*Romeo and Juliet* - SCENE-BY-SCENE

Here is a more detailed look at what happens in each scene of Romeo and Juliet, to help you look at the structure of the play and interrogate it.

As you look at each act we’ve included some things to notice. These are important character developments, or key questions that an acting company might ask when they first go through the play together at the start of rehearsal. If you work through these as you go, they will help you to make sense of the play as well as starting to look at the text itself. It’s a good idea to have a copy of the play nearby!

[ACT 1](https://www.rsc.org.uk/shakespeare-learning-zone/romeo-and-juliet/story/scene-by-scene)

ACT 1 SCENE 1

The play opens with two servants from the house of Capulet talking about their hatred of the Montagues. They meet two servants from the house of Montague and a fight breaks out. Benvolio tries to stop the fight but when Tybalt arrives things get worse. With his line 'As I hate hell, all Montagues, and thee: / Have at thee, coward!' the fight escalates until there is a huge street brawl involving both Lord Montague and Lord Capulet. The fight is eventually stopped when the Prince stops everyone saying 'On pain of torture, from those bloody hands / Throw your mistemper'd weapons to the ground'. He is so angry he proclaims if there is another fight Montague and Capulet shall pay the ‘forfeit’ for it with their lives. Everyone departs leaving Lord and Lady Montague talking to Benvolio about their son Romeo, who has been missing all day. Benvolio promises to find out where Romeo has been and what’s upsetting him. Romeo reveals to Benvolio that he is in love with Rosaline but she doesn’t love him in return.

**WHAT DO WE LEARN?**

**MORE INFO**

* The Montagues and Capulets are rival families who regularly fight each other.
* The Prince warns Lord Capulet and Lord Montague that if there is another fight they shall pay for it with their lives.
* Romeo is in love with Rosaline.

ACT 1 SCENE 2

Paris visits Lord Capulet to ask for Juliet’s hand in marriage. Lord Capulet thinks Juliet is too young to marry saying to Paris ‘Let two more summers wither in their pride, / Ere we may think her ripe to be a bride’. However, he later encourages Paris to woo her at a ball at his house. Lord Capulet sends a messenger to invite other guests to the ball. The messenger bumps into Romeo and Benvolio revealing to them the ball is taking place and that Rosaline is one of the guests. Benvolio suggests they go to the ball so Romeo can find someone else to fall in love with. Romeo agrees to go – not to find a new love but to prove that Rosaline is the prettiest saying ‘I'll go along, no such sight to be shown, / But to rejoice in splendor of mine own.’

**WHAT DO WE LEARN?**

**MORE INFO**

* + - Paris wants to marry Juliet but Lord Capulet wants to wait two years.
    - There is going to be a huge ball at the Capulets' house.
    - Romeo and Benvolio plan to go to the ball even though they are not invited.

ACT 1 SCENE 3

Lady Capulet is searching for her daughter who is getting ready for the ball. Together with the Nurseshe tries to convince Juliet that Paris is a good match in marriage, praising him and saying ‘Verona's summer hath not such a flower’. The Nurse talks about a memory she has of Juliet when she was a little girl saying ‘Thou wast the prettiest babe that e'er I nursed: / And I might live to see thee married once, / I have my wish.’ and is also keen for Juliet to marry Paris and to be happy.

**WHAT DO WE LEARN?**

**MORE INFO**

* + - Juliet is only thirteen years old.
    - The Nurse has cared for Juliet since she was a baby and is very affectionate towards her.
    - Lady Capulet and the Nurse both think Paris is a good match for Juliet.

ACT 1 SCENE 4

Romeo, Mercutio and Benvolio are on their way to the ball. Romeo is having second thoughts about attending because he is feeling depressed about Rosaline, telling the others ‘I have a soul of lead / So stakes me to the ground I cannot move’. He then tells them that he had an ominous dream. Mercutio tries to convince Romeo that dreams are meaningless in his famous ‘Queen Mab’ speech telling Romeo ‘True, I talk of dreams, / Which is as thin of substance as the air’. Eventually Romeo agrees to go to the ball.

**WHAT DO WE LEARN?**

**MORE INFO**

* + - Romeo might have had a premonition and doesn’t want to go to the ball.
    - Mercutio thinks Romeo’s dreams are meaningless.

