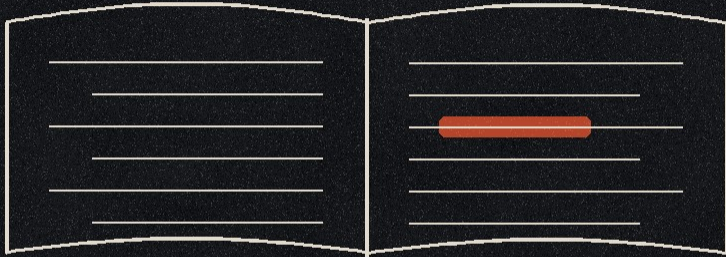




Shakespeare: Romeo and Juliet

Plot and context, characters, themes, and moving from the extract to the whole play

4 SUBTOPICS · 4 LESSONS OF ABOUT 60 MINUTES





Fate, or their own choices?

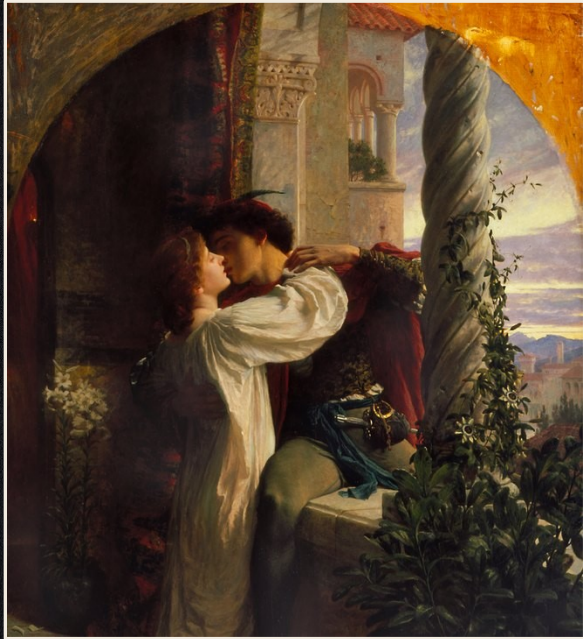


FIG 1 Frank Dicksee, Romeo and Juliet, 1884:
the balcony scene (public domain)

Before the play begins, the Chorus tells the audience how it ends:

“A pair of star-cross’d lovers take their life” (Prologue)

So we watch two teenagers fall in love, already knowing they will die.

Are they doomed by the stars, or do people make choices that kill them?



By the end of this section you can...

01

PLOT AND CONTEXT

Know what happens in each act, and the Elizabethan ideas behind it.

02

CHARACTERS

Track how Romeo and Juliet change, and what the others are for.

03

THEMES

Use key quotations on love, conflict, fate, family and time.

04

THE EXAM

Write about the extract, then the whole play, covering AO1, AO2, AO3 and AO4.



Paper 1, Section A: Shakespeare

THE QUESTION

One question on Romeo and Juliet: an extract is printed; write about it and the whole play.

THE MARKS

30 marks for the essay, plus 4 for spelling, punctuation and grammar (AO4).

NO BOOK

Closed book: quotations come from memory, so learn short ones.

SAME AS MACBETH

The method is the same one used for Macbeth: extract first, then the whole play.

A01

Your response: a clear argument with quotations

A02

Shakespeare's methods: language, form and structure

A03

Context: ideas and beliefs of the time

A04

Spelling, punctuation, grammar and vocabulary

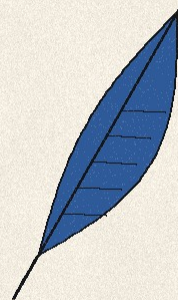
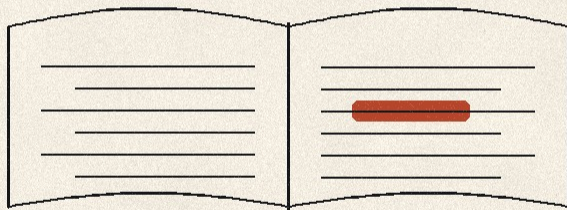


