The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet

Characters

Friar Lawrence
Nurse
Tybalt
Mercutio
Romeo
Juliet

Setting

This reader’s theater is set in Verona, Italy, during the Renaissance. The story begins on the streets of Verona and then shifts to a party held at the Capulet home. The setting continues to change between the streets of Verona, the Capulet home, and the cell of Friar Lawrence. This play concludes at the Capulet mausoleum.
Act I, Scene I

On the streets of Verona

Friar Lawrence: Nurse, it is a pleasant surprise to see you this day walking about the streets of Verona. Where are you headed, and where is your lovely charge, Juliet?

Nurse: Lady Capulet is now speaking to Juliet. She sent me out to get these ornaments for her daughter’s hair. Evidently, there is to be a party tonight in Juliet’s honor at the home of the Capulets. But if Juliet understood what that honor really meant, I think she might use the word horror instead.

Friar Lawrence: What do you mean? What is this party about?

Nurse: It seems that the Capulets do not remember how young their daughter is. Juliet is to be introduced to Paris tonight, and the Capulets are anxious for their daughter to find him in good favor for the purpose of marriage. I must hurry off now to get Juliet ready. But wait, Friar, why is there so much rubble in the streets? Has there been another battle between the Capulets and the Montagues?
Sonnet 18
William Shakespeare

Shall I compare thee to a summer’s day?
Thou art more lovely and more temperate:
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
And summer’s lease hath all too short a date:
Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,
And often is his gold complexion dimmed;
And every fair from fair sometime declines,
By chance, or nature’s changing course, untrimmed;
But thy eternal summer shall not fade,
Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow’st;
Nor shall Death brag thou wander’st in his shade,
When in eternal lines to time thou grow’st:
So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see,
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.
Let me not to the marriage of true minds
Admit impediments. Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove:
O, no! it is an ever-fixed mark
That looks on tempests and is never shaken,
It is the star to every wandering bark,
Whose worth’s unknown, although his height be taken.
Love’s not Time’s fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
Within his bending sickle’s compass come:
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
But bears it out even to the edge of doom.
    If this be error and upon me proved,
    I never writ, nor no man ever loved.
Building Fluency through
Reader’s Theater

William Shakespeare
Grades 6–12

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I am not ashamed to say that I am a reader’s theater nut! I really get pumped when I see kids perform scripts. I am equally excited to see the fire in teachers’ eyes when they begin to use reader’s theater with their students. Thus, it is no understatement to say that I am thrilled to see Teacher Created Materials publish this fine reader’s theater program. Let me explain why I am such an advocate for reader’s theater.

As someone who has studied reading fluency, I know that repeated reading is one of the best methods for developing students’ fluency in reading. However, it disturbs me greatly to see the manner in which students are often asked to engage in repeated reading. I see students practice repeated reading with an aim at improving their reading speed—“Read this one more time to see if you increase your reading rate.” To me, this is not a terribly authentic way to engage in repeated readings. As a result of such a focus, I have seen many students develop the idea that repeated reading is done to make them faster readers and that reading fast is what reading is all about. Through such an approach, we run the risk of developing readers who sacrifice comprehension in order to read fast.

To do repeated reading appropriately, students need an authentic reason to repeatedly read or rehearse a text. I think the most natural reason to practice is performance. If you want students to engage in repeated readings, have them perform what they are practicing for an audience. With performance as a goal, students now have a natural reason to engage in repeated readings. Reader’s theater is a performance genre—it is a type of reading material meant to be performed. Moreover, because the focus of the practice is to convey a meaningful interpretation of the text to an audience, reader’s theater is also a natural vehicle for developing reading comprehension. I believe that reader’s theater is one of the best and most authentic ways to engage students enthusiastically in repeated reading to build reading fluency and improve overall reading performance.

