



HOUSTON
SHAKESPEARE
FESTIVAL

ONE ROLE, TWO ACTORS: Juliet

Romeo & Juliet Intentionality: An Actor's Choice

Curriculum Authors: Laura B. Turchi, Abbey Bachmann, and Cori Stevenson

Approximate timeline: 70 minutes – see sequence

TEKS (9th Grade)

E1.4 Reading/Comprehension of Literary Text/Drama.

Students understand, make inferences and draw conclusions about the structure and elements of drama and provide evidence from text to support their understanding.

E1.25 Listening and Speaking/Speaking.

Students speak clearly and to the point, using the conventions of language. Students will continue to apply earlier standards with greater complexity. Students are expected to give presentations using informal, formal, and technical language effectively to meet the needs of audience, purpose, and occasion, employing eye contact, speaking rate (e.g., pauses for effect), volume, enunciation, purposeful gestures, and conventions of language to communicate ideas effectively

Overview (notes for the teacher)

Thinking about oral fluency. When students read aloud during class time, you've probably urged them to read with expression and fluency. This lesson will support their understanding of what that means: what students can do with their voices and possibly gestures that will help both the reader and listener make more sense of a scene or speech.

One goal for this lesson (in addition to exploring Shakespeare's text together) is for students to think about how an actor thinks about creating and performing a character. There are many intentional decisions that actors make about how to speak and gesture when they act a part. These are decisions that students can also make when they read aloud. Student actors might even tell one another to "put some feeling into it" or "say it like you mean it" or "make it come alive." This video is intended to help students read aloud with some dramatic techniques.

Teachers may want to discuss the differences between reading aloud in class and acting in a play or movie. It's good to think about memorization, practice, performance, and other aspects of the actor's craft.

What is this scene about?

In this aria, Juliet is speaking to herself, or perhaps to the universe, about this new and powerful emotion of love – love at first sight – that she is experiencing.

Even though Romeo is in this scene (hiding below Juliet's balcony), *nothing that Juliet says in this aria is directly addressed to him*. That said, some theater companies perform this scene as if Juliet might know, or might suspect, that Romeo is nearby. After all, as soon as she finishes this aria, he's going to reveal his presence. It can be a great discussion with students to consider how Juliet's speech might change if she does know he is there – but isn't admitting it.

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But this lesson assumes that Juliet is talking to herself. Does that make this speech, this aria, a soliloquy? Juliet is definitely facing the audience and saying things she would not say to anyone else in the play. It's useful to remind students that a play rarely uses a narrator to explain or describe what is happening or why. Instead, the characters need to express and explain their feelings to the audience directly.

If you're teaching the whole play

The scene (Romeo and Juliet 2.2) excerpted here is pivotal to the plot, and there are themes you may want students to explore, including the consequences of "love at first sight" and other passionate emotional connections (especially for adolescents). The two actors interviewed about this speech do a great job of explaining how they see this speech represents a key moment – Juliet's decision that she loves Romeo even though he is the son of her family's worst enemies – that will impact to the rest of the play. Do your students agree? Have your students thought about this as Juliet's *choice*? *The performances in this video will help your students think about Juliet's experience.*

If you're teaching just this excerpt

You can probably count on your students already knowing *something* about *Romeo and Juliet*. But rather than getting hung up on the plot, etc., this is a great speech to use to illustrate ways that Shakespeare's writing has influenced our contemporary language (your students probably know that "O Romeo, Romeo" is a famous cry of love and longing; do they also recognize the "saying" that a rose by any other name would smell as sweet?). You can use the two actors' perspective to focus on the craft of acting: the way that actors think about how they will perform a speech, and what the speech means (that they are trying to communicate).

Key Vocabulary

33 Wherefore - means *why*. It's not that Juliet wonders where Romeo is – but maybe she should, as he is nearby spying on her.

35 Be but sworn - is part of a double negative – as long as Romeo *will swear* his love, Juliet will give up being a Capulet.

45 Owes - means *has*, or *possesses*, or *owns*. Juliet says Romeo is his own perfect self, even without his name.

48 Do off - means to *take off* or *remove*. Juliet wants Romeo to trade his name in return for all of her love.

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Additional information and ideas for teachers

Because this lesson is based on dramatic performance, this is a great opportunity to start a conversation – or even a collaboration – with a drama teacher.