PART 1 OF 4

Plot and context

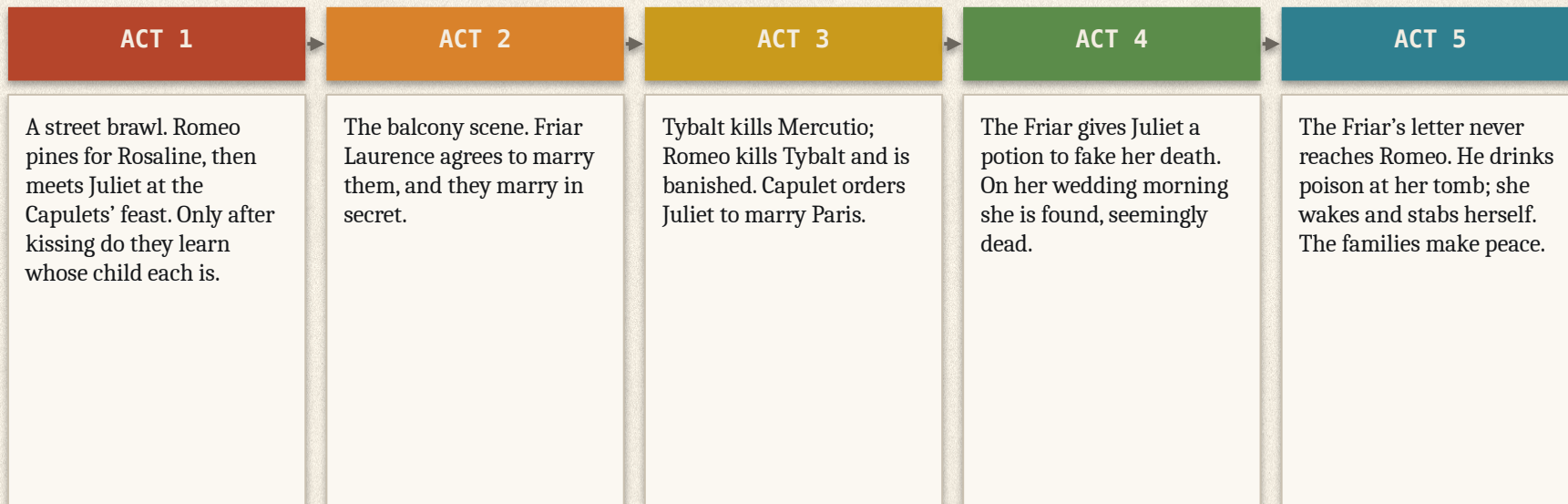
What happens, act by act, and what an Elizabethan audience believed.

04 PLOT AND CONTEXT





The play in five acts



Shape: comedy in Acts 1 and 2 (love, a wedding), then Mercutio's death in Act 3 turns it into tragedy.





Elizabethan context (A03)

WRITTEN

Around 1595, for an Elizabethan audience; the story is set in Verona, Italy.

SOURCE

An English poem by Arthur Brooke, The Tragical History of Romeus and Juliet (1562).

FATHERS

Daughters were expected to obey their fathers, who arranged marriages for land, money and status.

HONOUR

Family honour mattered; insults could lead to duels, even though fighting in the streets was against the law.

FATE AND FAITH

Many believed the stars shaped lives. Suicide was seen as a grave sin by the Church.





Context that earns marks

WEAK: BOLTED ON

In Elizabethan times fathers chose who their daughters married.
Juliet lived in a patriarchal society.

STRONG: WOVEN IN

When Capulet calls Juliet a “disobedient wretch” (3.5), Shakespeare shows a father’s total power over his daughter; an Elizabethan audience might expect obedience, yet the violence of his words invites sympathy for her.

The test: does the context explain a choice Shakespeare makes, or how an audience reacts to one moment? If not, cut it.

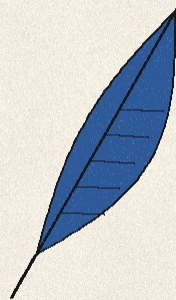
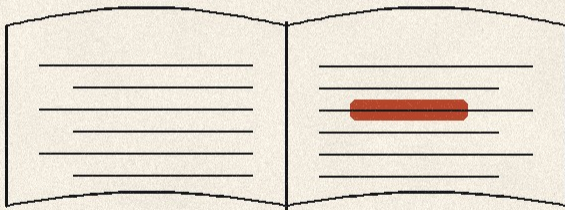


PART 2 OF 4

Characters

How the lovers change, and what the people around them are for.

