

**Topic:** The balcony scene in *Romeo and Juliet*

**Level:** B2+

**Time:** 90 minutes

### Aims

- To contextualise the balcony scene in Shakespeare's play *Romeo and Juliet* in order to increase students' interest in and awareness of drama in general and Shakespeare in particular
- To practise both reading for gist and close reading

### Introduction

This lesson is based around the balcony scene in *Romeo and Juliet*. It looks at the themes and language that Shakespeare uses to describe love. It gives students reading, speaking and writing practice.

#### Summary of the plot of *Romeo and Juliet*

Romeo and Juliet are the son and daughter of two families who are at war with each other. They meet at a party and fall in love. Even though their families are enemies, Romeo and Juliet swear their love for each other and marry in secret because they know their parents would not allow it. However after the wedding, Romeo gets into a fight with Juliet's cousin and kills him. The next day he has to flee from the city. When Romeo has gone, Juliet is told by her family that she must marry someone else. She is very upset and goes to see the priest who married her and Romeo. He gives her a sleeping potion that will make it look as if she is dead. The priest tries to let Romeo know about the plan, but does not manage to tell him in time. Romeo thinks Juliet is dead and kills himself by drinking poison. When Juliet wakes up and finds Romeo dead, she commits suicide with his dagger.

This lesson looks at Act 2, Scene 2: the balcony scene, which is perhaps the most famous scene in all of Shakespeare's plays. After meeting and falling in love with Juliet at a party, Romeo realises that she is the daughter of his father's enemy, but that does not stop him jumping over the wall of her house and hiding in the darkness, hoping to catch sight of her. To his delight Juliet appears on the balcony and Romeo praises her beauty from his hiding place. A contemporary translation of the scene can be found at the end of the lesson plan.

### Procedure

#### Warmer – Romantic or cheesy compliments? (15 mins)

The warmer is a short activity to engage learners and introduce the theme of the Shakespeare text.

- Ask students if they know what a compliment is and if they can give an example.
- Teach/revise the verbs *to pay* a compliment (*Your English is very good.*) and *to return* a compliment (*Thank you, so is yours.*).
- Ask students to pay each other a compliment and then return the compliment.

Explain that compliments can vary in intensity: they can be friendly, romantic, or 'cheesy', meaning that the compliment is just too exaggerated to be taken seriously. (*This is the nicest meal I have ever had!* or *You are the best cook in the universe!*) Cheesy compliments often make you feel slightly sick, which is probably where the name 'cheesy' comes from!

- Ask them to look at the six compliments in the worksheet **Warmer – Romantic or cheesy compliments?** and decide which compliments are friendly, which are romantic and which are cheesy.
- Feedback answers and discuss as a class. Students may disagree on which compliments are romantic and which are cheesy!
- Ask students which compliments they would/wouldn't like to receive.

*Suggested Answers:*

1. *You're the most attractive person I've ever met. (R)*
2. *You look nice today. (F)*
3. *Flowers are jealous of your beauty. (C)*
4. *You're my favourite cook. (R)*
5. *You cook very well. (F)*
6. *I would walk a thousand miles for one of your meals. (C)*

### **Task 1 – A picture of Juliet (10 mins)**

This group discussion about a picture of Juliet on the balcony is to contextualise the balcony scene for the students. It prepares the students for the speeches that follow.

- Ask students to look at the picture, read the information on Romeo and Juliet and discuss the questions in small groups.
- Ask the groups to feedback their opinion to the rest of the class.

*Suggested Answers:*

1. *Juliet looks as if she is feeling thoughtful, and anxious, as if she doesn't know what to do or what the outcome of her love will be.*
2. *There are many cases of people falling in love during a war with someone on the opposing side. For example, some French girls fell in love with German soldiers in Occupied France during the Second World War.*
3. *There is no right or wrong answer for this question; it depends on the student's viewpoint.*
4. *Romeo and Juliet is one of Shakespeare's tragedies. In the end Romeo and Juliet both die.*

**Task 2 – Romeo’s in love (20 mins)**

The reading comprehension introduces students to Shakespearean language to describe love. There is a contemporary translation at the end of the lesson plan.

**Summary:** Romeo is so in love with Juliet that he thinks she is as beautiful as the sun (lines 1–3). He says that the moon is jealous of her beauty and that Juliet should not be the moon’s servant (lines 3–6). Then there is a reference to Diana, Roman goddess of the moon, who swore never to marry. Romeo says that the moon/Diana’s clothing is pale and sickly and he hopes that Juliet will not remain unmarried (lines 7–8). Romeo is delighted to see Juliet and wishes that she knew that he loves her (lines 9–10). He sees her murmuring to herself, lost in thought and wonders about speaking to her, but decides not to as she is not speaking to him (lines 11–13). He compares her eyes to two stars and says that, if her eyes and the stars changed places, the stars would not be able to shine as brightly as Juliet’s cheeks (lines 14–18). Meanwhile Juliet’s eyes would shine so brightly in the night sky that birds would sing and think it was daytime (lines 19–21). Romeo longs to be close to Juliet and wishes that he was her glove so that he might touch her cheek.