ACT 1 SCENE 5

The servants in the Capulet household are getting ready for the ball before Capulet welcomes all the guests. Tybalt sees Romeo and is offended by his presence at the ball claiming ‘I'll not endure him’ and viewing his presence as an insult. Lord Capulet stops him from confronting Romeo which makes Tybalt feel even angrier and he vows to seek revenge. Meanwhile, Romeo meets Juliet at the ball and they kiss, with Juliet saying ‘You kiss by the book’. They then both find out who the other is and are separated, with Juliet remarking ‘My only love sprung from my only hate! / Too early seen unknown, and known too late!’

**WHAT DO WE LEARN?**

**MORE INFO**

* Lord Capulet allows Romeo to stay at his ball, showing a much more relaxed attitude to the 'grudge' than his nephew Tybalt, who vows revenge on Romeo.
* Romeo and Juliet meet and share an instant connection. Their lines together in this scene form a sonnet.
* Romeo and Juliet both learn who the other one is.

THINGS TO NOTICE IN ACT 1

* Notice the setup of the opening scene and the conflict between the two households mentioned in the prologue. What could have been the cause of their ‘ancient grudge’? Why do you think Shakespeare includes the prologue? Which characters feel most strongly about the ‘feud’?
* Look out for the references to fate and premonitions in the opening scenes. In scene four, Romeo says ‘for my mind misgives some consequence yet hanging in the stars… of untimely death’. What has Romeo dreamt about and why do you think Shakespeare has given Romeo these lines?
* Take note of Tybalt’s reaction to seeing Romeo at the ball. He seems more offended by Romeo being there than Lord Capulet. Why might this be? What does this tell us about Tybalt’s character? What does it tell us about the younger generation in the play?
* Act 1 is important because it sets up the characters – revealing their allegiances. Romeo and Juliet also have a very private first meeting, in a public space. What kind of language do Romeo and Juliet use when they meet? What are your impressions of Romeo and his attitude towards love? What do we discover about who is on which side in 'feud'?

[ACT 2](https://www.rsc.org.uk/shakespeare-learning-zone/romeo-and-juliet/story/scene-by-scene)

ACT 2 SCENE 1

Romeo climbs over the orchard wall into the Capulets' garden. Mercutio and Benvolio try to find him but soon give up when he doesn’t answer saying ‘Go, then; for 'tis in vain / To seek him here that means not to be found’.

**WHAT DO WE LEARN?**

**MORE INFO**

* Mercutio wants Romeo to leave.
* Romeo is taking a big risk going into the Capulet orchard and climbing their walls. He could be killed for being there.
* Romeo still wants to see Juliet, even though he now knows she is a Capulet.

ACT 2 SCENE 2

Juliet appears at her window, sometimes a balcony, and Romeo watches her from below saying, ’But, soft! what light through yonder window breaks? / It is the east, and Juliet is the sun’. Romeo listens as she talks about him and eventually speaks to her. They tell each other that they love each other with Juliet asking him for ‘The exchange of thy love's faithful vow for mine’. Whilst they are talking the Nurse calls Juliet from inside which hurries their decision to meet the next day and get married with Juliet saying ‘If that thy bent of love be honourable, / Thy purpose marriage, send me word to-morrow’.

**[PLAY ACT 2 SCENE 2](https://www.rsc.org.uk/shakespeare-learning-zone/romeo-and-juliet/story/scene-by-scene)**

Juliet appears at her window, sometimes a balcony, and Romeo watches her from below saying, ’But, soft! what light through yonder window breaks? / It is the east, and Juliet is the sun’. Romeo listens as she talks about him and eventually speaks to her. They tell each other that they love each other with Juliet asking him for ‘The exchange of thy love's faithful vow for mine’. Whilst they are talking the Nurse calls Juliet from inside which hurries their decision to meet the next day and get married with Juliet saying ‘If that thy bent of love be honourable, / Thy purpose marriage, send me word to-morrow’.

**WHAT DO WE LEARN?**

**MORE INFO**

* Juliet and Romeo are in love and are willing to set aside family loyalty to be together.
* Juliet pushes Romeo to make vows and promise to her that she can trust him.
* They want to see each other again and to get married.