05 CHARACTERS





Romeo

Impulsive, passionate, and quick to despair

LOVESICK

"O brawling love! O loving hate!" (1.1)

SMITTEN

"For I ne'er saw true beauty till this night" (1.5)

DEVOTED

"It is the east, and Juliet is the sun" (2.2)

TORN

"O sweet Juliet, / Thy beauty hath made me effeminate" (3.1)

FATE

"O, I am fortune's fool!" (3.1)

DEATH

"Thus with a kiss I die" (5.3)

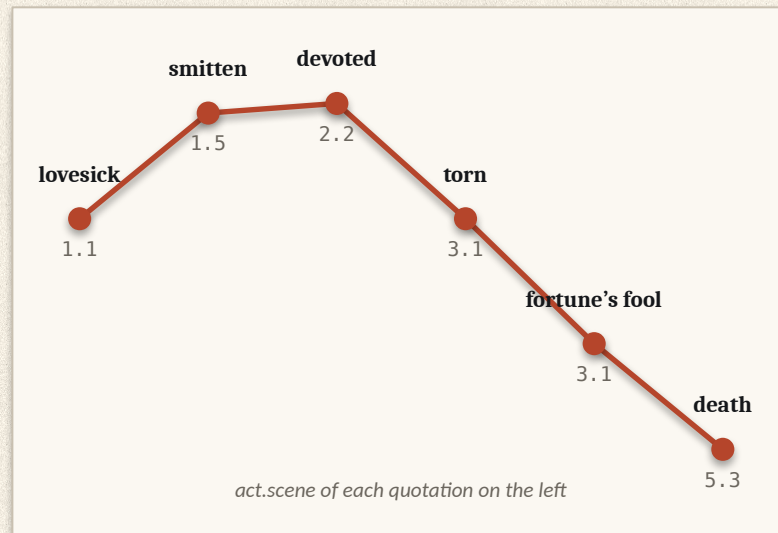


FIG 2 Romeo's highs and lows, act by act (drawn)



Juliet: from child to decisive woman

EARLY: DUTIFUL BUT THOUGHTFUL

“My only love sprung from my only hate” (1.5)

“It is too rash, too unadvis’d, too sudden” (2.2)

“My bounty is as boundless as the sea” (2.2)

LATER: DEFIANT AND DETERMINED

“Give me my Romeo” (3.2)

“Wilt thou be gone? It is not yet near day” (3.5)

“O happy dagger” (5.3)

The change: she is the one who warns that their love is too fast, yet she defies her father, the Nurse and the law to keep it.





Mercutio and Tybalt

MERCUTIO

Romeo's witty friend; neither Montague nor Capulet.

"Ask for me tomorrow, and you shall find me a grave man" (3.1)

"A plague o' both your houses" (3.1)

TYBALT

Juliet's cousin; quick to anger and proud of family honour.

"What, drawn, and talk of peace? I hate the word" (1.1)

He dies by Romeo's sword in Act 3 Scene 1.

The turning point: Mercutio's death in Act 3 Scene 1 turns the play from comedy to tragedy. Romeo kills Tybalt in revenge and is banished.



FIG 3 Frank Dicksee, The Death of Mercutio (public domain)





Friar Laurence, the Nurse and Lord Capulet

QUOTATION

“Wisely and slow; they stumble that run fast” (2.3)

FRIAR LAURENCE

WHAT IT SHOWS

Good advice he does not follow: his plans fail through haste.

“Go, girl, seek happy nights to happy days” (1.3)

THE NURSE

Earthy and affectionate; later she urges Juliet to marry Paris.

“My child is yet a stranger in the world” (1.2)

CAPULET (ACT 1)

At first a protective father who wants Juliet to wait.

“Hang thee young baggage, disobedient wretch!” (3.5)

CAPULET (ACT 3)

His love turns to fury when she disobeys.





A model paragraph, with its AOs

Shakespeare presents Romeo's love for Juliet as overwhelming and sudden. In the balcony scene he declares "Juliet is the sun": the metaphor makes her the centre of his world, giving light and life, and it replaces the tired, clichéd language he used for Rosaline. Yet an Elizabethan audience, many of whom believed the stars shaped human lives, would remember the Prologue's "star-cross'd" lovers, so even this joyful image of the heavens hints at the tragedy to come.

