

## COMMON CORE

Included in this workshop:

**RL 3** Analyze how complex characters develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme. **RL 9** Analyze how an author draws on and transforms source material in a specific work. **RL 10** Read and comprehend dramas. **L 3** Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening. **L 6** Acquire and use accurately domain-specific words and phrases.

## Shakespearean Drama

“If we wish to know the force of human genius,” the writer William Hazlitt once proclaimed, “we should read Shakespeare.” Though he wrote them over 400 years ago, Shakespeare’s 37 plays are arguably as popular today as they were in Elizabethan times; they still draw avid fans to packed theaters. Shakespeare’s comedies and histories remain crowd-pleasing classics, but his tragedies are perhaps his most powerful plays. One of Shakespeare’s most famous tragedies is *The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet*, the story of two lovestruck teenagers from feuding families.

### Part 1: Characteristics of Shakespearean Tragedy

A **tragedy** is a drama that ends in catastrophe—most often death—for the main characters. Shakespearean tragedies, however, offer more than just despair; they also include comic moments that counter the overall seriousness of the plot. Familiarize yourself with the characters and dramatic conventions of Shakespearean tragedy before you begin reading *Romeo and Juliet*.

#### CHARACTERS

##### Tragic Hero

- is the **protagonist**, or central character—the one with whom audiences identify
- usually fails or dies because of a character flaw or a cruel twist of fate
- often has a high rank or status; shows strength while facing his or her destiny

##### Antagonist

- is the force working against the protagonist
- can be another character, a group of characters, or something nonhuman, such as nature or society

##### Foil

- is a character whose personality and attitude contrast sharply with those of another character
- highlights both characters’ traits—for example, a timid character can make a talkative one seem even chattier



#### DRAMATIC CONVENTIONS

##### Soliloquy

- is a speech given by a character alone on stage
- lets the audience know what the character is thinking or feeling

##### Aside

- is a character’s remark, either to the audience or to another character, that others on stage do not hear
- reveals the character’s private thoughts

##### Dramatic Irony

- is when the audience knows more than the characters—for example, the audience is aware of Romeo and Juliet’s tragic demise long before the characters themselves face it
- helps build suspense

##### Comic Relief

- is a humorous scene or speech intended to lighten the mood
- serves to heighten the seriousness of the main action by contrast

## MODEL 1: CHARACTER IN TRAGEDY

In this excerpt, Romeo—the young protagonist of the play and a member of the Montague family—complains to his cousin, Benvolio, about a problem that is plaguing him. What do you learn about Romeo’s personality?

## COMMON CORE

**RL 2** Provide an objective summary of a text. **RL 3** Analyze how complex characters develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme.

### from **Act One, SCENE I**

Lines 153–161

**Benvolio.** Good morrow, cousin.

**Romeo.** Is the day so young?

**Benvolio.** But new struck nine.

**Romeo.** Ay me! sad hours seem long.

155 Was that my father that went hence so fast?

**Benvolio.** It was. What sadness lengthens Romeo’s hours?

**Romeo.** Not having that which having makes them short.

**Benvolio.** In love?

**Romeo.** Out—

160 **Benvolio.** Of love?

**Romeo.** Out of her favor where I am in love.

## Close Read

1. What is Romeo experiencing that most readers could relate to?
2. What possible weakness or flaw does Romeo’s attitude hint at?

## MODEL 2: SOLILOQUY

Through this soliloquy, readers gain access to the thoughts and feelings of Juliet, a Capulet and therefore a hated enemy of any Montague.

### from **Act Three, SCENE 2**

Lines 20–31

20 **Juliet.** . . . Come, gentle night; come, loving, black-browed night;

Give me my Romeo; and, when he shall die,

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

25 And pay no worship to the garish sun.

O, I have bought the mansion of a love,

But not possessed it; and though I am sold,

Not yet enjoyed. So tedious is this day

As is the night before some festival

30 To an impatient child that hath new robes

And may not wear them. . . .

## Close Read

1. What does the imagery in lines 20–25 reveal about Juliet’s feelings for Romeo?
2. Reread the boxed text. What is Juliet’s mood as she waits for Romeo? Point out specific words and details that reveal her state of mind.

## Part 2: The Language of Shakespeare

Shakespeare's plays deal with experiences and emotions that are easy to relate to, but his language can be challenging for modern readers to decipher. However, once you get past the play's unfamiliar language, learn the rhythm of its poetry, and discover how to decode Shakespeare's allusions and puns, you will come to appreciate the romance, drama, and humor that await you.

