

List of characters

CHORUS

The house of Capulet

JULIET
 CAPULET her father
 LADY CAPULET her mother
 TYBALT her cousin
 NURSE to Juliet
 PETER the Nurse's servant
 COUSIN CAPULET Juliet's kinsman
 SAMPSON servant to Capulet
 GREGORY servant to Capulet
 CLOWN servant to Capulet
 PETRUCHIO Tybalt's friend

The house of Montague

ROMEO
 MONTAGUE his father
 LADY MONTAGUE his mother
 BENVOLIO his friend
 BALTHASAR his servant
 ABRAM Montague's servant

The Court

ESCALES Prince of Verona
 MERCUTIO his kinsman, Romeo's friend
 PARIS his kinsman, suitor to Juliet
 PAGE to Paris

The Church

FRIAR LAWRENCE Franciscan priest
 FRIAR JOHN Franciscan priest

The City

Musicians, Gentlemen and Gentlewomen, Maskers, Torch-bearers,
 Citizens and Officers of the Watch, Captain of the Watch

Mantua

An apothecary

The Play is set in Verona and Mantua



Chorus (a narrator) gives a preview of the play: the bitter quarrels of the Montagues and Capulets are ended only by the death of their children, Romeo and Juliet.

1 Chorus speaks the Prologue (in threes)

The role of the Chorus originated in classical Greek drama over two thousand years ago. Back then, the Chorus was a group of characters who took no actual part in the play, but who introduced it and commented on the action as it developed. Deciding how to play the Chorus can be a challenge for directors of *Romeo and Juliet*, as the main elements and outcomes of the plot are clearly explained before the play even begins.



In the production pictured here, the actor playing Prince Escalus delivered the Chorus's lines, giving him the first and last words in the play. In another production, the Prologue was delivered collaboratively by the whole cast.

- In groups of three, talk about how well you think these ideas would work and then come up with some other ideas for staging the Prologue. After the discussion, offer your most unusual suggestion to the class.

alike in dignity equal in high status

ancient grudge

long-standing quarrel or dispute

civil blood ... unclean

the blood of the people dirties the hands of their fellows

From forth ... foes conceived by deadly enemies

star-crossed ill-fated

take their life are born

misadventured ... overthrows

unlucky tragic accidents

fearful passage tragic unfolding

nought nothing

traffic business, performance

shall miss is missed out

toil efforts

mend make up for

Language in the play

Antithesis (in pairs)

The Prologue is written in the form of a fourteen-line **sonnet** (see p. 216). A key feature of such poems – and of this play – is the use of **antithesis** (see p. 215), or oppositions, especially in the type of language Shakespeare uses. Here, Montagues are set against Capulets ('Two households'), and in line 3 'ancient' is set against 'new'. The remaining eleven lines contain several other antitheses.

- Take turns reading aloud lines 1–14. As one person reads, the other listens out for examples of antithesis and writes them down. Swap roles and compare notes.
- Start a Language file and give one of the sections the heading 'Antithesis'. Collect examples and add to this list as you read on.

The tragedy of Romeo and Juliet

The Prologue

Enter CHORUS.

Two households, both alike in dignity,
In fair Verona (where we lay our scene),
From ancient grudge break to new mutiny,
Where civil blood makes civil hands unclean.
From forth the fatal loins of these two foes 5
A pair of star-crossed lovers take their life;
Whose misadventured piteous overthrows
Doth with their death bury their parents' strife.
The fearful passage of their death-marked love,
And the continuance of their parents' rage, 10
Which but their children's end nought could remove,
Is now the two hours' traffic of our stage;
The which if you with patient ears attend,
What here shall miss, our toil shall strive to mend. [Exit]



Capulet's servants, Sampson and Gregory, joke together and boast that they are superior to the Montagues. Suddenly two of Montague's servants appear. Sampson urges Gregory to pick a quarrel with them.

1 Servants' banter (in pairs)

The play begins with Capulet's servants, Gregory and Sampson, joking about sex and women.

- a Read lines 1–36 aloud together several times, changing roles. Try to emphasise all Sampson's and Gregory's wordplay – their **puns** (words that sound the same but have different meanings, see p. 218) and double meanings. For example, in lines 3–4 Sampson's 'we be in choler, we'll draw' means 'being angry, we'll draw our swords'. But Gregory's reply, 'draw your neck out of collar', turns the meaning into 'pull your head out of the hangman's noose' ('choler' = anger; 'collar' = noose). In addition, 'stand', 'thrust', 'maidenheads', 'tool' and 'weapon' all have crude double meanings.
- b Talk together about why you think Shakespeare chose to begin the play with this kind of dramatic episode. Write a paragraph each, summarising your thoughts. Afterwards, swap your writing with another pair to read and comment on.