A01

clear argument

A02

method: a metaphor, explained

A03

context linked to this moment

A04

accurate, precise writing throughout

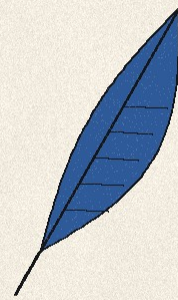
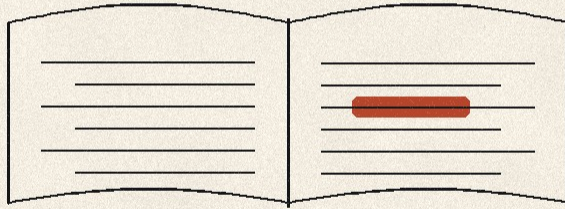




Themes

Love, conflict, fate, family, and time and haste: with the quotations to prove them.

06 THEMES





Love

QUOTATION

“Love is a smoke made with the fume of sighs” (1.1)

ROMEO (ABOUT ROSALINE)

WHAT IT SHOWS

Love as misery and mist: the clichés of courtly love.

“Good pilgrim, you do wrong your hand too much” (1.5)

JULIET

Their first words form a shared sonnet: love as holy and equal.

“My bounty is as boundless as the sea” (2.2)

JULIET

A simile of endless, generous love.

“These violent delights have violent ends” (2.6)

FRIAR LAURENCE

A warning that intense love burns out: foreshadowing.





Conflict and hate

QUOTATION

WHAT IT SHOWS

“Two households, both alike in dignity” (Prologue)

CHORUS (PROLOGUE)

The families are equal: the feud has no just side.

“What, drawn, and talk of peace? I hate the word” (1.1)

TYBALT

Hate as pride: he rejects peace itself.

“A plague o’ both your houses” (3.1)

MERCUTIO

A curse on the feud that killed him: it comes true.

“See what a scourge is laid upon your hate” (5.3)

PRINCE

The deaths are a punishment for the families’ hate.





Fate

QUOTATION

WHAT IT SHOWS

“A pair of star-cross’d lovers take their life” (Prologue)

CHORUS (PROLOGUE)

Doomed by the stars from the start: dramatic irony.

“Some consequence yet hanging in the stars” (1.4)

ROMEO

A premonition before he even meets Juliet.

“O, I am fortune’s fool!” (3.1)

ROMEO

He feels like a plaything of fate after killing Tybalt.

“Then I defy you, stars!” (5.1)

ROMEO

He tries to fight fate, and in doing so fulfils it.





Family and parents

QUOTATION

WHAT IT SHOWS

“My child is yet a stranger in the world” (1.2)

CAPULET

At first a caring father.

“Deny thy father and refuse thy name” (2.2)

JULIET

Love demands rejecting family identity.

“Hang thee young baggage, disobedient wretch!” (3.5)

CAPULET

Fatherly love becomes control and insult.

“Out, you green-sickness carrion! Out, you baggage!” (3.5)

CAPULET

Shocking insults that show patriarchal power.





Time and haste

QUOTATION

“It is too rash, too unadvis’d, too sudden” (2.2)

JULIET

WHAT IT SHOWS

She fears the speed of their love: a triple of warnings.

“Wisely and slow; they stumble that run fast” (2.3)

FRIAR LAURENCE

Advice the whole play ignores.

“Gallop apace, you fiery-footed steeds” (3.2)

JULIET

She urges time to hurry towards night and Romeo.

“my mind misgives” (1.4)

ROMEO

A sense that events are moving too fast to control.





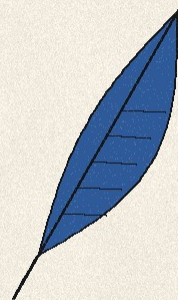
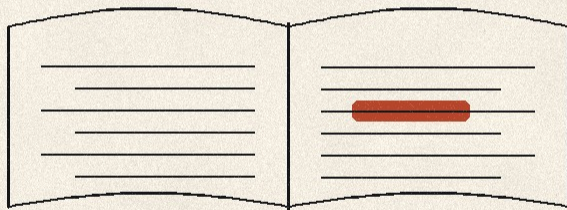
PART 4 OF 4

Extract to whole play

How to plan the exam answer, a worked plan, and timed practice.

07 FROM THE EXTRACT TO THE WHOLE PLAY

EX EXAM PRACTICE





Extract to whole play

The 50-minute answer

STARTING WITH	Begin with the extract: zoom in on words and methods.
THE WHOLE PLAY	Then move to other moments, before and after the extract.
LINK	Use the question's focus word in every paragraph.
AN ARC	Show change over the play: beginning, middle, end.
CONTEXT	Weave in one or two precise points; do not bolt them on.