### BLANK VERSE

Shakespeare wrote his plays primarily in **blank verse**, the form of poetry that most resembles natural speech. Blank verse is made up of unrhymed lines of **iambic pentameter**, a type of meter that has five unstressed syllables (˘), each followed by a stressed syllable (ˊ). Read the following lines aloud, making sure to emphasize each stressed syllable:

*Yet tell me not, for I have heard it all.*

*Here's much to do with hate but more with love.*

While this pattern is the general rule, it is often broken. Variations in the rhythm prevent the play from sounding monotonous. Breaks in the pattern also help to emphasize important ideas or dramatic moments. As you read, pay close attention to places where characters speak in rhyming poetry instead of unrhymed prose.

### ALLUSION AND WORD PLAY

An **allusion** is a reference, within a work, to something that the audience is expected to know. Shakespeare's audience was familiar with Greek and Roman mythology as well as the Bible, so he sprinkled references to these works throughout his plays. In this romantic tragedy, Shakespeare included allusions to Venus, the Roman goddess of love.

Shakespeare was also a master of clever **puns**, or jokes that result from multiple word meanings or rhyming sounds. In Act One, a depressed Romeo puns on two meanings of the word *light* when he offers to carry a torch: "Being but heavy, I will bear the light."

### ELIZABETHAN WORDS TO KNOW

Chances are you don't need an Elizabethan glossary to figure out that *dost* means "does." Other words and expressions, however, can prove more of a challenge. Here is a list of words that you should expect to encounter often as you read:

**'a:** he.

**an, and:** if.

**anon:** soon; right away.

**ought:** anything.

**coz:** short for *cousin*; used to refer to relatives or close friends.

**ere:** before.

**e'er:** ever.

**god-den:** good evening.

**God gi' go-den:** God give you a good evening.

**hence:** from here.

**hie:** hurry.

**hither:** here.

**marry:** a short form of "by the Virgin Mary" and so a mild exclamation.

**morrow:** morning.

**naught:** nothing.

**o'er:** over.

**prithce:** pray thee, or please.

**sirrah:** a term used to address a servant.

**soft:** be still; quiet; wait a minute.

**thither:** there.

**whence:** where.

**wherefore:** why.

**wot:** know.

**yond, yonder:** over there.

**MODEL 1: BLANK VERSE**

The fact that Shakespeare wrote in verse should not intimidate you. Since iambic pentameter is fairly close to English speech patterns, it can be spoken naturally, without much awkwardness. Read the following excerpt aloud to get a feel for its rhythm.

from **Act Two, SCENE 2**

Lines 2–6

But soft! What light through yonder window breaks?  
 It is the East, and Juliet is the sun!  
 Arise, fair sun, and kill the envious moon,  
 5 Who is already sick and pale with grief  
 That thou her maid art far more fair than she.

**Close Read**

1. Reread the excerpt, tapping your foot at each stressed syllable. How many stressed syllables are in each line?
2. Point out a place where the pattern breaks. One example has been boxed. What ideas are emphasized by these variations in rhythm?

**MODEL 2: ALLUSION AND WORD PLAY**

For a tragedy, *Romeo and Juliet* contains quite a bit of humor. In the first two acts, much of the comedy comes courtesy of Mercutio, who clowns around, trying to make his friend Romeo laugh. Look for several puns and an allusion in this comic conversation.

from **Act One, SCENE 4**

Lines 13–22

**Mercutio.** Nay, gentle Romeo, we must have you dance.  
**Romeo.** Not I, believe me. You have dancing shoes  
 15 With nimble soles; I have a soul of lead  
 So stokes me to the ground I cannot move.  
**Mercutio.** You are a lover. Borrow Cupid's wings  
 And soar with them above a common bound.  
**Romeo.** I am too sore enpierced with his shaft  
 20 To soar with his light feathers, and so bound  
 I cannot bound a pitch above dull woe.  
 Under love's heavy burden do I sink.

**Close Read**

1. Identify the allusion in this excerpt, and describe the mental image it conjures up for you. Why do you think Shakespeare included this reference?
2. One example of a pun has been boxed. Find one other example and explain the play on words.

## Part 3: Reading Shakespearean Drama

As you read *Romeo and Juliet*, you will encounter tools and strategies on every page. The following tips will show you how to make the most of them:

### READING DRAMA

- Study the opening **cast of characters** to see who's in the play.
- Read the **stage directions** to find out where a scene takes place as well as who's on stage and what they're doing. Stage directions in *Romeo and Juliet* are minimal, so you'll sometimes have to infer what's happening from the dialogue.
- Visualize the setting and the action by noting key details in the stage directions and the **synopsis** at the beginning of every scene.