Stagecraft

Set the scene

At the beginning of each scene, a location is given (here it is 'Verona A public place'). But in Shakespeare's theatre the action took place on a bare stage, with little or no scenery.

- a Look at the illustration in the '*Romeo and Juliet* in performance' section on page 220, showing the interior of Shakespeare's Globe. Suggest two or three simple ways in which you could convey to the audience that the scene in the script opposite takes place in the open air in Verona. Then think about where you might set this scene in a modern production. For example, Baz Luhrmann's movie version places the action in Verona Beach, a mythical modern Hispanic-American city. One modern theatre production was set on a volcanic fault line that constantly generated fire and steam 'to represent the ever-present threat of violence'.
- b As you read on, look out for and make notes on the way in which Shakespeare alternates scenes that are played out in public arenas and those that have intimate domestic settings.

bucklers small round shields

carry coals suffer insults, do dirty work

colliers coal-carriers (or a term of abuse)

and if

take the wall not be near the gutter

thrust to the wall cowardly, dominated

The quarrel ... men the dispute is just between men (no women are involved)

fish woman or prostitute (slang)

poor-John dried hake, cheap food that Elizabethans linked with lack of sex-drive

two other SERVINGMEN Abram and, probably, Balthasar

naked weapon sword

Act 1 Scene 1


Verona A public place

Enter SAMPSON and GREGORY, with swords and bucklers.

- SAMPSON Gregory, on my word, we'll not carry coals.
- GREGORY No, for then we should be colliers.
- SAMPSON I mean, and we be in choler, we'll draw.
- GREGORY Ay, while you live, draw your neck out of collar.
- SAMPSON I strike quickly, being moved. 5
- GREGORY But thou art not quickly moved to strike.
- SAMPSON A dog of the house of Montague moves me.
- GREGORY To move is to stir, and to be valiant is to stand: therefore if thou art moved thou runn'st away.
- SAMPSON A dog of that house shall move me to stand: I will take the wall of any man or maid of Montague's. 10
- GREGORY That shows thee a weak slave, for the weakest goes to the wall.
- SAMPSON 'Tis true, and therefore women being the weaker vessels are ever thrust to the wall: therefore I will push Montague's men from the wall, and thrust his maids to the wall. 15
- GREGORY The quarrel is between our masters, and us their men.
- SAMPSON 'Tis all one, I will show myself a tyrant: when I have fought with the men, I will be civil with the maids; I will cut off their heads. 20
- GREGORY The heads of the maids?
- SAMPSON Ay, the heads of the maids, or their maidenheads, take it in what sense thou wilt.
- GREGORY They must take it in sense that feel it.
- SAMPSON Me they shall feel while I am able to stand, and 'tis known I am a pretty piece of flesh. 25
- GREGORY 'Tis well thou art not fish; if thou hadst, thou hadst been poor-John. Draw thy tool, here comes of the house of Montagues.

Enter two other SERVINGMEN, [one being ABRAM].

- SAMPSON My naked weapon is out. Quarrel, I will back thee.
- GREGORY How, turn thy back and run? 30

 Sampson and Gregory begin a quarrel with the Montagues. Benvolio (a Montague) tries to make peace, but Tybalt (a Capulet) adds flames to the fire, seizing the opportunity to fight.



Stagecraft

Stage fight (in pairs)

Would you make the street fight ritualised and symbolic (as above) or brutally realistic (for example, one production had a servant’s bloodied head smashed against a wall of the set; it remained evident throughout the performance)? Weigh up the merits of both approaches. Which do you think would have the greater impact in the theatre? Why? In your pairs, come up with some alternative ways of staging this fight.

Themes

Love versus hate (in small groups)

Shakespeare’s plays contain many themes (key ideas or concepts that run throughout the script). Often these are presented in the form of tensions or oppositions, one set against another. *Romeo and Juliet* is famous for being a great love story, but in this first scene the Montague and Capulet servants engage in a violent fight.

- Suggest two or three reasons why Shakespeare might have decided to begin the play with a scene of hatred and anger rather than love.

1 Benvolio versus Tybalt (in pairs)

Benvolio’s first words in the play (‘Part, fools!’) are an attempt to halt the riot that has developed between the Montagues and the Capulets. Tybalt seeks only to inflame it (his second line threatens death to Benvolio).