ACT 2 SCENE 3

Friar Laurence is collecting herbs and plants that he uses for making medicines and potions saying ‘I must up-fill this osier cage of ours / With baleful weeds and precious-juiced flowers’. Romeo joins him and tells him he wants to marry Juliet. At first, Friar Laurence is dismissive of Romeo’s request as it was only yesterday that he was talking about his love for Rosaline asking ‘Is Rosaline, whom thou didst love so dear, / So soon forsaken?’. However, he agrees, believing the marriage might help end the feud between the two families.

**WHAT DO WE LEARN?**

**MORE INFO**

* Friar Laurence has an understanding of plants and herbs.
* Friar Laurence has counselled Romeo against his infatuation of Rosaline and thinks his love for Juliet is the same.
* Friar Laurence believes the marriage of Romeo and Juliet could end the family feud.

ACT 2 SCENE 4

Mercutio and Benvolio are still looking for Romeo, who has not yet returned home. They reveal that Tybalt has challenged Romeo to a duel. Mercutio tells Benvolio that Tybalt is a very good swordsman claiming ‘O, he is the courageous captain of compliments’. Romeo arrives and is in a very good mood and the three friends tease each other saying to Romeo ‘Why, is not this better now than groaning for love? Now art thou sociable, now art thou Romeo’. The Nurse enters and asks to speak to Romeo. He tells her his intentions are true, saying ‘Nurse, commend me to thy lady and mistress’, and that Juliet should visit Friar Laurence that afternoon so they can marry.

**WHAT DO WE LEARN?**

**MORE INFO**

* Tybalt is a threat to Romeo. He is called a 'captain of compliments', referring to his studied ability with a sword. Other characters also call him the 'Prince of Cats' in the play. This is a reference to another fictional character, with a similar name, who was a quick tempered fighter.
* Romeo, Mercutio and Benvolio are very good friends who know each other very well.
* The Nurse does not want Juliet to be hurt by Romeo but is willing to help them.

ACT 2 SCENE 5

Juliet is waiting for the Nurse to return with news of Romeo’s proposal declaring ‘The clock struck nine when I did send the nurse; In half an hour she promised to return’. She is even more irritated by the Nurse’s reluctance to tell her the news when she comes back from meeting with Romeo. The Nurse tells Juliet to visit Friar Laurence where she’ll be married, remarking ‘Now comes the wanton blood up in your cheeks, / They'll be in scarlet straight at any news’

**WHAT DO WE LEARN?**

**MORE INFO**

* Juliet is very impatient while she waits for the Nurse’s news.
* The Nurse teases Juliet and deliberately holds back the news Juliet wants most.
* The Nurse and Juliet have a strong and warm relationship.

ACT 2 SCENE 6

Romeo and Juliet meet in secret at Friar Laurence’s cell with the Friar blessing them and saying ‘So smile the heavens upon this holy act’. They exit together to get married off stage as the Friar tells them to ‘Come, come with me, and we will make short work; / For, by your leaves, you shall not stay alone / Till holy church incorporate two in one.’

**WHAT DO WE LEARN?**

**MORE INFO**

* Romeo and Juliet are now married.
* Friar Laurence is their ally and the only person, apart from the Nurse, who knows they are married.

THINGS TO NOTICE IN ACT 2

* Look at the way Act 2 opens, carrying on from Act 1 as Romeo replies to Benvolio. Why do you think this has been split? What does this do dramatically?
* Notice the way in which Romeo chases after Juliet in Scene 1, climbing the orchard wall. Why do you think he does this instead of waiting to meet her at another time? The impatience of the younger characters throughout Act 2 is a key factor in things going wrong. Romeo is impatient with the Friar, Juliet with the Nurse, and Mercutio with Romeo. What does this tell us about the characters’ decision making? How does this affect the plot?
* Act 2 is important because it is where Romeo and Juliet fall in love and are married – helped by the Friar and the Nurse. How willing are the Friar and the Nurse to help the young couple? How do you think they feel about the match and why do they help?

