

Act 1 Reading Guide

Two families in Verona, Italy, have hated each other for years. In Act 1, a street fight breaks out, a party is planned, and two teenagers from opposite sides meet for the first time.

WHO'S WHO

House of Montague

Romeo, the son. Moody, in love with Rosaline at the start.

Lord + Lady Montague, his parents.

Benvolio, Romeo's cousin. Tries to keep the peace.

House of Capulet

Juliet, the daughter. Almost 14.

Lord + Lady Capulet, her parents.

Tybalt, Juliet's cousin. Quick to fight.

The Nurse, raised Juliet. Talks a lot, loves her.

Others: Prince Escalus rules Verona and is tired of the fighting. **Mercutio** is Romeo's friend and a relative of the Prince, so he is not a Montague. He jokes a lot. **Count Paris** is a young nobleman, also a relative of the Prince, who wants to marry Juliet.

Words and Questions

SHAKESPEARE WORDS YOU WILL SEE A LOT

thou / thee you	thy / thine your	art are	doth does
hath has	ere before	anon soon	'tis it is
ay / nay yes / no	wherefore why	o'er over	hie hurry

ACT 1 AT A GLANCE

Scene 1

Street fight. The Prince warns both families. Romeo is lovesick.

Scene 2

Paris asks to marry Juliet. Romeo hears about a party.

Scene 3

Juliet's mother brings up marrying Paris.

Scene 4

Romeo and friends head to the party. Romeo feels uneasy.

Scene 5

Romeo and Juliet meet and fall in love. Tybalt is furious.

HOW THE QUESTIONS WORK

● **Find it** : the answer is in the text ● **Explain it** : say what it means ● **Think deeper** : use evidence + your own idea

The Prologue

The play opens with a 14-line poem called a **sonnet**. Lines 1–2 are done for you. Rewrite at least 4 more lines in your own words. Use the word list on page 2.

Shakespeare	In my own words
1 Two households, both alike in dignity,	Two families, equally respected,
2 In fair Verona, where we lay our scene,	in Verona, where our play happens,
3 From ancient grudge break to new mutiny,	
4 Where civil blood makes civil hands unclean.	
5 From forth the fatal loins of these two foes	
6 A pair of star-cross'd lovers take their life;	
7 Whose misadventured piteous overthrows	
8 Do with their death bury their parents' strife.	
9 The fearful passage of their death-mark'd love,	
10 And the continuance of their parents' rage,	
11 Which, but their children's end, nought could remove,	
12 Is now the two hours' traffic of our stage;	
13 The which if you with patient ears attend,	
14 What here shall miss, our toil shall strive to mend.	

Find it Line 6 calls Romeo and Juliet “star-cross'd lovers.” What does the prologue say will happen to them? (lines 6–8)

Think deeper The prologue tells us the ending before the play starts. Why might Shakespeare do that? Think about why a writer might tell you the ending first.

Scenes 1-2

Scene 1 A street in Verona

What happens: Servants from both houses start a fight. Benvolio tries to stop it. Tybalt joins in. The Prince says the next fight will cost lives. Later, Romeo tells Benvolio he is sad because the girl he loves (Rosaline) does not love him back.

Find it What does the Prince say will happen if the families fight in the streets again?

Explain it Benvolio and Tybalt both join the fight. How are they different? Use one quote.

TYBALT: What, drawn, and talk of peace! I hate the word, / As I hate hell, all Montagues, and thee.

Scene 2 A street

What happens: Paris asks Lord Capulet for permission to marry Juliet. Capulet says to wait two years and win her heart first. A servant who cannot read asks Romeo to read the party guest list. Romeo sees Rosaline's name and decides to go.

Find it How old is Juliet? Find the clue.

Explain it Does Capulet want Juliet to marry Paris right now? How do you know?