My second reason for being a reader’s theater nut is easy to express—reader’s theater is fun! We all like to be a star at one time or another. Reader’s theater is a perfect vehicle for allowing students to become the stars. I remember doing reader’s theater with the elementary and middle school students I taught. They could not get enough of it. They absolutely loved it. And, as their teacher, I loved it, too. I loved to see students perform with their voices, watch their excitement, and enjoy their growth as successful readers.
Moreover, through the opportunity to perform and see themselves as successful in reading, many of the struggling readers I worked with began to believe in themselves again. Many struggling readers give up on themselves as they are forced to plod through one unsuccessful reading experience after another. The enjoyment, success, and fulfillment that are part of reader’s theater can help to break this cycle of despair and failure in reading for so many students who find learning to read difficult.

Third, reader’s theater is a natural way to connect all areas of the school curriculum. Social studies, literature, science, art, and other curriculum areas can easily and effectively be explored through reader’s theater. The scripts that are part of this program in particular have been developed to make those connections. Students can become so engaged in the process of rehearsal and performance that they may not even be aware that they are learning important content that goes beyond the reading experience!

I know reader’s theater works. Nearly every teacher I have met who uses reader’s theater on a regular basis feels that it is one of the best and most engaging ways to grow readers and to instill in them a sense of reading success as they learn important content. I hope you will give reader’s theater a try. I know that you, too, will become a reader’s theater nut!

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The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet Lesson Plan

Objectives
- **Fluency:** Students will demonstrate an understanding of the characters by reading their parts fluently and focusing on pacing, phrasing, and using the correct tone.
- **Content Area:** Students will understand elements of character development with a focus on character traits and motivations. (McREL)

Summary
In *The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet*, the Italian city of Verona is disrupted by two wealthy families at war. The Capulets and the Montagues despise each other. Unwittingly, Romeo Montague and Juliet Capulet fall in love. Too afraid to tell their families, Romeo and Juliet marry in secret. They make this choice knowing that nothing good can come from their deception. The hatred between their families creates a tragic end.

Materials
- *The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet* script booklets
- *The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet* Primary Sources (pages 26–31 or Teacher Resource CD)
- copies of the Take-Home Script (Teacher Resource CD)
- Performance CD and CD player or computer with a CD drive and speakers

Introduce the Literature
Place students in pairs. Ask the class, “Have any of you ever made a rash, or reckless, decision? Tell your partner about it.” Then ask, “How many of you knew that your decision was reckless before you went through with it? Explain to your partner how you knew.” Then say, “Anyone who has ever made a rash decision can connect to Shakespeare’s *The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet*. This is the story of two young people who know they are headed for trouble but can’t seem to avoid it.” Ask pairs to predict whether it will be Romeo or Juliet who makes the first reckless move. Tally predictions on the board and check the results while reading the play. Finally, show students the image of Juliet’s balcony (page 26). Ask them to predict how this setting fits into the play.

Differentiation Support
Prior to reading the play, help **English language learners** and **below-grade-level students** practice pronouncing the characters’ names. Create a character web on the board or, if one is available, use an interactive whiteboard. Draw lines and other symbols to diagram the relationships in the play.

Have **on-grade-level students** and **above-grade-level students** research the Elizabethan era (1558–1603), which is the period of time in England under the reign of Elizabeth I. Assign small groups subtopics, such as houses, clothing, and family life. Have students display pictures and factoids on a bulletin board or in a **PowerPoint** slide show to help everyone better grasp the play’s context.

Involving All Students
While this script has only six roles, there are ways to involve all students. Ask some students to work on presenting the sonnets. Others can create backdrops. The backdrops might include a street scene, a party scene, or a mausoleum. The actual performances can be done in various choral groupings as well.
Reading the Script

1. Write the glossary words from the script on the board. Ask students if they recognize any of the words. Record their ideas on the board. Next, read the definitions of the words from the glossary. Ask students if they notice any common themes. (Hint: Many of the words paint quite a picture of doom and gloom!)

2. Show the class the image of the masks (page 27). Explain that these are called comedy and tragedy masks and are a universal symbol for the theater arts that date back to ancient Greece. Ask students to select which mask best represents the play they are about to read. The glossary words should help them pick the tragedy mask. Tell the class that a tragedy is a drama in which the main character endures many hardships, and the conclusion of the story is tragic. The sad conclusion often comes about because of the main character’s own flaws. Tragedies may also conclude with hope for the future. A comedy, on the other hand, is a light or humorous play in which the audience’s hopes and dreams for the characters are fulfilled in a satisfying way.

