

A photograph of a young man and woman sitting on a city street at night. They are seen from behind, huddled together. The man is wearing a dark cap and jacket, and the woman is wearing a light-colored hoodie. A bright street lamp illuminates the scene, creating a soft glow. In the background, other people and city lights are visible but out of focus.

# ROMEO & JULIET

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**LIVE LESSON:  
ROMEO AND JULIET**

**Lesson Plans and  
Activities**

## ABOUT THIS PACK

This pack supports the RSC's 2018 Live Lesson on *Romeo and Juliet* Act 2 Scene 2, led by production Director Erica Whyman. The production itself will open in Stratford-upon-Avon on 21 April 2018 at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre.

The activities in this pack provide material for two preparatory lessons, along with background information on the production and the scene we will explore in the Live Lesson. The first preparatory lesson focuses on the prologue and introducing the story of *Romeo and Juliet* to young people and is only needed for pupils who need background on the play. The second preparatory lesson focuses on the opening of Act 2 Scene 2, the scene we will be exploring in the live lesson with the 2018 company, and will allow students to become more familiar with the scene itself.

## ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

*Romeo and Juliet* focuses on a generation of young people who were born into violence and ripped apart by the bitter divisions of their parents.

Rehearsals for our 2018 production of *Romeo and Juliet* start in January and the Live Lesson will take place in the second week of rehearsal. It's during our rehearsal period that all the decisions about the show will be made, which means that we don't yet know everything about the production. What we do know before rehearsals start is:

- **The production will be set in a modern world a bit like our own. In this world the weather will be hotter and there are no guns. You can find out more about the design and what the play will look like by watching our Model Box video.**

**For every production at the RSC a designer will produce a model box of what the set will look like. These are scaled down models of the theatre, created to look like the set of the production and are made months before rehearsals start. This is because they are used to help build the set, which can take a long time, and to help the actors imagine their surroundings once they start work on the play.**

**This film shows when the model box was first shown to RSC staff. This is the start of a creative journey into the rehearsal process and before the Live Lesson please try to show it to your students so they have an insight into that process and know what the set will look like and what some of the thoughts are around the production at this point.**

- **The tensions between the generations are something Director Erica Whyman is very keen to explore and it also feels very relevant in 2018 following several major votes and debates which will impact on the lives of young people. You can find out details of the cast at [www.rsc.org.uk/romeo-and-juliet/cast](http://www.rsc.org.uk/romeo-and-juliet/cast)**

In talking about her inspiration for staging the play Erica Whyman said:

**'The grown ups in the play have created a situation where they don't agree and that disagreement is violent and really dangerous. People die all the time on their streets, so what I think young people recognise in the play is that the grown ups have let the young people down'**

**The RSC Live Lesson will take place on 25 January at 10.30 – 11.15 am. Together with Erica Whyman and members of the company you will be able to explore Act 2 Scene 2 in which Romeo and Juliet meet in private for the first time. There are lesson plans below to help you prepare for the event.**

## **SYNOPSIS**

You can find a synopsis of the play at [www.rsc.org.uk/romeo-and-juliet/the-plot](http://www.rsc.org.uk/romeo-and-juliet/the-plot)

## **THE BALCONY SCENE**

This scene, Act 2 Scene 2, is often called the 'Balcony Scene' but there is actually no balcony mentioned in the script. Romeo and Juliet met that same night at a party, for a few moments and Romeo enters the Capulets' orchard in order to see Juliet, who is at her 'window'. As he listens to her, he realises she is thinking about him as well and he blurts out that he is there. She is astonished and they have an intense, funny and surprising conversation about their future.

In the Live Lesson, Erica explains:

**'we're going to look at that scene, try to understand what kind of choices and thoughts the actors need to have in their minds as they begin to approach the text.'**

In advance, she and the company would like you to think about:

What would you do in this situation? If you had just met someone you really wanted to see again but couldn't?

How would you feel? What would you be saying to yourself, having met someone who was forbidden to you but you were very attracted to?

These are all questions the actors start asking as they start rehearsal, so they will bring their own thoughts to the Live Lesson as well.

## LESSON 1:

# AN INTRODUCTION TO ROMEO AND JULIET

**Using the prologue, the following activities will introduce the story of the play as well as allow students to consider Shakespeare's structural choices.**



### **ACTIVITY 1: STARTING**

Start with pupils sitting in a circle. Tell them they are going to be detectives looking for clues to the storyline of Romeo and Juliet. As a first step you will read them the opening lines of the play and will want them to echo, or repeat after you, any words they think are especially important. How much information can they discover just from listening? Pupils close their eyes while you read, in order to give their full attention to the words.

Tell pupils they are now going to create some of the words and phrases they echoed. Ask them to push back the chairs, find a partner and spread out through the space so that all pairs are equidistant from one another. Everyone needs a good amount of space around them. Tell them they have a count of five to create freeze frames of:

- Two households
- Two foes
- Star-crossed lovers
- Death-marked love
- Parents' rage

Ask pupils what they have discovered so far about what happens in the play. Record their insights on a whiteboard or flipchart.



## ACTIVITY 2: EXPLORING

Divide the class into groups of four or five. Provide each group with two lines from the prologue each until all 14 lines have been allocated. Ask the groups to translate their two lines into their own words. Tell them to be prepared to speak their lines aloud so that a part of the group says the original two lines and the others say their modern version. Invite groups to read and translate their lines, in order, so that they can hear the whole prologue in order.