[ACT 3](https://www.rsc.org.uk/shakespeare-learning-zone/romeo-and-juliet/story/scene-by-scene)

#### ACT 3 SCENE 1

Benvolio tries to convince Mercutio to go indoors as the Capulets are on the lookout for a fight. Sure enough, Tybalt arrives looking for Romeo. When Romeo does arrive he refuses to fight with Tybalt, who he is now related to by marriage saying to him ‘I do protest, I never injured thee, / But love thee better than thou canst devise’. A fight breaks out between Mercutio and Tybalt which ends with Mercutio being stabbed after Romeo gets in the way. While dying Mercutio curses both houses of Capulet and Montague exclaiming ‘A plague o' both your houses! I am sped’. In revenge for his friend’s death, Romeo seeks out Tybalt and kills him. When the Prince arrives he announces ‘And for that offence / Immediately we do exile him hence.’

# WHAT DO WE LEARN?

**MORE INFO**

* Mercutio suggests that Benvolio is as quick to fight as Tybalt is.
* Romeo gets in the way of Mercutio and Tybalt which allows Tybalt to kill Mercutio and makes Romeo partly responsible.
* When he takes revenge for Mercutio's murder by killing Tybalt, Romeo puts his friendship before his marriage to Juliet.
* Romeo is banished from Verona’s walls rather than being killed for what he has done, as the Prince proclaimed would happen.

#### ACT 3 SCENE 2

Juliet waits for Romeo to join her after their marriage impatiently saying ‘Gallop apace, you fiery-footed steeds, / Towards Phoebus' lodging’, but the Nurse arrives with news of Tybalt’s death. At first, Juliet curses Romeo’s name but when she discovers what happened she asks ‘Shall I speak ill of him that is my husband? / Ah, poor my lord, what tongue shall smooth thy name, / When I, thy three-hours wife, have mangled it?’ and realizes she needs to stand beside her husband. The Nurse agrees to get a message to Romeo.

# WHAT DO WE LEARN?

**MORE INFO**

* Juliet is very impatient to be with Romeo.
* Juliet is angry at Romeo for killing Tybalt, but then feels sorry for hating him.
* Juliet refuses to see her parents who she knows are mourning Tybalt.

#### ACT 3 SCENE 3

Romeo is hiding at Friar Laurence’s cell and is given the news he has been banished. He is distraught and says that being banished is worse than being killed as he won’t be able to see Juliet, telling the Friar ‘There is no world without Verona walls, / But purgatory, torture, hell itself’. The Nurse arrives with news that Juliet still loves him and the Friar convinces Romeo to run away to Mantua while things settle down in Verona. He tells him to go to Juliet first, to consummate their marriage, saying ‘Go, get thee to thy love, as was decreed, / Ascend her chamber, hence and comfort her”.

# WHAT DO WE LEARN?

**MORE INFO**

* Romeo thinks death would be better than being banished.
* Romeo cries and weeps and doesn't want to live without Juliet.

#### ACT 3 SCENE 4

Paris visits Lord Capulet to seek Juliet’s hand in marriage. At first Capulet suggests that everyone is too full of grief to entertain the idea of a wedding. But as Paris is about to leave he has a change of heart and suggests they get married in three days' time 'Thursday be it, then. / Go you to Juliet ere you go to bed, / Prepare her, wife, against this wedding-day'.

# WHAT DO WE LEARN?

**MORE INFO**

* Paris once again tries to get Lord Capulet to agree to the wedding even though Tybalt has just died.
* Lord Capulet suggests he knows his daughter’s mind and that she will agree to marry Paris.
* Lady Capulet is left to deliver the news of the proposed marriage.

#### ACT 3 SCENE 5

Romeo and Juliet say goodbye to each other with Juliet asking, 'Art thou gone so? Love, lord, ay, husband, friend! / I must hear from thee every day in the hour, / For in a minute there are many days'. Lady Capulet enters and tells Juliet that she is to marry Paris. Juliet refuses and when she tells Lord Capulet this he threatens to disown her if she doesn’t agree saying, 'For, by my soul, I'll ne'er acknowledge thee, / Nor what is mine shall never do thee good'. When they are alone, the Nurse tries to convince Juliet to forget Romeo and marry Paris. Juliet decides to visit Friar Laurence.