3. Next, provide each student with a copy of the script. Play the professional recording as students follow along. Ask students to focus on how the readers convey the feelings of the characters through their tones and expressions. Discuss the emotions of the different characters as a class.

4. Then use the PowerPoint edition of the script to conduct a whole-class reading. Model the most dramatic way to read some of the parts and call on different students to read other parts with the appropriate tone, phrasing, and expression.

5. Divide students into small, heterogeneous groups. Explain to the class that for many people, the dismal ending of this play is hard to handle. Ask each group to create a warning label for the play. Like the labels on cigarettes and medicine bottles, the play’s warning label should list the risks associated with the “product.” (For example, a side effect of viewing the play might be uncontrollable crying. Instead of the traditional skull and crossbones, students can design a unique symbol.) Encourage students to be creative, or perhaps even humorous, as they design their warning labels. They must also be able to support their ideas with evidence from the script. Display the completed warning labels around the classroom.

Differentiation Support

Review the glossary words with the English language learners and below-grade-level students. Help students organize the words into practical categories such as “action words” and “feeling words.” Have the on-grade-level students and above-grade-level students create short skits to dramatize the glossary words. Finally, have them perform the skits while the rest of the students test their knowledge by trying to guess the words.
Assigning Roles

Assign roles to students based on reading proficiency. When students practice fluency, it is important that they read materials at or below their reading levels so they can focus on accuracy, expression, and reading rate. If a student reads text that is too difficult, his or her attention will be focused on decoding words and comprehending the text rather than reading with fluency.

Approximate reading levels for the roles in this script are:

- **Juliet:** low 5th grade
- **Mercutio:** high 5th grade
- **Friar Lawrence:** low 6th grade
- **Romeo:** low 5th grade
- **Tybalt:** high 5th grade
- **Nurse:** low 6th grade

Meeting the Fluency Objective

1. Divide the class into heterogeneous groups, each with six students. Assign roles for the script within each group. Review with students why it is important to be familiar with the script in order to read fluently. Have students read through their lines within their small groups.

2. Write these lines by Romeo on the board: *I cannot believe my dreadful fate; my new love is a Capulet and the daughter of my family’s greatest foe! What hope can the future bring? No good can come from this. All is lost, I fear.* (This line can be found on page 13 in the script.) Read these lines in a monotone voice. Slur the words together awkwardly and read quickly. Then ask the class to critique your reading. Discuss what the lines mean and how they think Romeo felt in this scene. Have volunteers read the lines more effectively. Ask students how fluent reading affects comprehension.

3. Now, explain how strong readers use pacing, phrasing, and tone to convey meaning. Pacing is the speed of reading. It is important not to read too slowly or too quickly. Phrasing is the way words are grouped together. Tone is the sound of your voice that conveys the characters’ feelings. Play the professional recording of Romeo’s lines to demonstrate how an actor says them.

4. Display the primary source on page 28. Play the professional recording again. This time, ask students to pay special attention to their character’s pacing, phrasing, and tone. Stop the recording after each scene so students can make notes on their take-home scripts. Also, ask students to listen for the scene depicted in the picture. Have students raise their hands when they think they hear that scene being performed (*Act II, Scene II*). Stop the CD and ask students to explain the connection, using evidence from the picture and play. Next, have students evaluate whether Romeo’s appearance and stance in the primary source fit the actor’s reading of the lines.

5. Have students focus on pacing, phrasing, and tone as they practice their lines. Allow students to practice performing the script over and over again. Provide students with copies of the Take-Home Script so they may continue to practice at home.
Language Arts Connection
With this script, students will examine character traits and motivations to understand elements of character development.

1. Use the PowerPoint edition of the script to model the skill of making character inferences. Make an attribute web on the board. Draw a circle and write Romeo inside it. Draw lines coming out of the circle. Ask students to copy the web onto their own papers. Tell students that making character inferences requires readers to use the words on the page, plus their own understanding of the way real people act to gain a deeper understanding of characters’ personalities and motivations.