Ask each group to then create a sequence of actions that tell the story of their two lines from the prologue. The sequence should begin and end in a freeze frame and Shakespeare's lines should be spoken during the action. Groups can choose one person or the whole group to say the lines during the sequence of actions. Give pupils about five minutes to prepare their pieces, then position the groups around the space in speech order so that the prologue runs in sequence.



## ACTIVITY 3: REFLECTING

Pupils continue working in the same small groups. Ask them to work together to:

- List all the things they have discovered about the story of Romeo and Juliet. For example, who are the main characters? What causes the tragedy? Why? What happens in the end?
- What have you noticed about the way the prologue is written? Why do you think Shakespeare write it this way?

- How do you feel about being given so much information about the story at the start of the play? Why might Shakespeare have chosen to do this?

As pupils work through these tasks and questions encourage them to think about what effect it has if the audience knows how the play will end before it even begins.

Invite groups to share all their reflections with the rest of the class.

## LESSON 2:

# THE BALCONY SCENE

**Using Romeo's opening speech from Act 2 Scene 2, the following activities will help students to think about why this character visits Juliet and what the stakes are in this scene.**



### ACTIVITY 1: STARTING

Explain to pupils the context behind the scene. Romeo has sneaked into the Capulet's orchard in search of Juliet, knowing he'll be killed if he's found.

Pupils read the speech out loud together, taking turns to read up to the next punctuation mark until the whole text has been read. This may mean that individuals only read one word or a couple of lines.

- Reflect with them on what words stand out when they read it this way. Was there a place in the speech where readers changed a lot? Did they notice anything about the pattern of the speech?
- Explain that actors, like the company members they will meet in the live lesson, use punctuation as an indicator of the thought patterns of the character. Many contemporary actors and directors make sense of Shakespeare's words by reading to the punctuation rather than to the verse line endings, precisely because the punctuation reveals the pattern of the character's thoughts.
- Ask pupils to repeat the ensemble reading but this time ask them to imagine that Romeo is sharing a secret that he doesn't want anyone else to overhear. Pupils will whisper the words to the next reader, passing on what is said with energy. There should be no pauses between one reader and the next; it should be as if there is only one person speaking. Ask:
  - What is the effect of this?
  - What is Romeo's state of mind? Excited? Confused?
  - Ask pupils to explain their comments and support them with evidence from the text?



## ACTIVITY 2: EXPLORING

Ask pupils to space themselves out evenly around the room and read the speech again, to themselves. As they read ask them to walk around the room, changing direction every time they reach a punctuation mark.

- Ask pupils to reflect on how they think Romeo feels during this speech? Are there any places where Romeo's thoughts seem to change direction rapidly? For example, what do they notice in the middle of the speech when he is deciding whether or not to talk to Juliet.
- Ask pupils to find examples of:
  - What Romeo is talking about when his direction isn't changing so much. Why are his thoughts more clear on this topic?
- Explain to students that Erica will be staging this scene so that Romeo cannot see Juliet at this point, and that rather than her looking like the sun this is just his imagination and how he sees her. Does that change the way he comes across?
- Ask pupils to form a circle and working with the person next to them, challenge the pairs to look at a short section of the speech, no more than two lines.
- Ask pupils to speak their lines together, in pairs, going around the circle until the whole speech is complete.
- Challenge pupils to try this multiple ways and introduce the idea that whenever actors approach their lines in the script they have choices they have to make. Encourage the whole circle to read the speech:
  - As if they are telling a young child a bedtime story
  - As if they are a teacher telling someone off
  - As if they are at a football match
- Ask pupils to find the key words in their lines and agree on strong gestures to go with each key word. Give them a few minutes to rehearse, so that they are confident to speak their lines and make their gestures.
- Invite pupils back into the circle and ask them to perform the speech together, delivering their lines and their gestures in order around the circle.
- Reflect with pupils on which words and images really stood out as they watched/listened? Why are there so many images of light in the speech do they think? Ask them to look specifically at the images of the sun and the moon. Why might Romeo use this imagery?
  - For students who are more familiar with the play, you may also want to ask them how his use of language here compares to other parts of the play. Is this language and behaviour something they would expect from Romeo as a character?



## ACTIVITY 3: REFLECTING

Consider the following with pupils as you reflect on the work they have done on the opening of this scene:

- Why does Romeo speak directly to the audience at this point in the play? (Because he needs to share his feelings? Because Shakespeare wants us to feel sympathy for him? Because Shakespeare wants us to understand the stakes before he risks speaking to Juliet?)
- What do the images and language Romeo uses tell you about his character?
- Explain to students that Erica wants Juliet to have an equal relationship with the audience, so her first lines could also be spoken to the audience, just like Romeo. This might be something to keep in mind if you chose to look at the next part of the scene in advance of the Live Lesson.

In the Live Lesson you will be exploring the next part of this scene, when Juliet and Romeo speak. You will have the chance to watch the actors work and think about their characters feelings, so it's a great idea to also think about Juliet and how she must feel. Romeo mentions her in this speech, and her actions, but we don't hear from her straight away.

- What do you think Juliet is feeling after learning who Romeo is at the party?
- Why is she at her window?
- What does Juliet want to happen?

Pupils will be able to ask questions and have them answered by the actors playing Romeo and Juliet. Is there anything they would like to know about this scene? They will have only just started rehearsing and so they are still working out what it means and how to play it, just like you, but they would love to talk more about it with you.