

## Romeo and Juliet: Exploring Timeless Social Issues

<p><b>Grade Level: 9</b></p> <p><b>Character Education Focus: Respect, Responsibility, and Integrity</b></p> <p><b>Summary</b></p> <p>This lesson contains pre-reading and post-reading activities for Shakespeare’s <i>Romeo and Juliet</i>. Collaboratively students will evaluate, rank, and discuss timeless moral and ethical events central to the play. Students will reflect upon and defend their own thinking and beliefs. They will compare their responses before and after reading the play. (Two 50-minute class sessions)</p>	<p><b>Materials Needed</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A class set of <i>Romeo and Juliet</i> (any version)</li> <li>2. Baron’s <i>Romeo and Juliet Shakespeare Made Easy</i> (optional)</li> <li>3. “Before Reading the Play” handout</li> <li>4. “After Reading the Play” handout</li> </ol>
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### Academic - Character Education Objectives

Students will:

1. Evaluate, rank, and compare a series of social offenses dealing with moral and ethical situations.
2. Present and discuss textual evidence in order to persuade classmates of the reasoning behind their ranking choices.
3. Listen to arguments and determine how these affect their own thinking.
4. Reflect upon and articulate deficits of character in relation to social offenses.
5. Analyze, interpret, and evaluate the themes of the play and the actions of the play’s characters.
6. Analyze and evaluate the relationship of an individual’s character to the events that occur in his/her life.
7. Collaborate as a team member and take on a specific role to assist the group in functioning effectively
8. Process and assess their own contribution to the team and the group’s effectiveness as a whole.

### California English - Language Arts Standards Addressed

Reading

2.0 Reading Comprehension

2.5 Extend ideas presented in primary or secondary sources through original analysis, evaluation, and elaboration.

3.0 Literary Response and Analysis

3.2 Compare and contrast the presentation of a similar theme or topic across genres to explain how the selection of genre shapes the theme or topic.

Writing

2.0 Writing Applications

2.2 Write responses to literature:

a. Demonstrate a comprehensive grasp of the significant ideas of literary works.

- b. Support important ideas and viewpoints through accurate and detailed references to the text or to other works.

## Listening and Speaking

### 1.0 Listening and Speaking Strategies

#### Comprehension

- 1.1 Formulate judgments about the ideas under discussion and support those judgments with convincing evidence.

## Lesson Procedures

### Before Reading the Play

1. Arrange students into cooperative groups of three or four. Assign roles to group members to promote collaboration. Suggested roles are gatekeeper (who makes sure everyone participates), taskmaster (who makes sure the team stays on the topic), reflector (who makes sure the team occasionally reflects on its progress and its use of social skills), and a cheerleader (who makes sure the group stops and celebrates its accomplishments) (*Kagan 2004; Cooperative Roles p. 1*).
2. Distribute the handout “Before Reading the Play” to each student. First ask students to individually evaluate and rank the list of 14 social offenses in order of seriousness. Then they can continue to answer the questions related to character attributes at the bottom of the page. Tell students to be prepared to defend their decisions in their group discussion.
3. In their groups, ask students to discuss their rankings and provide reasons for their choices. Ask each group to identify the items for which their group finds the most difference of opinion. During their discussion, students may change their opinions based on the discussion of their group. Students then can discuss their answers to the questions.
4. If desired, ask each group to report out the highlights of their discussion to the whole class.

### After Reading the Play

After students have read and discussed the play and its themes use the following activity:

5. Arrange students in cooperative groups and assign roles for their discussion (see number one).
6. Distribute the handout “After Reading the Play” and first have students individually evaluate and rank in order of seriousness the 14 social offenses listed from the play. Then the group can discuss their responses, fulfilling their group roles throughout the discussion.

The key to this exercise is to determine if, after reading and discussing the play and the actions of the characters, the students change their ranking of the seriousness of the actions. Have students refer to the handout “Before Reading the Play” to do their comparisons of rank order. Ask students to give reasons to support their choices and provide evidence from the text to support their explanations.

7. Students then answer the questions that follow the ranking activity. These questions ask students to reflect on:
  - a. the seriousness of each offense and how these behaviors contribute to the outcome of the play
  - b. the relationship of an individual’s character to the events which occur to him or her in life, and
  - c. their beliefs about the role of fate in life versus the nature of an individual’s character.
8. If desired, ask each group to report out the highlights of their discussion to the whole class. Ask students to dialogue about alternative behaviors that could have been chosen in the play that would demonstrate respect, honesty, fairness, responsibility, loyalty, self-discipline, courtesy, trustworthiness and compassion.

## Academic–Character Education Assessment

For the small and large group discussions, assess group and individual preparation, participation, argument detail, use of textual evidence to support arguments and listening skills. The written assignments can be assessed for completeness, detail, use of evidence in the written responses, depth of analysis, and conventions of language. Additionally the Rubric for Writing in Response to Journal Prompts (see ICE lesson support material at <http://charactered.ocde.us/ICE/Lessons/index.asp>) can be used to assess in-class writing responses.