# WHAT DO WE LEARN?

**MORE INFO**

* In Juliet and Romeo's last moments together there are several references to death and Juliet foreshadows Romeo's death by saying he looks as though he is in a tomb.
* Lord Capulet used to believe Juliet’s opinion was important in deciding who she should marry but he now says he will disown her if she refuses to marry Paris.
* Lady Capulet tries to calm her husband down but ends the scene telling Juliet she is also 'done with thee'.

#### THINGS TO NOTICE IN ACT 3

* Notice Romeo’s punishment for killing Tybalt. The Prince claimed in Act 1 Scene 1 that anyone who disturbed the peace would pay with their life so why do you think he banishes Romeo instead of having him killed? What effect does this have on the play?
* Take a look at Juliet’s reactions and behaviour in Act 3, Scene 2. What different emotions does she experience in this one scene? Can you find any directions in her lines that might help an actor playing the role, or show them how to respond?
* Take note of Lord Capulet’s plan to marry Juliet to Paris. Why do you think he has changed his mind and now wants the couple to marry that same week, when he wanted to wait two years in Act 1? What does this change of pace do to the plot? This is the first time we see Juliet disobey her father and mother. Does this change how you view her character?
* Act 3 is important because Romeo and Juliet are separated – with Romeo being banished and Juliet’s proposed marriage to Paris being brought forward. Why do you think Shakespeare does these at the same point in the play?

[ACT 4](https://www.rsc.org.uk/shakespeare-learning-zone/romeo-and-juliet/story/scene-by-scene)

#### ACT 4 SCENE 1

Paris visits Friar Laurence in order to plan his own wedding to Juliet. He meets Juliet there who says she has come for confession. When Paris has left Juliet threatens to kill herself if the Friar cannot help her, saying to him, ‘O, bid me leap, rather than marry Paris, / From off the battlements of yonder tower’. The Friar devises a plan where Juliet will take a potion that will make her appear dead and ‘No warmth, no breath, shall testify thou livest’. Friar Laurence plans to let Romeo know the truth via a message so he can collect her from the Capulet family tomb.

# WHAT DO WE LEARN?

**MORE INFO**

* Juliet is desperate to avoid marrying Paris.
* Friar Laurence can make Juliet a potion to make her appear dead.
* The Nurse doesn’t know about this plan but Friar Laurence plans to let Romeo know by sending him a message. The message tells Romeo to meet Juliet in the tomb so they can leave together when she wakes up.

#### ACT 4 SCENE 2

Juliet returns to the family home and begs forgiveness from her father. He is overjoyed and decides to move the date of the wedding to the very next day exclaiming ‘my heart is wondrous light, / Since this same wayward girl is so reclaim’d’.

# WHAT DO WE LEARN?

**MORE INFO**

* Juliet has lied to her father.
* The change in date of the wedding is a serious problem for Juliet’s plan.

#### ACT 4 SCENE 3

Due to the change in the date of the wedding, Juliet is forced to take the potion a night early. At first she worries that maybe the Friar has given her a poison so his marrying her to Romeo won’t be discovered, asking herself ‘What if it be a poison, which the friar / Subtly hath minister'd to have me dead, / Lest in this marriage he should be dishonour'd, / Because he married me before to Romeo?’. She takes the potion anyway and immediately appears dead.

# WHAT DO WE LEARN?

**MORE INFO**

* Juliet takes the potion and feels like there is no other way out.
* Juliet knows she will be taken to the Capulet family tomb.

#### ACT 4 SCENE 4

The Capulet household prepares for the wedding.

# WHAT DO WE LEARN?

**MORE INFO**

* The household has been up all night preparing food, flowers and music for the wedding.

#### ACT 4 SCENE 5

The Nurse discovers the body of Juliet and exclaims ‘She's dead, deceased, she's dead; alack the day!’ Lady Capulet, Lord Capulet, and finally Paris then also see the body one after the other throughout the scene. Lord Capulet says everything that was made ready for the wedding should now be for her funeral and her body is then taken to the Capulet family tomb.

# WHAT DO WE LEARN?

**MORE INFO**

* The potion has worked and everyone believes Juliet to be dead. Her family are devastated.
* Juliet is taken to the family tomb.