### READING SHAKESPEAREAN TRAGEDY

- Keep track of the characters' relationships, such as whether they are friends, relatives, or enemies. Also think about what role a character has—tragic hero, antagonist, foil, or comic relief. This will help you interpret his or her speech and actions.
- Note important character traits revealed through **dialogue**, **soliloquies**, and **asides** as well as the action. Consider whether the characters exhibit any flaws or weaknesses.
- Look for cause-and-effect relationships between events, especially those events that lead to the tragic outcome. Track them in a graphic like the one shown.

### READING SHAKESPEARE'S LANGUAGE

- Use the **marginal notes** to help you figure out unfamiliar words and unusual sentence structures. In a chart like this one, record difficult lines and then rephrase them to read like modern speech.
- To help clarify their meaning, **paraphrase** passages and **summarize** events, ideas, and themes. Use your own words to retell what is happening and what it means, without including your own opinions.
- Just as when you read poetry, don't automatically stop reading when you come to the end of a line. Look carefully at each line's punctuation and consider the meaning of the complete sentence or phrase.

### STRATEGIES IN ACTION

#### KEY DETAILS IN A SYNOPSIS

#### Act One

##### SCENE 1 *A public square in Verona.*

*As the scene opens, two young Capulet servants swagger across the stage, joking and bragging. When they happen to meet servants from the rival house of Montague, a quarrel begins that grows into an ugly street fight.*

#### Cause

*As part of a plan to cheer up Romeo, Benvolio and other Montagues bring him to a party that the Capulets are throwing.*



#### Effect

*At the party, Romeo sees Juliet for the first time and falls madly in love.*

Text	What It Really Says	What It Means
<i>"O Romeo, Romeo! wherefore art thou Romeo?" Juliet, Act Two, Scene 2, line 33</i>	<i>"Why are you Romeo?"</i>	<i>Why do you have to be a Montague, an enemy of my family?</i>



**MODEL: READING SHAKESPEAREAN DRAMA**

This fight scene takes place in a public square in Verona, the city in which the play is set. Sampson and Gregory, servants of the Capulets, have gotten into a heated argument with Abram and Balthasar, servants of the Montagues. Use the strategies you learned on the preceding page and what you already know about tragedy to analyze this episode.

from **Act ONE, SCENE I**

Lines 51–67

[Enter Benvolio, nephew of Montague and first cousin of Romeo.]

**Gregory** [aside to Sampson]. Say “better.” Here comes one of my master’s kinsmen.

**Sampson.** Yes, better, sir.

**Abram.** You lie.

55 **Sampson.** Draw, if you be men. Gregory, remember thy swashing blow.

[They fight.]

**Benvolio.** Part, fools! [beats down their swords]

Put up your swords. You know not what you do.

[Enter Tybalt, hot-headed nephew of Lady Capulet and first cousin of Juliet.]

**Tybalt.** What, art thou drawn among these heartless hinds?

60 Turn thee, Benvolio! look upon thy death.

**Benvolio.** I do but keep the peace. Put up thy sword, Or manage it to part these men with me.

**Tybalt.** What, drawn, and talk of peace? I hate the word

As I hate hell, all Montagues, and thee.

65 Have at thee, coward!

[They fight.]

[Enter several of both houses, who join the fray; then enter Citizens and Peace Officers, with clubs.]

**Officer.** Clubs, bills, and partisans! Strike! beat them down!

**Citizens.** Down with the Capulets! Down with the Montagues!

**51–52** Gregory notices that Tybalt, a Capulet, is arriving.

**59–65** Tybalt does not understand that Benvolio is trying to stop the fight. He challenges Benvolio.

**59 heartless hinds:** cowardly servants.

**63 drawn:** with your sword out.

**65 Have at thee:** Defend yourself.

**66 bills, and partisans:** spears.

**Close Read**

1. First, read through this excerpt. Then describe the setting, characters, and action you visualized as you read. Cite details from the dialogue and stage directions that helped you form a mental image.
2. What is Benvolio trying to do when Tybalt enters? Support your answer.
3. Using the marginal notes as necessary, paraphrase Tybalt’s speech in the boxed lines. Why does Tybalt hate Benvolio so much?
4. How would you characterize Tybalt on the basis of this excerpt? In what way is he different from Benvolio? Cite details from the text to support your answer.