Students can also be assessed on their understanding of the following themes for *Romeo and Juliet*:

- Generation gap
- Uselessness of violence
- Stubbornness and pride leading to death and heartbreak
- The strength of young love
- The dangers of dishonesty
- Revenge leads to destruction
- Fate often controls lives

Students can develop an essay of literary analysis discussing how the lack of an individual's positive character traits may be related and contribute to specific tragic actions or outcomes of the play.

Assessment of cooperative skills can occur during class as the teacher monitors student groups and team roles while they work. To process the group work these prompts can be used:

- *What worked well in your group?*
- *What could have been improved?*
- *What did you contribute to the team's learning?*
- *How did the team contribute to your learning?*
- *How did team members show respect and responsibility?*
- *What other character traits did your team members demonstrate?*

## Reflective Journaling Prompts

- When you think of social offenses, what comes to mind? Provide concrete examples to support your thoughts.
- Look at the handout "Before Reading the Play." Which of the social offenses in the list would you never participate in under any circumstances? Why?
- Look at the handout "Before Reading the Play." Are there any social offenses listed that you might participate in without much difficulty? Explain.
- Look at the handout "Before Reading the Play." Chose one of the social offenses that you think might be acceptable for you to do under some circumstances but not under others. Explain when it is acceptable and when it is not acceptable.
- Compare and contrast your rankings on the first list to your rankings on the second list. Are there any differences in your rankings? Explain why.

## Teacher Notes or References

This lesson not only enhances students' understanding of Shakespeare's timeless tale, but also allows them to explore moral and ethical issues that they face in today's society. This lesson was adapted from the lesson, "Romeo and Juliet: Insight into Ourselves" found on the Intel Education website at: <http://www97.intel.com/en/ProjectDesign/UnitPlanIndex/RomeoAndJuliet/>

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Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_ Period \_\_\_\_\_



*Romeo and Juliet*: Exploring Timeless Social Issues  
**Before Reading the Play**

Consider the following 14 social offenses. Rank each action in order of seriousness, with 1 being the most serious and 14 the least serious. Be prepared to give reasons for your choices. When you have completed the ranking, answer each question below. Then, when everyone in your group has completed the assignment, begin your discussion. Discuss the items in which your group finds the most difference of opinion.

- \_\_\_\_\_ Planning to trick someone
- \_\_\_\_\_ Lying to parents
- \_\_\_\_\_ Killing someone for revenge
- \_\_\_\_\_ Advising someone to marry for money
- \_\_\_\_\_ Two families having a feud
- \_\_\_\_\_ Selling poison
- \_\_\_\_\_ Killing someone by mistake while fighting
- \_\_\_\_\_ Cursing
- \_\_\_\_\_ Killing someone in self-defense
- \_\_\_\_\_ Suicide
- \_\_\_\_\_ Crashing a party
- \_\_\_\_\_ Marrying against parents' wishes
- \_\_\_\_\_ Giving an obscene gesture
- \_\_\_\_\_ Picking a fight

Questions: Please respond in detailed sentences.

1. What does each of the above situations have in common? Explain.
2. Select one of the social offenses listed above and discuss which character attributes are lacking in a person that would commit such an act.
3. What factors do you think contribute to a person participating in this offense?

**Character Attributes**

- *Respect*
- *Honesty*
- *Fairness*
- *Responsibility*
- *Loyalty*
- *Self-discipline*
- *Courtesy*
- *Trustworthiness*
- *Compassion*
- *Integrity*

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_ Period \_\_\_\_\_



*Romeo and Juliet*: Exploring Timeless Social Issues  
**After Reading the Play**

Now that you have read *Romeo and Juliet*, rank each action below in order of seriousness, with 1 being the most serious and 14 the least serious. Be prepared to give reasons for your choices and support your reasons with evidence from the text. When you have completed the ranking, answer each question below. Then, when everyone in your group has completed the assignment, begin your discussion. Defend your choices and try to reach a consensus regarding the rankings.

- \_\_\_\_\_ Friar Laurence plans a trick
- \_\_\_\_\_ Juliet lies to her parents
- \_\_\_\_\_ Romeo kills Tybalt
- \_\_\_\_\_ Nurse advises Juliet to marry Paris
- \_\_\_\_\_ Capulets and Montagues feud
- \_\_\_\_\_ Apothecary sells poison
- \_\_\_\_\_ Tybalt kills Mercutio
- \_\_\_\_\_ Romeo kills Paris
- \_\_\_\_\_ Juliet kills herself
- \_\_\_\_\_ Romeo crashes Capulet's party
- \_\_\_\_\_ Romeo and Juliet marry against their parent's wishes
- \_\_\_\_\_ Sampson bites his thumb at Abraham
- \_\_\_\_\_ Tybalt picks a fight with Romeo

Questions: Please respond in detailed sentences.

1. Review the themes of *Romeo and Juliet*. Discuss how the social offenses listed above support the themes of the play.
2. How do character attributes contribute to the "fate" of the young lovers? Explain.
3. Think of a person you know who can be described either as *fortunate* or as *unfortunate*. Is his or her fortune, or lack of it, the result of *fate* or *destiny*? Or is it the result of the person's character?

**Character Attributes**

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- *Compassion*