#### THINGS TO NOTICE IN ACT 4

* Notice the length of Act 4. It is very short with the scenes moving quite quickly. This reflects the speed at which things are happening in the text but what does this tell us? Why would Shakespeare have these quick scenes?
* Look out for the characters that are missing. Romeo, for example, does not appear in Act 4 at all. What does this tell us about who the key character is in these scenes? Why is this the case?
* Take note of Juliet’s relationships and how they change. Which key figures does she lie to? Is this different from her behavior towards them before? Why do you think her attitude towards those people has changed? What does this tell us about Juliet’s emotional state?
* Act 4 is important because it explores Juliet’s reaction to Romeo’s banishment – following her plans with the Friar and the execution of her plan to fake her own death. Why do you think Juliet lies to both her family and the Nurse and does not confide in anyone apart from the Friar?

ACT 5

#### ACT 5 SCENE 1

Romeo discovers Juliet has died from his servant Balthazar and is devastated, saying ‘I defy you, stars!’ He buys some poison from an apothecary and returns to Verona to visit Juliet’s tomb.

# WHAT DO WE LEARN?

**MORE INFO**

* Romeo believes Juliet is really dead.
* Friar Laurence has not got a message to Romeo in time.
* Romeo has purchased a poison to kill himself with.

#### ACT 5 SCENE 2

Friar John reveals to Friar Laurence that due to an outbreak of disease he was stopped from leaving Verona. As a result Romeo did not get the message letting him know that Juliet isn’t really dead. Friar Laurence worries about what may happen as a result and says ‘Unhappy fortune! By my brotherhood, / The letter was not nice but full of charge / Of dear import, and the neglecting it / May do much danger’. He then quickly hurries to the Capulet tomb.

# WHAT DO WE LEARN?

**MORE INFO**

* Friar Laurence has gone to collect Juliet because he knows Romeo has not got his message.

#### ACT 5 SCENE 3

Paris visits Juliet’s body to mourn her death. He is disturbed by Romeo, they fight and Romeo kills Paris although he doesn’t realise who it is at the time. Romeo then goes to see Juliet’s body and takes the poison and dies, saying ‘Eyes, look your last! / Arms, take your last embrace!’. Friar Laurence finds Juliet just as she is waking up but she refuses to come with him. A noise frightens the Friar and he leaves Juliet behind. She takes Romeo’s dagger and kills herself saying ‘O happy dagger! This is thy sheath; there rust, and let me die’. The Prince arrives and discovers the dead bodies in the tomb and the Capulets see Juliet with a knife wound. Finally, Lord Montague arrives and tells us that Lady Montague has died and ‘Grief of my son's exile hath stopp'd her breath’. The Friar returns to tell everyone what has happened. Capulet and Montague agree to end the feud that has taken so many lives with Lord Capulet saying ‘O brother Montague, give me thy hand: / This is my daughter's jointure, for no more / Can I demand’.

# WHAT DO WE LEARN?

**MORE INFO**

* Paris is deeply upset by Juliet's death and really cared for her. When he is mourning in the tomb, Romeo kills him by mistake.
* Friar Laurence leaves Juliet in the tomb when he hears a noise.
* Romeo and Juliet both take their lives, fulfilling the destiny described in the prologue.
* The families find their bodies and agree to end their feud.

#### THINGS TO NOTICE IN ACT 5

* Notice how Friar Laurence behaves throughout Act 5. Why does he go to the tomb and how does he react to finding Paris and Romeo there? Why do you think he leaves Juliet and runs away? He blames himself at the end of the play and claims he is responsible, how far do you agree with this?
* Take note of the clues Shakespeare gives us about the setting of the tomb. Romeo claims he couldn’t see Paris which suggests it is dark. How else does Shakespeare create a picture for the audience of how it feels to be in the Capulet tomb?
* Look closely at the resolution of the play. Who instigates the end to their ‘grudge’? What do you think the most important factors are? How do they intend to remember Juliet and Romeo?
* Act 5 marks the resolution of the story – Romeo and Juliet both die, believing the other to be dead, and their families agree a truce after witnessing so much death. How many people have died and what are their relationships to the Prince, Lord Capulet and Lord Montague? Why would Shakespeare include this reconciliation? How does it make the audience feel at the end of the play? Why is this important? This play takes place over a very short timescale, lasting no more than five days. What is the impact of this?