realizing that Romeo's affections have found a new mistress.

**Act II, scene 2** - Romeo is hanging around outside Juliet's house, and she appears on the balcony. As he tries to get up enough courage to speak to her, she breathes out his name. He listens to her words, then responds, and the two pledge their love to one another. The Nurse calls Juliet to come to bed, but the two young lovers make arrangements to meet the following day to get married.

**Act II, scene 3** - Early the next morning, Friar Laurence is gathering herbs and commenting on the fact that the same ones, used in different ways and in different quantities, can either heal or kill. Romeo enters, and Friar Laurence discerns that he has been awake all night. He asks the Friar to marry him and Juliet that very day, but Friar Laurence is confused at his sudden change of affections away from Rosaline. He advises caution, though he sees the potential for mending the rift between the two families.

**Act II, scene 4** - Mercutio and Benvolio are still searching for Romeo, and they find him in much better spirits. The three banter for a while, and then the Nurse arrives with a message for Romeo. Benvolio and Mercutio treat her rudely. After they leave, she tells Romeo that Juliet awaits his word, and he tells her to come to Friar Laurence's cell that afternoon so that they can be married. The Nurse is thrilled.

**Act II, scene 5** - Juliet is fretting as she waits for the Nurse to return. When the Nurse arrives, she teases Juliet by stalling as long as possible before delivering her message. Juliet is told to go to Friar Laurence's cell that afternoon. The Nurse, meanwhile, will arrange for a ladder to be brought so that Romeo can climb into Juliet's bedroom that night.

**Act II, scene 6** - The two young lovers come to Friar Laurence's cell and are married.

**Act III, scene 1** - Benvolio and Mercutio are arguing about who has the hottest temper for a fight when the Capulets arrive. Tybalt is looking for Romeo, and when Romeo enters, Tybalt challenges him. Romeo, however, refuses to take the bait, professing his love for Tybalt and all Capulets. Mercutio cannot let such meekness pass and draws his sword on Tybalt. When Romeo tries to break up the fight, Tybalt stabs Mercutio under Romeo's arm, then flees as Mercutio dies. When Tybalt returns, Romeo engages him in combat and kills him, then flees. When the Prince comes on the scene, Benvolio tells him what happened and he decrees Romeo's banishment.

**Act III, scene 2** - Juliet, in her bedroom, can hardly wait for the night to come so she can be with Romeo. The Nurse comes in, crying loudly about a horrible death, and Juliet thinks she is talking about Romeo. When the Nurse finally gets the story straight and tells her that Tybalt is dead, having been slain by Romeo, and that Romeo has been banished, she is more upset about Romeo's banishment than about Tybalt's death. The Nurse promises to fetch Romeo, who is hiding at Friar Laurence's cell.

**Act III, scene 3** - Friar Laurence comes to Romeo in his cell and tells him the Prince's verdict - banishment. Romeo is ready to kill himself, but Friar Laurence tries to talk some sense into him. The Nurse then arrives and reports that Juliet is in the same miserable state as Romeo. Friar Laurence advises Romeo to go to his bride, but warns that he must be sure to leave before the morning watch is set and flee to Mantua. While he waits there, Friar Laurence will try to calm things down and get the Prince's edict reversed, meanwhile sending messages by the hand of his friend Friar John.

**Act III, scene 4** - Juliet remains in her room, but her parents think she does this because she is mourning the death of Tybalt. Paris has renewed his request for her hand in marriage, and Capulet this time agrees without Juliet's consent. He tells Lady Capulet to go to Juliet's room and inform her of his decision - that she and Paris are to wed in three days' time.

**Act III, scene 5** - As morning breaks, Romeo is about to leave Juliet's room. They struggle to part, but realize they must. The Nurse comes in and warns Juliet that her mother is on the way to her bedroom; at this point, Romeo leaves. Lady Capulet enters, and Juliet feigns mourning for the death of Tybalt. Lady Capulet then tries to comfort Juliet by telling her that she intends to

arrange for Romeo to be poisoned in Mantua. She then tells her daughter that she is to marry Paris three days hence. Juliet flatly refuses, saying that she would sooner marry the murderer Romeo himself than marry Paris so soon after her cousin's death. Capulet loses his temper and tells Juliet that she will do what he says or he will never see her again. After her parents storm out of the room, Juliet asks the Nurse for advice, but she can do no better than to tell her to marry Paris, since she will never see Romeo again. Juliet, determined to take matters into her own hands, tells the Nurse that she is going to Friar Laurence's cell to confess her sins.

