Unit plan for an introductory lesson sequence on *Romeo and Juliet*

This unit plan is reproduced in Figure 18.2 of the book. The resources relating to the lesson sequence are included here.

Aims

As a result of studying this unit, students will:

* engage in fluid, contextual and collaborative meaning-making through the exploration of *Romeo and Juliet* as both a literary and dramatic text;
* evaluate and integrate ideas and information from *Romeo and Juliet* and related paratexts, forming their own interpretations and evaluations of them;
* investigate how aesthetic choices and conventions (language, movement, visual design, characterisation) influence meaning-making; and
* appreciate the extent to which individual choices and opinions about a dramatic text reflect salient aspects of that individual’s personality and value system.

Acclimatising to Shakespeare (Lesson 1)

* Shakespearean Chairs: chairs are arranged around the room (one chair per student). All students bar one (the ‘walker’) sit in the chairs; the walker attempts to walk towards the empty chair and sit. The seated students must work together to prevent this from happening by one of their number filling the empty chair. As soon as a new chair becomes empty, the walker may move towards it and attempt to sit (again, the others working to prevent this). A round of the game is over when the walker has successfully sat down in an empty chair. The new student left standing becomes the next ‘walker’.  
  Rule 1: the walker must always walk (not run)  
  Rule 2: once a seated student has stood up from their chair, they must not sit back down in the chair they have ‘surrendered’.

*N.B. The point of this game is to encourage collaboration and to induce a sense of urgency in the participants. This sense of urgency is what drives the need to speak in Shakespeare’s plays. The stakes are always very high.*

* Feel the pulse: students sit in a tight circle, facing each other, their hands palm-down on the floor in front of them. Students must use their hands to tap out a weak and then a strong beat (i.e. ti-TUM). As soon as one student does this, the beat moves to the next student, and so on around the circle (ti-TUM, ti-TUM, ti-TUM, ti-TUM, ti-TUM, etc.).

*N.B. The point of this game is for students to get used to iambic pentameter as a physical sensation, the metre in which most Shakespearean verse is written.*

* Bouncing Balloons: assign each student a numbered line of either **Extract A** or **Extract B** on a slip of paper and instruct them, in turn, to read their line and hit an inflated balloon into the air when they reach their line’s final syllable. If a class can get through the entire poem without the balloon falling to the ground, they are ready to attempt the same exercise without their slips of paper (you may employ a PPT slide with the first and last words of each line as a jog to their memories).

*N.B. Students will have familiarised themselves with passages from Shakespeare and imbued their reading with a collective energy and import; focusing on the balloon allows them to ignore the Shakespearean language and makes their readings of it less self-conscious (if functions as a ‘mask’).*

Acclimatising to *Romeo and Juliet* (Lesson 2)

* Woosh: the 15-minute *Romeo and Juliet*. Teacher introduces the plot and characters of the play to students through the [Folger Shakespeare Library’s 15-minute *Romeo and Juliet*](https://www.folger.edu/sites/default/files/TM13%20-%2015M%20Romeo%20%26%20Juliet.pdf).

The teacher reads the explanatory text and supplies a box of props (plastic swords, funny wigs, glasses, feather boas, etc.). Each time a line of numbered, bolded text occurs, a different student selects a prop of their choice from the box and delivers the line accompanied by an action that makes use of their selected prop (see **Woosh Lines** below).

* Compare and contrast: guide students through an annotation of **Handout A**. Explain that this handout presents two different ‘summaries’ of the plot of Romeo and Juliet by two different authors. Ask students to underline sections that seem similar or different to each other, to write down where they ‘make a connection’ to something they’ve read or seen before, to write down any questions they have about either text and to identify which of the two summaries they prefer, giving at least two reasons why.

Scaffolding questions: Which of the summaries gives you a better idea of what’s going to happen? Does either summary blame anyone/anything for the events of the play’s ending?

*N.B: this activity places* Romeo and Juliet*’s opening sonnet adjacent to that of its source material: Arthur Brooke’s* Tragicall Historye of Romeus and Juliet *(1562). The aim is to take Shakespeare down off his cultural pedestal by encouraging a comparison to alternative tellings of the story and to allow students to recognize that Shakespeare’s play is not an ‘original’ work, but one version of a story that exists on a continuum*.

* Tableaux: instruct students to cut their preferred summary into sections of 3 to 4 lines: working in groups, they are to devise a series of tableaux or ‘freeze frames’ that illustrate each section of text in still visual terms – they may use the materials in the prop box for this activity when they present their tableaux to the rest of the class.

Montagues vs Capulets (Lesson 3)

* Boal sword fight: students engage in a ‘sword’ fight in pairs, the index finger of one hand representing a sword and their other hand, behind their back, their opponent’s target. The aim of the fight is to score a point by touching your opponent’s target with your ‘sword’.
* ‘Shakespearean insults’ activity (see Table 18.7 of the book).
* Discussion: setting. Italy: hot, bored, intelligent, well-trained upper-class young men. Parallel: inner-city Sydney or Melbourne, upper middle-class private school rivalry.
* Clarify environment ‘Market place- day’: where/when/why/relevance: sellers, children, thieves, tourists. Whole class improvisation: choose a character from these options and become that character.