5 MIN	Read the question; underline the focus word.
5 MIN	Annotate the extract: 3 or 4 short quotations.
5 MIN	Plan: 2 extract points, 2 whole-play points.
30 MIN	Write: extract first, then the rest of the play.
5 MIN	Check spelling and punctuation (AO4).

FIG 4 A suggested timing (about 50 minutes for this question)





A planned answer: the balcony scene

EXTRACT · ACT 2 SCENE 2 · ROMEO

*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,*

Question: Starting with this extract, explore how Shakespeare presents Romeo's love for Juliet.

EXTRACT 1

Light imagery: "Juliet is the sun". AO2: metaphor; she outshines all.

EXTRACT 2

"kill the envious moon": even his praise is violent, a hint of the play's violence. AO1.

WHOLE PLAY 1

"O brawling love! O loving hate!" (1.1): his clichés for Rosaline show how different this is.

WHOLE PLAY 2

"Thus with a kiss I die" (5.3): love ends in death. AO3: fate and the stars.





Fate, or their own choices?

FATE

The Prologue, Romeo's premonitions and the undelivered letter all suggest the lovers never had a chance.

THE FEUD AND THE ADULTS

The families' hate, Capulet's forced marriage and the Friar's risky plan push the lovers into danger.

THEIR OWN HASTE

Romeo kills Tybalt, and later drinks poison without waiting a moment longer.

A strong exam argument weighs these and then decides. The play can show fate at work through human choices: both, but in a reasoned way.





Common mistakes

✗ Retelling the story earns marks.

✓ Marks come from analysing methods and ideas.

✗ Only write about the extract.

✓ The question also asks about the play as a whole.

✗ It is only a love story.

✓ Hate, violence and family power are just as central.

✗ Juliet is passive and weak.

✓ She proposes marriage and defies her father.

✗ Wherefore means where.

✓ It means why: why are you a Montague?

✗ Spelling does not matter in Literature.

✓ AO4 gives 4 extra marks on this question.





Question 1: parents and children

ACT 3 SCENE 5 • JULIET AND CAPULET

JULIET.

Good father, I beseech you on my knees,
Hear me with patience but to speak a word.

CAPULET.

Hang thee young baggage, disobedient wretch!
I tell thee what, get thee to church a Thursday,
Or never after look me in the face.
Speak not, reply not, do not answer me.
My fingers itch. Wife, we scarce thought us blest
That God had lent us but this only child;
But now I see this one is one too much,
And that we have a curse in having her.
Out on her, hilding.

Starting with this extract, explore how Shakespeare presents the relationship between parents and children in *Romeo and Juliet*.

Write about:

- how Shakespeare presents the relationship in this extract
- how Shakespeare presents it in the play as a whole.

[30 marks] A04 [4 marks]

Allow about 50 minutes. Closed book.





Question 2: more practice titles

CONFLICT

Starting with the fight in Act 3 Scene 1, explore how Shakespeare presents conflict in Romeo and Juliet.

LOVE

Starting with the meeting at the feast (Act 1 Scene 5), explore how Shakespeare presents love.

JULIET

Starting with Act 3 Scene 2, explore how Shakespeare presents Juliet as a strong character.

FATE

Starting with Act 5 Scene 1, explore how Shakespeare presents ideas about fate.

Each: [30 marks] plus AO4 [4 marks]. Use your own copy of the play to find the extract.



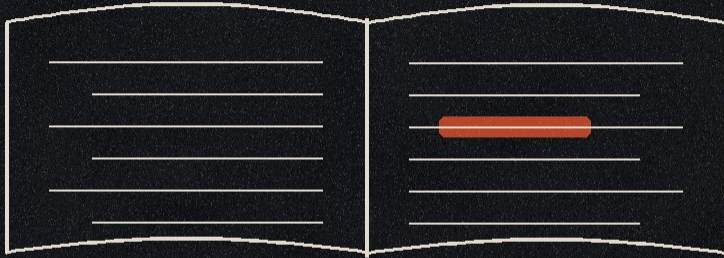
SECTION COMPLETE



Well done!

You can now tell the story of Romeo and Juliet with its context, track each main character, quote on five themes, and plan an answer from the extract to the whole play.

Short quotations, real analysis, and the whole play.





Images used in this lesson

Romeo and Juliet (1884) · Frank Bernard Dicksee · Public domain

The Death of Mercutio · Frank Bernard Dicksee · Public domain