**Act IV, scene 1** - When Juliet arrives at Friar Laurence's cell, she finds that Paris is already there making arrangements for their marriage. After he leaves, Juliet tells Friar Laurence that if he has no remedy for her dilemma, she will kill herself. He tells her to go home, look happy, consent to marry Paris, then on Wednesday night, the night before the wedding, to take a drug he gives her. This drug will counterfeit death for forty-two hours, after which she will wake up healthy and refreshed. Meanwhile, her parents will think her dead and bury her in the family mausoleum. Friar Laurence will send word to Romeo, and the two of them will be waiting when she revives so Romeo can carry her off to Mantua.

**Act IV, scene 2** - The Capulet house is a whirlwind of preparation for the coming wedding. Juliet returns from Friar Laurence's cell seemingly repentant and ready to obey her father. He is so pleased that he decides to move the wedding up a day, despite Lady Capulet's pleas that she lacks adequate time for preparation.

**Act IV, scene 3** - As Juliet prepares to take the potion, she entertains all kinds of fears. What if it doesn't work? Then she will kill her self with her dagger. What if Friar Laurence gave her a real poison to prevent the shame of bigamy? But Friar Laurence is a good and holy man. What if she wakes before Romeo arrives to rescue her and suffocates in the tomb, or goes mad because of the horror of her environment? She finally puts aside all her fears and drinks the potion.

**Act IV, scene 4** - Preparations for the wedding are in full swing even before the sun comes up.

**Act IV, scene 5** - The Nurse goes to wake Juliet up and finds her dead. General weeping and wailing ensue. Friar Laurence tries to console the Capulets by reminding them that Juliet is in heaven, and therefore better off than she would be on earth. Preparations are then made for her funeral.

**Act V, scene 1** - Romeo awakes from a dream in which Juliet found him dead and awakened him with a kiss. Balthasar then arrives and tells Romeo that Juliet is dead. Romeo, grief-stricken, buys a deadly poison from the apothecary, intending to go to Juliet's tomb and use it on himself.

**Act V, scene 2** - Friar John, entrusted with delivering Friar Laurence's letter to Romeo, is detained because he had been ministering to those who had the plague, and the letter is never delivered. Friar Laurence calls for a crowbar, knowing that he must free Juliet immediately, since she will wake in three hours. His intention is to keep her in his cell until Romeo can be summoned.

**Act V, scene 3** - Paris has come to leave flowers at Juliet's grave, but hears someone coming and hides. Romeo arrives, intending to pry open the door of the mausoleum and join his beloved Juliet. He sends Balthasar away with a letter for his father explaining his coming suicide, but Balthasar remains behind to see what is to happen. Romeo opens the tomb and Paris steps out from hiding to apprehend him. They fight, and Romeo kills Paris. He then goes into the tomb and speaks his last words to Juliet, kissing her cold lips before drinking the potion sold to him by the apothecary. He then dies, right before Friar Laurence arrives on the scene. He finds Paris and Romeo dead; then Juliet wakes up. Friar Laurence tries to get her to come away and enter a convent, but she refuses and sends him off. She tries to drink from the poisoned cup, but finds it empty, kisses Romeo in case there remains poison on his lips, then finally stabs herself. Soon the Prince, the Capulets, and Montague arrive and view the carnage. Lady Montague has died of grief because of Romeo's exile. Friar Laurence then explains everything, and Montague and Capulet are finally reconciled, determined to honor the slain lovers.

### ESSAY QUESTIONS

Discuss the following in a five-paragraph essay:

1. *Romeo and Juliet* is one of Shakespeare's most popular plays, but critics have often ridiculed the plot because of the absurdities and coincidences upon which it depends. For instance, why doesn't Friar Laurence simply sneak Juliet out of Verona to Mantua rather than giving her a sleeping potion? Why does Shakespeare need an exceedingly timely attack of the plague to keep Friar Laurence's letter from being delivered by Friar John? In your opinion, do such issues detract from your enjoyment of the story? Why or why not?
2. Discuss the time frame within which William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* occurs. Careful reading leads to the conclusion that the entire play takes place over five days, from Sunday morning to the following Thursday. Is this credible? Why or why not? Does the compressed time frame detract from the ability of the audience to accept what they see before them, or does it somehow contribute to the themes Shakespeare is trying to bring out?
3. Discuss the view of love portrayed in William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. Does the playwright present an accurate picture of romantic love? Why or why not? Is he advocating or criticizing this kind of love? Support your conclusions with details from the play.
4. In William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, do the protagonists really love one another, or are they simply infatuated? How can you tell? What is the difference between the two?
5. Is there such a thing as love at first sight? In William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, the two young lovers meet at Capulet's ball. When Romeo first sets eyes on Juliet, he says, "Did my heart love till now? Forswear it, sight! / For I ne'er saw true beauty till this night." Can such instantaneous love exist? Why or why not? Be sure you define the idea of love carefully in giving your answer.