2. Model this skill by reading Romeo’s lines to the class. Think aloud as you examine his words and actions. Make a list of character traits. There are no right or wrong answers as long as ideas can be justified. In Act I, Scene II, for example, Romeo shows his tendency to be a pessimist. Add “pessimist” to the attribute web. Ask students to share their own inferences about Romeo as you read aloud.

3. Divide the class into homogeneous groups of three or four students. Students will now practice making character inferences about Juliet. Have each group read Juliet’s lines aloud and complete an attribute web with at least five character traits. Circulate and assist students, as needed.

4. Next, display the photo of the old stamp (page 29) and the illustration of the balcony scene (page 30). Ask each small group to make a Venn diagram to compare and contrast the depictions of the characters in the two illustrations. Be sure group members factor in the cultural and time period differences between the two pictures. The stamp is from the United Arab Emirates, circa 1969. The illustration is from London, England, circa 1839.

5. Ask students to apply what they learned about Romeo and Juliet by writing personal ads for the pair. Explain to students that such ads are used to make people sound appealing to potential suitors. They usually include details about the person’s appearance, likes and dislikes, and hopes for the future. Show students appropriate examples. Have students choose partners and write ads for Romeo or Juliet. They should draw upon the character traits inferred from the script. Post the ads on a class wiki space.

Differentiation Support
Reteach the process of making character inferences to both your English language learners and below-grade-level students using the illustration of the party scene (page 31). Provide students with copies of the picture. Ask students to use visual clues and their background knowledge to imagine what each person is thinking and feeling. Have them add thought bubbles for at least three characters in the picture.

Assign the on-grade-level and above-grade-level students the task of evaluating the personal ads written by the class. (Be sure to remove students’ names from the assignments. Number each ad and keep a list of students’ assigned numbers.) Ask each of them to choose the most effective ad for Romeo and the most effective ad for Juliet. Each student should write a one-paragraph justification for each choice. Have them present their choices to the class. You could even award prizes to the students whose ads were chosen.
Fine Arts Connection

1. Explain to students that the script *The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet* contains Sonnets 18 and 116. Sonnet 116 has been set to music. Both sonnets relate to this reader’s theater but are not limited to use only with this script.

2. Play the professional musical recording of Sonnet 116. Explain that this sonnet celebrates true love as something eternal and unchanging. Its sentiments inspired the wedding vows used in many western marriage ceremonies. If time allows, examine the sonnet line by line. Analyses of the sonnets can be found on a variety of websites on the Internet.

3. Next, play the professional reading of Sonnet 18 (Track 03, Volume I) to relate the sonnet to the fluency objective for this lesson. Ask students to listen for ways that the reader’s pacing, phrasing, and tone enhance the subject.

4. Next, use the *PowerPoint* edition of the script to conduct a class reading of Sonnet 18. Discuss Shakespeare’s use of simile and metaphor in the description of his friend. Note how the initial simile turns into a metaphor as the sonnet progresses.

5. Now, have students choose partners. Ask them to take turns reading the sonnet aloud five times. On the fourth reading, partners will rate each other on pacing, phrasing, and tone, using a 1 to 5 scale. Taking the ratings into account, students will prepare to do their best reading on the fifth time. Use audio software to record each student’s performance.

6. Ask each student to choose a friend or family member to celebrate in a sonnet. While writing their sonnets, have students follow the sonnet rhyme pattern a b a b, c d c d, e f e f, g g. They should use modern English language rather than attempting to use Shakespearean English.

Differentiation Support

Instead of having English language learners write sonnets, have them create picture tributes for close friends or relatives. Instruct them to divide their papers into four quadrants. In each quadrant, they should illustrate a character trait they admire in their subjects.

Clarify the sonnet rhyme pattern by creating a simple activity sheet for the below-grade-level students and on-grade-level students to complete. Add a word bank of common character traits to inspire below-grade-level students.

Challenge above-grade-level students to choose a season as the basis for comparison to his or her sonnet subject.
# The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet

## Lesson Plan

### Performance CD

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### Teacher Resource CD—Primary Sources

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<td>27</td>
<td>Comedy and Tragedy Masks</td>
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<td>Scene from Romeo and Juliet</td>
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<td>29</td>
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### Teacher Resource CD—Materials

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