## Part 4: Analyze the Text

Apply the skills you've learned in this workshop as you analyze a longer excerpt from the beginning of the tragedy. This scene takes place at a costume party hosted by the Capulets. Disguised by their masks, Romeo and other Montagues have crashed the party. The important moment that follows—when Romeo notices Juliet from across the room and falls in love at first sight—sets the course of tragic events in motion.

from **ACT ONE, SCENE 5**

Lines 14–62

[Maskers *appear with* Capulet, Lady Capulet, Juliet, *all the* Guests, *and* Servants.]

**Capulet.** Welcome, gentlemen! Ladies that have their toes

- 15 Unplagued with corns will have a bout with you.  
Ah ha, my mistresses! which of you all  
Will now deny to dance? She that makes dainty,  
She I'll swear hath corns. Am I come near ye now?  
Welcome, gentlemen! I have seen the day  
20 That I have worn a visor and could tell  
A whispering tale in a fair lady's ear,  
Such as would please. 'Tis gone, 'tis gone, 'tis gone!  
You are welcome, gentlemen! Come, musicians, play.  
A hall, a hall! give room! and foot it, girls.

[*Music plays and they dance.*]

- 25 More light, you knaves! and turn the tables up,  
And quench the fire, the room is grown too hot.  
Ah, sirrah, this unlooked-for sport comes well.  
Nay, sit, nay, sit, good cousin Capulet,  
For you and I are past our dancing days.  
30 How long is't now since last yourself and I  
Were in a mask?

**Second Capulet.** By'r Lady, thirty years.

**Capulet.** What, man? 'Tis not so much, 'tis not so much!

**14–27** Capulet welcomes his guests and invites them all to dance. At the same time, like a good host, he is trying to get the party going. He alternates talking with his guests and telling the servants what to do.

**17–18** *She that . . . corns:* Any woman too shy to dance will be assumed to have corns, ugly and painful growths on the toes.

**20** *visor:* mask.

**28–38** Capulet and his relative watch the dancing as they talk of days gone by.

### Close Read

1. Choose a passage with several unfamiliar or Elizabethan words. Paraphrase the passage, using the marginal notes and the word list on page 1024 as necessary.
2. Consider Capulet's behavior toward his guests and his treatment of his servants. How would you describe Capulet? Support your answer with details from the text.

'Tis since the nuptial of Lucentio,  
Come Pentecost as quickly as it will,  
35 Some five-and-twenty years, and then we masked.

**Second Capulet.** 'Tis more, 'tis more! His son is elder,  
sir;  
His son is thirty.

**Capulet.** Will you tell me that?  
His son was but a ward two years ago.

**Romeo** [*to a Servingman*]. What lady's that, which  
doth enrich the hand  
40 Of yonder knight?

**Servant.** I know not, sir.

**Romeo.** O, she doth teach the torches to burn  
bright!  
It seems she hangs upon the cheek of night  
Like a rich jewel in an Ethiop's ear—  
45 Beauty too rich for use, for earth too dear!  
So shows a snowy dove trooping with crows  
As yonder lady o'er her fellows shows.  
The measure done, I'll watch her place of stand  
And, touching hers, make blessed my rude hand.  
50 Did my heart love till now? Forswear it, sight!  
For I ne'er saw true beauty till this night.

**Tybalt.** This, by his voice, should be a Montague.  
Fetch me my rapier, boy. What, dares the slave  
Come hither, covered with an antic face,  
55 To flear and scorn at our solemnity?  
Now, by the stock and honor of my kin,  
To strike him dead I hold it not a sin.

**Capulet.** Why, how now, kinsman? Wherefore storm  
you so?

**Tybalt.** Uncle, this is a Montague, our foe;  
60 A villain, that is hither come in spite,  
To scorn at our solemnity this night.

**Capulet.** Young Romeo is it?

**Tybalt.** 'Tis he, that villain Romeo.

**33 nuptial:** marriage.

**39–40** Romeo has spotted Juliet across the dance floor and is immediately entranced by her beauty.

**44–45 Ethiop's ear:** the ear of an Ethiopian (African); **for earth too dear:** too precious for this world.

**52–57** Tybalt recognizes Romeo's voice and tells his servant to get his sword (**rapier**). He thinks Romeo has come to make fun of (**flear**) their party.

### Close Read

- Reread the boxed text. How is the pattern of Romeo's smitten speech different from the pattern of earlier lines in this scene?
- Reread lines 52–57. What does Tybalt want to do to Romeo? Explain what has made Tybalt so enraged.
- Tybalt is just one of many antagonists working against Romeo and Juliet. Cite details that reveal Tybalt's searing hatred of Romeo.
- Given what you know about the characters' personalities, what do you think might happen next between Romeo and Tybalt? Support your prediction with evidence.