6. Evaluate the view of love found in William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* from a biblical perspective. What aspects of biblical love do the two young people portray? In what ways is their relationship far from the love advocated in Scripture. Be sure to use specifics, both from the play and from the Bible.
7. Several of William Shakespeare's plays teeter on the edge between comedy and tragedy at a critical point in the story, leaving the audience to wonder which way the play will go. For instance, *Romeo and Juliet* could easily have become a comedy up to the deaths of Mercutio and Tybalt, while *Much Ado About Nothing* could have turned into a tragedy after Claudio's false accusation and rejection of Hero. Yet, in both cases, Shakespeare tips his hand, with the Prologue of the former and the title of the latter. Why do you think he does this? Discuss Shakespeare's possible reasons for letting the audience in on the secret the way he does.
8. Compare and contrast the views of love found in William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Consider the views of love held by the characters as well as the incidents that help communicate the leading thematic elements of the plays. Does the fact that one is a tragedy and the other a comedy affect the views of love presented in them? Why or why not?
9. William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* was written about a year after *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Discuss the similarities between the two plays. Consider themes, language, imagery, characters, and plot devices. To what extent is the Mechanicals' skit in the earlier play a parody of the main story of the tragedy?
10. Discuss the use of comic relief in William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. Consider the nature of the comedy, the characters who provide it, and the placement of the comic scenes within the play. How do these scenes contribute to what Shakespeare is trying to accomplish in this play?
11. Do you consider William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* to be a real tragedy? Why or why not? In your answer, be sure to define what you mean by a tragedy and use specifics from the play to support your conclusion.
12. Discuss the role of fate in William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. At one point Romeo describes himself as "fortune's fool." To what extent is the plot driven by the choices made by the characters and to what extent are they the victims of things beyond their control? What might Shakespeare be saying by the interrelation of determinism and free will in the narrative?
13. Choose one of the protagonists in William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. Do you consider the person you have chosen to be an admirable character? Why or why not? Be sure to incorporate Scripture in your evaluation of the character of the person you have chosen.

14. A good tragedy always has a credible villain. Who (or what) is the villain in William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*? Why do you think so? Does your answer indicate something about the effectiveness of the story as a tragedy?
15. In William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, Friar Laurence advises Romeo to move slowly with regard to his love for Juliet: "Wisely and slow. They stumble that run fast." Discuss the extent to which the impetuosity of youth is one of the themes of the play. In what serious ways does "haste make waste" in this story?
16. Discuss the use of foreshadowing in William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. Why does Shakespeare leave little hints throughout the play about what will occur later? How does foreshadowing help produce thematic unity? How does it affect the way the audience views the play? Be sure to cite specific examples from the script as you answer the question.
17. Discuss the concept of social justice found in William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. Is Escalus an effective ruler? Why or why not? Do his actions contribute to the eventual tragedy? What may one conclude about Shakespeare's view of a just ruler from the details of the narrative?
18. Evaluate the character of Juliet in William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. According to the script, she is thirteen years old. Is this believable? Does she speak and act like a young teenager? Remember that marriages typically occurred much earlier in Renaissance society than is the case today. Do cultural differences make the character less credible today than she would have been to Shakespeare's audience?
19. A *foil* is a character who brings out the traits of another by contrast. Major characters may serve as foils for one another, but often a minor character serves as a foil for the protagonist in order to help the audience see his qualities in bolder relief. Discuss the use of foils in William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. Choose two characters, one of whom is a foil for the other, and explain why they should be considered foils and what qualities the contrasts between the two serve to clarify.
20. Compare and contrast the characters of Mercutio and Tybalt in William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. Do the similarities between the two men advance Shakespeare's principal themes? How do they do this?
21. Discuss the view of parent-child relationships presented in William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. Are the Montagues and Capulets good parents? Why or why not? What about the parental surrogates such as the Nurse and Friar Laurence? What conclusions does Shakespeare wish us to reach concerning the kinds of behavior that constitute good parenting? Be sure to use specifics from the play to support your argument.

