Daily Bard

LESSON PLANS

Romeo and Juliet: three lesson plans

Three sixty-minute lessons that take a class from the Prologue's promise of death to the moment the comedy breaks, with a printable worksheet on the lovers' shared sonnet.



LEVEL
Ages 14-18 (GCSE, A-level, AP Lit, IB); adaptable for first-year seminars

SEQUENCE
3 lessons of 60 minutes

FOCUS
Fate and the feud, the language of love, Act 3 Scene 1 as turning point

YOU WILL NEED
Copies of the play, the worksheet below, highlighters, mini whiteboards or paper

Overview

This sequence teaches three passages that between them carry the play's argument: the Prologue and opening brawl, the lovers' first meeting, and the deaths of Mercutio and Tybalt. It works best once students know the outline of the story; the act summaries in the Romeo and Juliet study guide are enough.

- Students will be able to explain how the Prologue shapes an audience's response to everything that follows.
- Students will be able to analyse how sonnet form and religious imagery present the lovers' meeting.
- Students will be able to evaluate how far Act 3, Scene 1 makes the tragedy a matter of choice.
- Students will be able to write an analytical paragraph that moves from a quotation to method, effect and idea.

Assessment focus. The lessons practise the three things every literature course rewards: a clear, supported argument (the AO1 idea), analysis of language, form and structure (AO2), and context used to explain meaning (AO3). Lesson 3 adds competing interpretations for older students. The assessment map sets out these emphases in general terms.

Passages and background reading

Each lesson is built on one short passage. The pages listed beside it give the teacher, and students who want to go further, the key quotations and the analysis behind the lesson.

- **Lesson 1:** The Prologue and Act 1, Scene 1. Read with Romeo and Juliet quotes about fate and quotes about conflict.
- **Lesson 2:** Act 1, Scene 5. Read with quotes about love and the character studies of Romeo and Juliet.
- **Lesson 3:** Act 3, Scene 1. Read with the character study of Mercutio.

The lessons at a glance

LESSON	TITLE	KEY QUESTION
1	Two households and a death foretold	Why does Shakespeare tell us the ending before the play begins?
2	A sonnet for two voices	How does Shakespeare make the lovers' first conversation feel different from everything Romeo has said before?
3	The moment the comedy breaks	Is Romeo "Fortune's fool", or does he choose what happens in Act 3, Scene 1?

LESSON 1

Two households and a death foretold

Key question: Why does Shakespeare tell us the ending before the play begins?

OBJECTIVES

- Identify what the Prologue reveals and what it withholds.
- Analyse how the opening brawl shows the feud working at every social level.
- Explain the effect of dramatic irony on an audience.

TIME	ACTIVITY	WHY
0-8 min	**Starter.** Display only "A pair of star-crossed lovers take their life". Pairs list everything this one line tells us and one question it raises. Draw out the double meaning of "take their life".	Starts with close attention to a single line and activates prior knowledge.
8-20 min	**Teaching input.** Read the Prologue aloud twice. Students number the lines and mark the rhyme scheme, discovering it is a sonnet. Define dramatic irony. Ask: why use a love poem's form to announce deaths?	Establishes form as a carrier of meaning from the first minute of the play.
20-35 min	**Main task 1.** In groups of five, read Act 1, Scene 1 from Sampson's entrance to the Prince's exit. Each group builds a "ladder of escalation": servants, Benvolio, Tybalt, the fathers, the Prince, with one quotation for each rung.	Shows the feud as a system that draws in everyone, not a private quarrel.
35-47 min	**Main task 2.** Compare Benvolio and Tybalt. Students annotate "What, drawn and talk of peace? I hate the word": what does Tybalt rank alongside hell? What does the list reveal about him?	Practises word-level analysis on a short, memorable quotation.
47-55 min	**Discussion.** "Nobody tells us what the grudge is about. Is that a weakness or the point?" Use the stem: "By leaving the cause unnamed, Shakespeare suggests ..."	Moves from observation to interpretation and rehearses an argument orally.
55-60 min	**Plenary.** Exit ticket: one sentence answering the key question, using the term "dramatic irony".	Checks the lesson's central concept.

Differentiation

- **Support:** give the escalation ladder with the speakers already filled in and quotations to match to them.
- **Core:** complete the ladder independently and explain the choice of one quotation.
- **Stretch:** consider how the bawdy jokes of the first lines connect violence with ideas of masculinity.

Assessment and homework

Exit tickets show whether students can explain dramatic irony as an effect on the audience and not merely define it. Homework: learn the first four lines of the Prologue by heart and write three sentences on one word in them. As a low-stakes reading habit alongside the unit, students with an iPhone or iPad might read the day's page in Daily Bard, which pairs one verified Shakespeare passage with a plain-English reading.