*N.B. Students get a sense of the loud, rambunctious setting of this play and engaging in improvisational performance in collaboration with peers. The ‘spotlight’ of the entire class is on no single student’s performance in this activity.*

* Create a scene: select 4 students (give them the ‘mantle of expertise’) to create a shortened first scene of the play (**Extract C**); other students continue their improvisational characters around the scene. MOE group instructions:

‘You cannot lose face here’

With each line, choose one option for movement from the five point chase: toward / away / turn toward / turn away / still

Other student instructions: choose a side and offer words of encouragement.

* ‘Draw if you be men’: boal sword fight (all students)

Resources referred to in the unit plan

Extract A (Lesson 1)

1. But, soft! what light through yonder window breaks?

2. It is the east, and Juliet is the sun.

3. Arise, fair sun, and kill the envious moon,

4. Who is already sick and pale with grief,

5. That thou her maid art far more fair than she:

6. Be not her maid, since she is envious;

7. Her vestal livery is but sick and green

8. And none but fools do wear it; cast it off.

9. It is my lady, O, it is my love!

10. O, that she knew she were!

Extract B (Lesson 1)

1. O Romeo, Romeo! wherefore art thou Romeo?

2. Deny thy father and refuse thy name;

3. Or, if thou wilt not, be but sworn my love,

4. And I’ll no longer be a Capulet.

5. ’Tis but thy name that is my enemy;

6. Thou art thyself, though not a Montague.

7. What’s Montague? it is nor hand, nor foot,

8. Nor arm, nor face, nor any other part

9. Belonging to a man. O, be some other name!

10. What’s in a name? that which we call a rose

11. By any other name would smell as sweet.

Woosh Lines (Lesson 2):

1. Down with the Capulets!
2. Down with the Montagues!
3. If ever you disturb our streets again, your lives shall pay the forfeit.
4. Examine other beauties.
5. You are welcome, gentlemen! Come, musicians, play!
6. O, she doth teach the torches to burn bright!
7. You kiss by the book
8. But soft, what light through yonder window breaks?
9. O Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo?
10. Wilt thou leave me so unsatisfied?
11. If that thy bent of love be honorable, Thy purpose marriage, send me word tomorrow.
12. Tybalt, you rat-catcher, will you walk?
13. I am for you.
14. Here comes the furious Tybalt back again!
15. O, I am Fortune’s Fool!
16. Then, window, let day in, and let life out.
17. I’ll not marry yet.
18. Hang thee, young baggage, Disobedient wretch!
19. Romeo! Here’s drink – I drink to thee.
20. Alack the day, she’s dead, she’s dead, she’s dead!
21. O, I am slain!
22. Here’s to my love ... thus with a kiss I die.
23. I’ll dispose of thee among a sisterhood of holy nuns
24. O, happy dagger, this is thy sheath.
25. Never was a story of more woe, than this of Juliet and her Romeo.

Extract C (Lesson 3)

**GREGORY**  
I will frown as I pass by, and let them take it as  
they list.

**SAMPSON**  
Nay, as they dare. I will bite my thumb at them;  
which is a disgrace to them, if they bear it.

**ABRAHAM**  
Do you bite your thumb at us, sir?

**SAMPSON**  
I do bite my thumb, sir.

**ABRAHAM**  
Do you bite your thumb at us, sir?

**SAMPSON**  
I do not bite my thumb at you, sir, but I  
bite my thumb, sir.

**GREGORY**  
Do you quarrel, sir?

**ABRAHAM**  
Quarrel sir! no, sir.

**SAMPSON**  
If you do, sir, I am for you: I serve as good a man as you.

**ABRAHAM**  
No better.

**GREGORY**  
Say ‘better:’ here comes my master

**SAMPSON**  
Yes, better, sir.

**ABRAHAM**  
You lie.

**SAMPSON**  
Draw, if you be men.

Handout A (Lesson 2)

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| --- | --- | --- |
| Love hath inflaméd twain by sudden sight, | **http://www.wordstream.com/images/pr-versus-content-marketing.jpg** | Two households, both alike in dignity, |
| And both do grant the thing that both desire | In fair Verona, where we lay our scene. |
| They wed in shrift by counsel of a friar. | From ancient grudge break to new mutiny, |
| Young Romeus climbs fair Juliet’s bower by night. | Where civil blood makes civil hands unclean. |
| Three months he doth enjoy his chief delight. | From forth the fatal loins of these two foes |
| By Tybalt’s rage provokéd unto ire, | A pair of star-cross’d lovers take their life; |
| He payeth death to Tybalt for his hire. | Whose misadventur’d piteous overthrows |
| A banished man he ’scapes by secret flight. | Doth with their death bury their parents’ strife. |
| New marriage is offered to his wife. | The fearful passage of their death-mark’d love, |
| She drinks a drink that seems to reave her breath: | And the continuance of their parents’ rage, |
| They bury her that sleeping yet hath life. | Which, but their children’s end, nought could remove, |
| Her husband hears the tidings of her death. | Is now the two hours’ traffic of our stage; |
| He drinks his bane. And she with Romeus’ knife, | The which if you with patient ears attend, |
| When she awakes, herself, alas! she slay’th. | What here shall miss, our toil shall strive to mend. |