22. Imagine that Friar Laurence's scheme had worked and the two protagonists in William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* had escaped together to Mantua. Would their marriage have been a happy one? Why or why not? Use clues about their respective personalities found in the play to support your answer.
23. Discuss the character development found in William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. Concentrate on the two protagonists and consider the extent to which they change in the course of the narrative. In what ways do they change? Are these changes substantial or matters of surface behavior? Are such changes credible within the span of four days?
24. Sometimes a secondary character is so memorable that he threatens to take the spotlight from the protagonists. This is the case with Falstaff in the *Henry IV* plays, and some have suggested that the same tendency appears in William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. Evaluate the character of Mercutio in this light. One critic argued that Mercutio was such a powerful creation of the playwright that Shakespeare had to kill him off or else he would have dominated the play. What makes Mercutio such an attractive figure? Why is he important in the communication of the overall themes of the play?
25. William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* is a play of passion, not only in the central love story, but also in the prevalence of violence and death. In fact, the metaphors used to describe the different forms of passion often overlap. What does the play lead us to conclude about passion and its role in human life? Be sure to include both positive and negative examples in your overall evaluation. Can passion be beautiful without being destructive? Why or why not?
26. Discuss the role of youthful rebellion in William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. Against what authorities do the two young lovers rebel? Is their rebellion pictured as good or foolish? What might Shakespeare be saying about the conflict of the individual and society through this play? Is his perspective on the subject biblical? Why or why not?
27. William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* is largely a play about the nobility - all the main characters are from the upper class. Discuss the role played by the lower-class figures in the story - not only the Nurse and Friar Laurence, but also the servants, the musicians, and the Apothecary. How does their presence in the play provide a commentary on the actions and values of the main characters? Be specific.
28. In Shakespeare's *Henry IV* plays, Falstaff rejects the concept of honor because it too often leads to death. He argues that life is the ultimate good, and therefore honor has no meaning. In *Romeo and Juliet*, does Shakespeare present the same picture from a different angle? Does he see honor as leading only to death, or does he value it as a great social good? Support your answer with specifics from the play.
29. In William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, the character of Rosaline never appears on stage, yet she is crucial to our interpretation of Romeo's personality. Why does Shakespeare include her in the story? What does she tell us about Romeo? About the other characters' understanding or who Romeo is?

30. William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* has much to say about suicide. Not only do the protagonists commit suicide in the end, but they also threaten to do so repeatedly throughout the play. Given that suicide was considered sinful in Shakespeare's day, how might one explain the seemingly positive status it is given in the story? What about suicide causes the playwright to picture it as noble rather than cowardly or selfish? Use specifics from the play to support your argument.
31. Does William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* support or refute the idea that "love conquers all"? Choose a side and provide evidence from the play to back up your choice.
32. In William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, both the Nurse and Friar Laurence serve as counselors to the protagonists. Compare and contrast the two in that role and assess the value of their advice. Are Romeo and Juliet right to heed (or not heed) their counsel as the play progresses? Why or why not?
33. Analyze the uses of the imagery of light and darkness in William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. Note that the images are used in complex ways, often meaning different things at different times.
34. William Hazlitt, in his analysis of the characters in Shakespeare's plays, stated that "Romeo is Hamlet in love." Is this a fair comparison? What traits do the two young men have in common? In what ways are they significantly different?
35. Analyze the role played by ignorance in William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. To what extent is the plot driven by the ignorance of the characters - people acting on what they believe to be true, but is in fact false? Cite specific examples and discuss what this contributes to the development of the major themes of the play.
36. Exodus 20:5 speaks of God as "punishing the children for the sins of the fathers." In William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, the same thing seems to occur. Do the words in the Decalogue imply the sort of thing that happened to the protagonists in Shakespeare's play? Why or why not? How are the two the same, and how are they different?
37. I Timothy 6:10 says that "the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil." How does William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* illustrate this biblical truth? Find three specific incidents where the love of money causes mischief and relate these incidents to the major themes of the play.
38. Ephesians 4:26 says, "'In your anger do not sin': Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry." Discuss the ways in which William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* illustrates the importance of not holding grudges, but granting forgiveness instead. How do unforgiving attitudes, in fact, drive the entire plot and the conflicts that lead to such a tragic ending? Use specifics from the play in answering the question.

39. What would you consider the greatest source of beauty in William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, the characters of the protagonists or their language? Why do you think so? Build your argument using specific examples, and be sure to explain why you reject the other alternative.
40. William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* contains many variations in tone. Choose three different passages from the play in which the playwright creates three different tones, describe the tone each passage involves, and describe how Shakespeare accomplishes it.
41. In William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, who is the stronger character, Romeo or Juliet? Why do you think so? Support your answer with incidents and quotations from the play.