Scenes 3–4

Scene 3 Capulet's house

What happens: Lady Capulet tells Juliet that Paris wants to marry her. The Nurse tells a long, funny story about Juliet as a baby. Juliet says she will look at Paris at the party, but only as much as her mother wants.

Think deeper What does Juliet's answer tell you about her? Is she excited, unsure, or just obeying? Explain.

Find it in the scene. The line begins: *"It is an honour..."*

Scene 4 A street, on the way to the party

What happens: Romeo, Benvolio and Mercutio wear masks so they can sneak into the Capulet party. Mercutio gives a long, wild speech about Queen Mab, a fairy who brings dreams. Before going in, Romeo has a bad feeling.

Explain it Romeo worries something bad is "hanging in the stars." Where else have you seen the stars mentioned? What might the stars stand for?

Find it in the scene. The line begins: *"I fear, too early, for my mind misgives..."*

Scene 5

Scene 5 The Capulet party

What happens: Romeo sees Juliet and forgets Rosaline. Tybalt recognizes Romeo's voice and wants to fight, but Lord Capulet stops him. Romeo and Juliet talk, and kiss. Then each learns who the other really is.

Find it What does Romeo compare Juliet to? Find the line that shows it.

Explain it Romeo was “in love” with Rosaline earlier in this same act. What does that make you think about his feelings for Juliet?

Explain it Why does Lord Capulet stop Tybalt from fighting Romeo?

Think deeper Explain Juliet's line in your own words. Why is it a problem?

My only love sprung from my only hate! / Too early seen unknown, and known too late!

Act 1 Wrap-Up

CHARACTER TRACKER

Character	One word that describes them	Evidence (what they say or do)
Romeo		
Juliet		
Tybalt		
Benvolio		
Lord Capulet		

BIG IDEAS TRACKER

Big idea	Where did you see it in Act 1?
Love vs. hate	
Fate (the stars)	
Young vs. old	

EXIT TICKET

Romeo and Juliet just met. Make a prediction: what problem will they face first? Use one detail from Act 1.

Teacher Key + Notes

Question levels: Find it = DOK 1, Explain it = DOK 2, Think deeper = DOK 3. Scene 1 and 2 give the quote; scenes 3 and 4 give only how the line begins; in scene 5 students find the line themselves (line numbers vary by edition). Accept any reading that is supported by the text.

Make it easier: read the scene summary aloud first; allow quote matching; use the word list.

Make it harder: remove the summaries; students find their own quotes.

Prologue, Find it: They die, and their deaths end their parents' fight.

Prologue, Think deeper: Any supported answer. E.g., the audience watches how it happens, not what; builds tension and dramatic irony (DOK 3).

Sc. 1, Find it: Anyone who fights again will be put to death.

Sc. 1, Explain it: Benvolio wants peace ("Part, fools!"); Tybalt wants to fight and hates the word peace.

Sc. 2, Find it: Almost 14 ("not seen the change of fourteen years").

Sc. 2, Explain it: No. He says wait two more years and win her heart first.

Sc. 3, Think deeper: Any supported reading: unsure, obedient, not ready. Accept with evidence.

Sc. 4, Explain it: The prologue ("star-cross'd"). Stars = fate or destiny.

Sc. 5, Find it: Torches / light: she is brighter than the torches.

Sc. 5, Explain it (Rosaline): His love may be quick or based on looks; accept other supported views.

Sc. 5, Explain it (Capulet): He does not want a fight at his party; Romeo is behaving well; the Prince's warning.

Sc. 5, Think deeper: The only person she loves is the son of the family she is supposed to hate; she learned too late.

PROLOGUE: SAMPLE REWORDING

3–4: An old fight starts again, and citizens get blood on their hands. · 5–6: From these two enemy families come two unlucky lovers who kill themselves. · 7–8: Their sad deaths end their parents' fight. · 9–12: The play shows their doomed love and their parents' anger, which only their deaths could stop. · 13–14: If you watch patiently, we will try to fill in what this poem leaves out.