- Take parts as the two men and read aloud lines 54–63, emphasising their contrasting attitudes. Then perform the parts, adding actions that fit the language. Afterwards, in role as Benvolio and Tybalt, write down your thoughts about each other’s behaviour:

Fear me not don’t worry about my support
marry indeed (a mild oath based on a corruption of ‘Virgin Mary’)
as they list as they wish
bite my thumb a rude gesture in Elizabethan times
sir (repeatedly spoken contemptuously)

kinsmen relatives

washing slashing

hinds young female deer; Tybalt is punning on ‘heart’ (hart = a male deer), mocking Benvolio for fighting with servants (see p. 218)

manage handle

Have at thee here I come



SAMPSON Fear me not.
 GREGORY No, marry, I fear thee!
 SAMPSON Let us take the law of our sides, let them begin.
 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 35
 disgrace to them if they bear it.
 ABRAM Do you bite your thumb at us, sir?
 SAMPSON I do bite my thumb, sir.
 ABRAM Do you bite your thumb at us, sir?
 SAMPSON [*Aside to Gregory*] Is the law of our side if I say ay? 40
 GREGORY [*Aside to Sampson*] No.
 SAMPSON No, sir, I do not bite my thumb at you, sir, but I bite my
 thumb, sir.
 GREGORY Do you quarrel, sir?
 ABRAM Quarrel, sir? No, sir. 45
 SAMPSON But if you do, sir, I am for you. I serve as good a man as
 you.
 ABRAM No better.
 SAMPSON Well, sir.

Enter BENVOLIO.

GREGORY [*Aside to Sampson*] Say 'better', here comes one of my 50
 master's kinsmen.
 SAMPSON Yes, better, sir.
 ABRAM You lie.
 SAMPSON Draw, if you be men. Gregory, remember thy washing blow.
 They fight.
 BENVOLIO Part, fools! 55
 Put up your swords, you know not what you do.
 [*Beats down their swords.*]

Enter TYBALT.

TYBALT What, art thou drawn among these heartless hinds?
 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. 60
 TYBALT What, drawn and talk of peace? I hate the word,
 As I hate hell, all Montagues, and thee.
 Have at thee, coward.
 [*They fight.*]



A furious riot develops. Capulet and Montague join in. Prince Escalus, angry and exasperated, stops the fight. He rebukes Montague and Capulet, and threatens death if they fight in public again.

1 A snapshot at the height of the riot (in large groups)

Each group member takes a part. There are at least eleven speaking characters so far. You can add as many other servants and officers as you wish. Use the hall or drama studio if you can, but this activity will work just as well in the classroom if you clear some space.

- Each group prepares and presents a tableau (a 'human sculpture', like a still photograph) showing the height of the riot at line 72, 'Rebellious subjects, enemies to peace'. Your tableau should show precisely what each character is doing at that moment. This means thinking carefully about what your character has said so far, then 'freezing' as that person at this moment in the riot. Remember, each character is doing something in relation to other characters, so try to show those relationships. For example, both Lady Capulet and Lady Montague seem to rebuke and mock their husbands. It will take time to think out, experiment with and then present the most dramatic picture.
- Hold your tableau for at least sixty seconds – with no movement at all. The other groups spend that time working out exactly who is who.

Language in the play

The all-powerful Prince (in fours)

The Prince is a figure of absolute power and authority. His language is suitably elaborate and impressive (e.g. bloodstained swords are 'neighbour-stained steel').

- Identify other examples of the Prince's striking way of speaking, then compare his language style with the way the servants speak at the start of the scene. What differences do you notice?
- Write notes advising an actor playing the Prince how to speak the different sections of his speech opposite.

Clubs, bills, and partisans

weapons: bills are long-handled pikes, partisans are long, broad-headed spears

in his gown in his dressing-gown (i.e. he's just been woken up)

in spite of me in order to spite me

train attendants to the Prince

Profaners abusers (because they stain their swords with their neighbours' blood)

pernicious wicked

mistempered disorderly or badly made

movèd angry

airy empty, hollow

Cast by throw aside

grave beseeching ornaments marks of respect, staffs of office (or aids for the elderly)

Cankered ... cankered rusted ... diseased



*Enter [several of both houses, who join the fray, and] three or four
 Citizens [as OFFICERS of the Watch,] with clubs or partisans.*

OFFICERS Clubs, bills, and partisans! Strike! Beat them down!
 Down with the Capulets! Down with the Montagues! 65

Enter old CAPULET in his gown, and his wife [LADY CAPULET].