And here's a music connection: theater people call this speech an *aria* because, like in an opera or oratorio in classical music, it is a formal expressive piece for one performer. The Metropolitan Opera explains that, "arias mostly appear during a pause in dramatic action when a character is reflecting on their emotions," and in this scene (in this lesson), Juliet is definitely thinking about how it feels to experience love at first sight. This video enables students to hear two actors talk about how they understand the speech, and to see how each performs it as a result.

Students will likely be tempted to say which actor they "like" or who they think is "better" at being Juliet. This is an important opportunity to help students support their opinions by looking carefully at performance. In the "mutual admiration society" section, the two actors model a process sometimes called a *critique*: they each describe very specific details in how the other actor is creating Juliet in the performance, especially through their voices.

Your students can think about and use some of these same terms:

Pitch: The vocal range from "low" to "high". It is the natural musical tone when a person speaks.

Tempo: The speed of a person when they speak.

Rhythm: The timing and pace of a spoken line, moment, or scene. It is always shifting in performance.

Energy: How an actor moves, the amount of force, and the mood expressed through movement.

Gesture: Physical movement of any part of the body to express idea, feeling, or mood.

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Materials needed for this lesson

Scripts (one-pagers for students in groups of three to mark on)
Access to video

LESSON SEQUENCE

Part 1: whole class instruction 10 minutes

- A. Students begin the class session with a five-minute freewrite on how, when they watch a movie or television show, they know that a character has just fallen in love. What does a person look like when he or she is suddenly in love?
- B. Teacher introduces the excerpt (students have individual copies or teacher projects the one-page text) – see context notes.
- C. Teacher reads the text aloud while students follow along. Check if there are any words that students don't know, or any words they find strange or difficult to pronounce.

Part 2: small groups (trios) 10 minutes

- A. Student trios – each person has a role: one reads aloud, one notates ideas on the script, one directs (deciding what should be emphasized and how the words should be read out loud). Students may rotate roles, but the goal should be to read the speech aloud at least three times.
- B. Groups should focus on noticing how lines/rhythm and punctuation causes the reader to change the tone and perhaps the speed. One group member is keeping notes on these decisions, so that the one who reads aloud will remember.

Part 3: individual writing 5 minutes

- A. After working through the speech and deciding how best to read it, students should complete individual writing in their notebooks or on notecards.
- B. What is this speech about? What are the most important words? Why?

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Part 4: whole class instruction (recommended that students stay in their groups) (20+ minutes)

- A. Watch video opening (10 minutes – see video timeline for details). Ask students what they notice about these two actors and how they are thinking about this speech and their ideas about who Juliet is and what she is thinking.
- B. Watch performances (3 minutes)
- C. Students discuss the performances in trios.
- D. Watch “mutual admiration society” (15 minutes)
- E. Have the class identify useful words (vocabulary) for how to talk about what students hear (and maybe see) in watching a performance

Part 5: Combine trios to create groups of 6 (10 minutes)

- A. At least one person for each trio (so two per group) read the speech out loud as the group has planned it.
- B. Students in groups of 6 discuss choices for performance and explain their reasoning.
- C. Students may choose to volunteer to perform the speech for the whole class.

Part 6: Whole class instruction (15 minutes)

- A. Class performance – any volunteers?
- B. Teacher should highlight insights from the different groups, using the terminology of acting choices
- C. Teacher should now put the speech back in the context of the play (if teaching the whole play, ask students to reflect on what Romeo is going to say to Juliet, given that he's heard her idea about him “doffing his name” and he has heard her declare his love for him.
- D. Extension: play clips from one or more other productions, such as Zeffereilli or Baz Lurhman productions.
- E. Final individual reflection – what have we learned about the craft of acting? Reflecting on other performances students have seen (movies, television, plays), What are some other techniques for depicting emotion, or strategies for making acting choices, that would be good to learn?

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VIDEO TIMELINE

Actors discuss staging and preparatory work: up to 9:50

Performance of the Aria: 9:55 actor 1 Madison Pettis as Juliet

Performance of the Aria: 11:05 actor 2 Rachel Cendrick as Juliet

Actors discuss each other's performances: 12:10 to end.