Your notes

Timings that ran over, groupings, what to change next time.

LESSON 2

A sonnet for two voices

Key question: How does Shakespeare make the lovers' first conversation feel different from everything Romeo has said before?

OBJECTIVES

- Recognise the sonnet embedded in Act 1, Scene 5 and explain how the lovers share it.
- Analyse the extended religious metaphor of pilgrim and saint.
- Compare Romeo's language about Rosaline with his language to Juliet.

TIME	ACTIVITY	WHY
0-7 min	**Starter.** Display Romeo on Rosaline: "O brawling love, O loving hate" and "Feather of lead, bright smoke, cold fire, sick health". Students name the device (oxymoron) and decide: does this sound like love, or like someone performing love?	Provides the baseline against which the new language will be measured.
7-17 min	**Teaching input.** Explain the Petrarchan lover in three bullet points. Hand out the worksheet and read the passage with two volunteers. Students mark the rhyme scheme and find where the fourteen lines end.	Gives the context needed and lets students discover the form.
17-35 min	**Main task 1.** Pairs complete worksheet questions 1 to 6, highlighting religious words in one colour and words for the body in another.	Makes the pattern of sacred and physical language visible on the page.
35-45 min	**Discussion.** Who is in control of this conversation? Students vote line by line with a show of hands, then discuss question 7. Stem: "Juliet does not simply accept Romeo's metaphor; she ..."	Draws attention to Juliet's wit and to dialogue as a contest of equals.
45-57 min	**Main task 2.** Individual writing: the worksheet task, in silence.	Converts discussion into independent analytical prose.
57-60 min	**Plenary.** Students underline their best analytical sentence; three are read aloud.	Models success and gives quick feedback.

Differentiation

- **Support:** provide a glossary (profane, palmer, mannerly) and the opening sentence of the paragraph.
- **Core:** answer all questions and write the paragraph against the success criteria.
- **Stretch:** read on to "You kiss by th' book" and consider what Juliet's remark implies about Romeo's wooing.

Assessment and homework

Mark the paragraph against the worksheet's success criteria; the key indicator is whether the student comments on the shared form and not only on individual words. Homework: read the essay on **"But soft, what light"** and list three images of light from Act 2, Scene 2.

Your notes

Timings that ran over, groupings, what to change next time.

LESSON 3

The moment the comedy breaks

Key question: Is Romeo "Fortune's fool", or does he choose what happens in Act 3, Scene 1?

OBJECTIVES

- Track the decisions that lead to two deaths in a single scene.
- Analyse how Mercutio's language changes the tone of the play.
- Evaluate competing explanations of the tragedy: fate, character and society.

TIME	ACTIVITY	WHY
0-6 min	**Starter.** On mini whiteboards: who is most to blame for Mercutio's death, Tybalt, Romeo or Mercutio himself? Hold up answers and keep them for the plenary.	Establishes a position that the lesson will test.
6-22 min	**Main task 1.** Read Act 3, Scene 1 from Tybalt's entrance to Romeo's exit, cast around the room. At each of four pause points (Romeo refuses; Mercutio draws; Romeo steps between; Tybalt returns) students record who decides what, and what else they could have done.	Breaks a fast scene into a chain of choices.
22-34 min	**Teaching input and analysis.** Look closely at Mercutio's dying speech. Why prose? What is the effect of the pun in "you shall find me a grave man"? Why does he repeat "A plague o' both your houses!"?	Links form and wordplay to the scene's shift in tone.
34-46 min	**Main task 2.** Compare Romeo's two voices: "Villain am I none" and "fire-eyed fury be my conduct now". Pairs write two sentences on how the second line shows Romeo adopting the feud's values.	Evidence for the "character" reading, set against Romeo's own claim.
46-56 min	**Discussion.** Four corners of the room: fate, Romeo's character, the feud, bad luck. Students stand where they think the cause lies and defend it with one quotation. Older students add how a director could tilt the scene.	Rehearses evaluation and introduces the idea of interpretation.
56-60 min	**Plenary.** Return to the whiteboards. Who has changed their mind, and which line changed it?	Makes learning visible as a change of view grounded in the text.

Differentiation

- **Support:** supply the four pause points on a table with the speaker and line reference completed.
- **Core:** complete the decision chain and defend one corner with evidence.
- **Stretch:** weigh "Thy beauty hath made me effeminate": what does Romeo think love has done to him, and does the play agree?