**Commentary:** Romeo is hiding in the shadows so Juliet cannot see him. Romeo is talking to himself, not to Juliet, so she cannot hear him either. This creates a dramatic tension as the audience knows that Romeo is there but Juliet doesn’t. Also the audience knows from Romeo’s speech that he loves Juliet, but Juliet doesn’t know that yet. The darkness also contrasts dramatically with the fact that Romeo compares Juliet to different kinds of light: sun, stars, daylight, etc.

- Ask students if they know, or can guess, what the expression ‘love at first sight’ means.
- Ask them if they have a similar expression in their own language.
- Tell the students that they are going to read a speech from *Romeo and Juliet*. Romeo is standing below Juliet’s balcony watching her, although she can’t see him because it is dark.
- Tell the students that Romeo talks about Juliet in a very complimentary way and compares her to different things. Ask them if they can guess what compliments Romeo gives Juliet and what he compares her to. Write their ideas on the board.
- Ask the students to read the text and answer the questions.
- Elicit feedback. For question 2, compare the answer with the students’ previous suggestions.

*Suggested Answers:*

1. Romeo is not talking to Juliet. We know this because he uses the third person: 'She speaks yet she says nothing.'
2. Juliet is compared to the sun (line 3) and also daylight (line 19). Her eyes are compared to stars (lines 14–16).
3. moon, twinkle, brightness, stream, bright, lamp  
The effect: Shakespeare wants to emphasise Juliet's beauty by using words for light. Also, using lots of light words contrasts well with the fact that in the play it is night-time and the stage would be quite dark. This makes the scene more dramatic.
4. Romeo's compliments do sound quite cheesy; they are certainly very exaggerated.
5. Perhaps Shakespeare wants to show the audience that Romeo loves Juliet too much to care that she is his enemy. It also gives the audience the impression that Romeo is too passionate to think and speak rationally, which suggests to the audience that things might end up going wrong.

**Task 3 – Juliet's confession (10 mins)**

This short reading exercise gives students an opportunity to practise reading for gist and introduces students to the themes of **Task 4 – What's in a name?**

- Ask students to read the five-line speech and answer the two questions.
- Check answers.

Answers: Question 1: c, Question 2: a

**Task 4 – What's in a name? (15 mins)**

This gap-fill exercise gives students practice of close reading.

- Tell students to read the text and fill in the missing words.
- Check answers.

Answers:

- 1 'Tis but thy name that is my **enemy**.
- 2 Thou art thyself, though not a Montague.
- 3 What's Montague? It is nor **hand**, nor foot,
- 4 Nor arm, nor face, nor any other part
- 5 Belonging to a **man**. O, be some other name!
- 6 What's in a name? That which we call a **rose**
- 7 By any other word would smell as **sweet**.
- 8 So Romeo would, were he not Romeo called,
- 9 Retain that dear perfection which he owes
- 10 Without that title. Romeo, doff thy name,
- 11 And for that **name**, which is no part of thee
- 12 Take all myself.

**Task 5 – Rewriting Shakespeare (20 mins)**

- Ask students to work in pairs, choose any four consecutive lines from the two speeches and try and rewrite them in contemporary English.
- When they have finished, ask students to read out their lines while the others guess which bit of the speeches they are from.

**Homework**

- Tell students that after Juliet finishes speaking, Romeo comes out of hiding.
- Ask them to write the first few lines of their conversation. They can write it in a Shakespearean or a contemporary style.

**Task 2 – Romeo's in love**

- 1 But wait! What is that light in the window?
- 2 It is the east, and Juliet is the sun.
- 3 Rise fair sun and eclipse the jealous moon,
- 4 Who is already sick and pale with grief,
- 5 That you, her servant, are more beautiful than she is.
- 6 Don't be her servant because she's jealous of you.
- 7 Her pure white clothing is really green in colour,
- 8 And only foolish people wear it. Take it off.
- 9 It is my lady. Oh, it is my love.
- 10 I wish she knew I loved her!
- 11 Her lips are moving, but she isn't saying anything. What does that mean?
- 12 Her eyes are speaking. I will answer them.
- 13 No, I am too forward. She isn't speaking to me.
- 14 Two of the brightest stars in the sky,
- 15 Needing to do something somewhere else, ask her eyes
- 16 To twinkle in their place till they come back.
- 17 What if her eyes and the stars changed places?
- 18 Her cheeks would shine brighter and show up the stars
- 19 Just like daylight is brighter than a lamp. Her eyes in the sky
- 20 Would stream so brightly through the night skies
- 21 That birds would sing and think that it wasn't night-time.
- 22 Look at the way she leans her cheek upon her hand.
- 23 Oh, I wish I was a glove upon her hand
- 24 So I could touch her cheek.

**Task 3 – Juliet's confession**

- 1 Oh Romeo, Romeo,
- 2 Why are you called Romeo?
- 3 Reject your father's name,
- 4 Or if you won't, just swear that you love me,
- 5 And I'll stop being part of the Capulet family.

**Task 4 – What's in a name?**

- 1 It is only your name that is my enemy.
- 2 You are still yourself, if you stop being a Montague.
- 3 What is a Montague? It isn't a hand, or a foot,
- 4 Or an arm, or any other part
- 5 Belonging to a man. Oh choose another name!
- 6 What's in a name? The flower we call a rose
- 7 Would smell just as sweet if we called it something else.
- 8 So Romeo, even if he wasn't called Romeo,
- 9 Would still be perfect. Romeo, change your name,
- 10 And in exchange for your name, which is not part of you
- 11 Take all of me.