Preparatory work and the physical interpretation of a character.

The first nine minutes of this video focuses on where each actor performed the role of Juliet and how each thinks about this very important speech. The two actors describe their contrasting productions. The video is edited so the actors are trading back and forth about their different experiences

0:35 Madison about the stage for CO Shakespeare

0:48 Rachel about the stage in studio 208

1:28 Madison describes the CO production as like firecrackers

1:41 Rachel describes the intimate Studio 208 setting – the closeness of the audience

2:45 Madison talks about the saturated colors used for costuming in CO and the way these contributed to a “passionate” production

3:15 Rachel describes the minimal set for the Studio 208 stage

3:30 The actors describe the specific speech, “The Aria”: What launches it, and what inspires Juliet to say it.

3:43 Rachel describes how the scene was staged with Juliet standing on the balcony for a long time without saying anything (not knowing Romeo is there). This was because in this scene, when she is out on the balcony, she has a first opportunity to really breathe and think about what has happened to her (meeting Romeo).

4:35 Madison describes how this speech is where the audience understands that Romeo and Juliet have experienced love at first sight, and that they are soulmates.

5:01 Madison then discusses “the problem”: Juliet has met this really awesome guy and he’s the son of her enemy name: what can she do?

5:22 Rachel describes Juliet’s feeling in this scene as a big container of butterflies to be released.

6:00 Both actors are going to discuss the “big news” (or discovery) that this speech represents for Juliet, and what the consequences are for this character.

6:11 Madison describes that Juliet comes to understand that Romeo’s name is just a label (and thus unimportant).

6:25 Rachel says that the important discovery is in Juliet’s comparison of Romeo’s name to a rose (that would smell as sweet) – Juliet is happy to realize she is making a good point. “Doff your name” (Romeo doesn’t need his name) is thus the solution to the problem.

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VIDEO TIMELINE *continued*

7:28 Rachel explains that the audience needs to see this discovery (“this answer”) by Juliet

7:39 The actors discuss the aftermath of this discovery. They discuss this scene as evidence of Juliet’s choice to love Romeo. The actor’s job, says Rachel, is that the audience believes that she means it, that when she says “take all myself,” it is a declaration of great love, even after only the one encounter with Romeo.

9:20 Madison says the “Aftermath” is Romeo and Juliet will ultimately both choose to shake off the labels of their names – and thus the family feud.

9:36 Rachel asks rhetorically if Juliet knows this choice will cost her life? Rachel says no, but if even if she did know, she would still do it (give all for love).

Performances of the Aria

9:55 actor 1 Madison Pettis as Juliet

11:05 actor 2 Rachel Cendrick as Juliet

Discussion of performances

12:10 the Mutual Admiration Society is a section where the two actors talk about each other’s performance. Both actors use specific examples that can help the viewer understand the craft of acting.

Rachel on Madison described her Juliet as depicted with a mastery of pitch. Rachel imagines the Madison might have in her mind as she performs.

14:21 Rachel demonstrates what Madison did with pitch (going into different registers)

15:44 Rachel demonstrates what Madison did with tempo, and what lines she spoke the most quickly

Madison describes Rachel’s Juliet as it embodies what it means to be a young girl – full of feeling. Madison describes Rachel’s Juliet as coursing with energy and passion, and notices her freedom with the rhythm of the language in the performance. She also notices Rachel’s use of “oh” in this performance.

15:12 Madison notices how Rachel physically maps out what “Montague ‘wasn’t” – a name is not a physical trait.

16:35 very fast professional photos of the two actors [Cori – any additional available?]

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Act 2, Scene 2

JULIET

O Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo?

Deny thy father and refuse thy name,

Or, if thou wilt not, be but sworn my love,

And I'll no longer be a Capulet.

ROMEO, *aside*

Shall I hear more, or shall I speak at this?

JULIET

'Tis but thy name that is my enemy.

Thou art thyself, though not a Montague.

What's Montague? It is nor hand, nor foot,

Nor arm, nor face. O, be some other name

Belonging to a man.

What's in a name? That which we call a rose

By any other word would smell as sweet.

So Romeo would, were he not Romeo called,

Retain that dear perfection which he owes

Without that title. Romeo, doff thy name,

And, for thy name, which is no part of thee,

Take all myself.

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