Assessment and homework

Listen for students who can hold two causes together, for example "chance matters because Romeo is rash". Homework: a timed paragraph, "How does Shakespeare make Act 3, Scene 1 a turning point?", planned with the essay planner.

Your notes

Timings that ran over, groupings, what to change next time.

Student worksheet: The shared sonnet

Name _____ Class _____ Date _____

Romeo, in a mask at the Capulet feast, takes Juliet's hand. These are the first words they speak to each other.

> ROMEO If I profane with my unworthiest hand
> This holy shrine, the gentle sin is this:
> My lips, two blushing pilgrims, ready stand
> To smooth that rough touch with a tender kiss.
> JULIET Good pilgrim, you do wrong your hand too much,
> Which mannerly devotion shows in this;
> For saints have hands that pilgrims' hands do touch,
> And palm to palm is holy palmers' kiss.
> ROMEO Have not saints lips, and holy palmers too?
> JULIET Ay, pilgrim, lips that they must use in prayer.
> ROMEO O then, dear saint, let lips do what hands do.
> They pray: grant thou, lest faith turn to despair.
> JULIET Saints do not move, though grant for prayers' sake.
> ROMEO Then move not while my prayer's effect I take.
>
> ROMEO AND JULIET · ACT 1, SCENE 5 · 1.5.104-117

1. What does Romeo compare Juliet's hand to, and what does he compare his own lips to?

2. In her first four lines, does Juliet accept or refuse the kiss Romeo offers? What does she offer instead?

3. Label the rhyme scheme of the fourteen lines. What kind of poem is this?

4. Highlight every religious word. What does this imagery suggest about how the lovers see their feelings?

5. A “palmer” is a pilgrim. Explain the pun in “palm to palm is holy palmers’ kiss”.

6. How many lines does each speaker have in each section of the poem? What happens to the length of the speeches as the passage goes on, and what is the effect?

7. Who do you think controls this conversation? Support your view with two details.

8. Some readers find the religious language reverent; others find it daring, even blasphemous. Which reading do you find more convincing, and why?

Name _____ Class _____ Date _____

Writing task

Write one paragraph (about 120 words) answering: how does Shakespeare present the first meeting of Romeo and Juliet as something special?

- Begin with a clear point that answers the question.
- Embed at least two short quotations.
- Name one feature of form (the shared sonnet) and one of language (the religious metaphor).
- Explain the effect on the audience, remembering what the Prologue has told them.

Continue on lined paper if you need more room.

Teacher notes and indicative answers

1. Her hand is a “holy shrine”; his lips are “two blushing pilgrims”. He casts himself as a worshipper.
2. She deflects it. She accepts the touch of hands as a pilgrim’s proper greeting, which keeps the game going while slowing him down.
3. Three alternately rhymed quatrains and a couplet (the second quatrain reuses the “this / kiss” rhyme): an English sonnet, shared between two speakers.
4. Shrine, sin, pilgrims, devotion, saints, palmers, prayer, faith, despair. Love is presented as sacred and absolute; it also sets this love apart from the bawdy talk elsewhere.
5. “Palm” is both the hand and the palm leaf carried by pilgrims, so hands pressed together are a pilgrim’s kiss.
6. Four lines each, then single lines exchanged, then a final couplet split between them. The quickening exchange enacts growing intimacy.
7. Either answer is creditable. Romeo initiates; Juliet redirects his metaphor twice and sets the terms on which the kiss happens.
8. Look for a supported judgement. Strong answers note that both effects can operate at once.

Model paragraph

Shakespeare presents the lovers’ meeting as special by giving them a sonnet to share. Romeo opens with a quatrain in which Juliet’s hand is a “holy shrine” and his lips are “two blushing pilgrims”, an extended religious metaphor that makes desire sound like worship. Crucially, Juliet replies in a matching quatrain and turns his image back on him: “palm to palm is holy palmers’ kiss”. Unlike the silent Rosaline, she is an equal partner in the poem, and the lines shorten into rapid exchange until a shared couplet ends in a kiss. For an audience who already know these are “star-crossed lovers”, the perfection of the form is poignant: harmony achieved in fourteen lines, in a house where it cannot last.

Extending the sequence

To build the sequence into a full unit, set the themes and critics sections of the **study guide** as reading, and use the **quotation sheet** for weekly retrieval practice. The essay on **“What’s in a name?”** makes a natural fourth lesson on Juliet’s reasoning, and the **close reading toolkit** gives students a routine for any unseen passage. For a comic treatment of the same plot, see the **A Midsummer Night’s Dream lesson plans**. As a starter on any day, you can also project **today’s Daily Bard page** and ask the class to paraphrase the passage before turning the leaf.



A page of Shakespeare, every day.

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