

Themes in Romeo and Juliet

This resource is designed as a reference guide for teachers. We have listed the major themes and motifs within *Romeo and Juliet* and provided examples of scenes where you can study them.

Themes

- Love versus hate
- Parents and children
- Chance versus choice

Motifs

(Recurring elements and patterns of imagery in *Romeo and Juliet* which support the play's themes)

- Light and dark
- Celestial imagery
- Nature

Themes

Love versus hate and the many forms love takes; its power to challenge hate; the impetuosity of young love; the irrationality of hate and its capacity to destroy love.
Some related scenes:

- Act 1, Scene 1: The Capulets and Montagues fight in Verona's marketplace; Romeo tells Benvolio of his unrequited love for Rosaline.
- Act 1, Scene 5: Forgetting Rosaline, Romeo falls in love with Juliet at first sight.
- Act 2, Scene 2: In Juliet's orchard the two lovers agree to marry.
- Act 3, Scene 1: Tybalt fatally wounds Mercutio under the newly-wed Romeo's arm.
- Act 3, Scene 5: Romeo and Juliet prepare to part after their wedding night.
- Act 5, Scene 3: Romeo and Juliet commit suicide; the Prince asks the two families to reconcile.

Parents and children and the struggle of young people to make their own choices in the face of parents' vested interests.

Some related scenes:

- The Prologue: the Chorus describes the parents' 'ancient grudge' which is the catalyst for the death of their children.
- Act 1, Scene 1: Lord Capulet approves Paris's request to ask Juliet to marry him.
- Act 3, Scene 5: Lord and Lady Capulet tell Juliet of their arrangements for her to marry Paris.
- Act 5, Scene 3: Romeo and Juliet commit suicide; the parents are faced with the consequences of their ancient feud.

Chance versus choice the inevitability and the fickleness of fate; the mixture of chance and choice in determining outcomes.

Some related scenes:

- The Prologue: the Chorus describes the lovers as 'star-crossed.'
- Act 1, Scene 4: As he goes to the Capulets' ball, Romeo tells of a dream he has had.
- Act 3, Scene 3: Romeo happens upon the sword fight between Tybalt and Mercutio; his intervention results in Mercutio's death for which he kills Tybalt and calls himself 'fortune's fool'.
- Act 5, Scene 1: Balthasar tells Romeo of Juliet's death and Friar Laurence learns that Brother John has been unable to travel to Mantua to tell Romeo that Juliet still lives.

Motifs

Light and dark, light representing the lovers as they see one another in the darkness of their troubles; darkness also as the shroud of secrecy; also light as lightning and so transitory, easily burnt out.

For example:

- 'But, soft! what light through yonder window breaks?/It is the east, and Juliet is the sun'
Act 2 Scene 2
- 'The brightness of her cheek would shame those stars,/As daylight doth a lamp'
Act 2 Scene 2
- 'It is too rash, too unadvised, too sudden;/Too like the lightning, which doth cease to be/Ere one can say "It lightens"'
Act 2 Scene 3
- 'Take him and cut him out in little stars,/And he will make the face of heaven so fine/That all the world will be in love with night/And pay no worship to the garish sun'
Act 3 Scene 2
- 'More light and light; more dark and dark our woes!'
Act 3 Scene 5
- 'For here lies Juliet, and her beauty makes/This vault a feasting presence full of light'
Act 5 Scene 3
- 'A glooming peace this morning with it brings./The sun for sorrow will not show his head'
Act 5 Scene 3

Celestial imagery representing the power of fate; also heaven and heavenly as descriptive of the lovers' view of one another.

For example:

- 'A pair of star-crossed lovers take their life'
The Prologue
- 'my mind misgives/Some consequence yet hanging in the stars'
Act 1 Scene 4
- 'so smile the heavens upon this holy act,/ That after hours with sorrow chide us not!'
Act 2 Scene 6
- 'Can heaven be so envious'
Act 3 Scene 2
- 'The heavens do lour upon you for some ill'
Act 4 Scene 5
- 'Is it even so? then I defy you, stars!'
Act 5 Scene 1
- 'See, what a scourge is laid upon your hate,/That heaven finds means to kill your joys with love'
Act 5 Scene 3

Nature as representing beauty, value, youth and potential.
For example:

- 'fresh female buds shall you see this night'
Act 1 Scene 2
- 'Verona's summer hath not such a flower'
Act 1 Scene 3
- 'So shows a snowy dove trooping with crows'
Act 1 Scene 5
- 'This bud of love, by summer's ripening breath,/May prove a beauteous flower
when next we meet'
Act 2 Scene 2
- 'O mickle is the powerful grace that lies/In plants, herbs, stones, and their true
qualities./For naught so vile that on the earth doth live/But to the earth some
special good doth give'
Act 2 Scene 2
- 'An eagle, madam,/Hath not so green, so quick, so far an eye/As Paris hath'
Act 3 Scene 6
- 'sweet flower, with flowers thy bridal bed I strew'
Act 5 Scene 3