CAPULET What noise is this? Give me my long sword, ho!

LADY CAPULET A crutch, a crutch! why call you for a sword?

CAPULET My sword, I say! old Montague is come,
 And flourishes his blade in spite of me.

Enter old MONTAGUE and his wife [LADY MONTAGUE].

MONTAGUE Thou villain Capulet! – Hold me not, let me go. 70

LADY MONTAGUE Thou shalt not stir one foot to seek a foe.

Enter PRINCE ESCALES with his train.

PRINCE Rebellious subjects, enemies to peace,
 Profaners of this neighbour-stained steel –
 Will they not hear? – What ho, you men, you beasts!
 That quench the fire of your pernicious rage 75

 With purple fountains issuing from your veins:
 On pain of torture, from those bloody hands
 Throw your mistempered weapons to the ground,
 And hear the sentence of your movèd prince.

 Three civil brawls, bred of an airy word, 80

 By thee, old Capulet, and Montague,
 Have thrice disturbed the quiet of our streets,
 And made Verona's ancient citizens

 Cast by their grave beseeeming ornaments
 To wield old partisans, in hands as old, 85

 Cankered with peace, to part your cankered hate;
 If ever you disturb our streets again,
 Your lives shall pay the forfeit of the peace.

 For this time all the rest depart away:
 You, Capulet, shall go along with me, 90

 And, Montague, come you this afternoon,
 To know our farther pleasure in this case,
 To old Free-town, our common judgement-place.
 Once more, on pain of death, all men depart.

Exeunt [all but Montague, Lady Montague, and Benvolio]



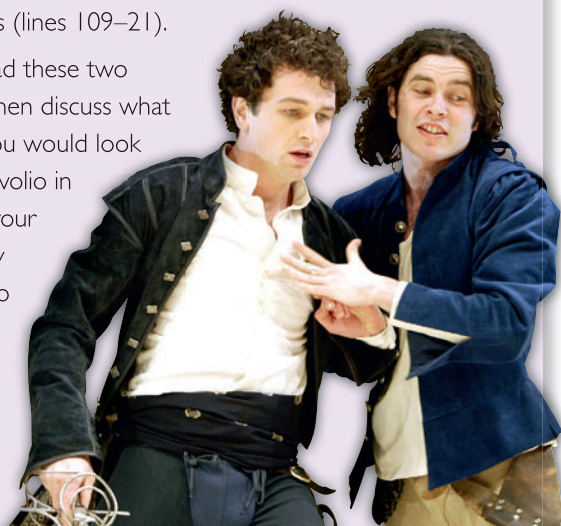
Benvolio recounts the story of the riot. He tells Lady Montague how Romeo has avoided meeting him. Lord Montague confirms that Romeo has been keeping to himself, preferring night to day.

Characters

Focus on Benvolio (in pairs)

Benvolio's name means 'well-wishing' (the opposite of Malvolio in *Twelfth Night*, whose name means 'ill-wishing'). Benvolio seems to be a peacekeeper. He has already tried to stop the street brawling. Now he recounts to the parents of his good friend Romeo how the riot unfolded (lines 97–106) and describes Romeo's current dejectedness (lines 109–21).

- Take turns to read these two groups of lines, then discuss what characteristics you would look for in casting Benvolio in a production of your own. How closely does this Benvolio (on the right in the picture) match your own ideas for this character?



abroach open and flowing like a wine-barrel

adversary enemy

ere before

drew drew my sword

nothing hurt withal
not hurt in the slightest

fray affray, riot

abroad outside

sycamore tree associated with melancholy lovers

ware wary, aware

covert concealment

shunned avoided

augmenting adding to

Aurora Roman goddess of dawn

heavy sad, melancholy

pens shuts

portentous ominous

humour mood

Write about it

Lord and Lady Montague (in pairs)

In pairs, take one of the following activities each.

- Lady Montague speaks only two lines, then is silent. The fact that she never speaks again in the play suggests the powerlessness of women in Verona. Step into role as Lady Montague and break her silence by writing a **monologue**, in which she expresses her previously unspoken thoughts about Romeo, her husband, the feud with the Capulets and the fight she has just witnessed.
- Lord Montague describes Romeo's current perplexing behaviour (lines 122–33 and 137–46). Write an additional monologue for Lord Montague, in which he voices his thoughts about his son and considers Romeo's reluctance to talk to him.

Read aloud your monologues to each other in ways that bring out Lord and Lady Montague's contrasting attitudes and perspectives.