

NAME: _____

DATE: _____

Prereading Activity
for
Romeo and Juliet
Plot Summaries
Act I

Directions: To help you better understand and follow Shakespeare's play, read the summary of specific scenes immediately before you begin to read the original. If you get lost during the scene, refer to the summary again.

Prologue In these sixteen lines, the Chorus establishes the setting as Verona, an Italian city. Its warring, noble families are again fighting over an old dispute. The children of both families become lovers and their deaths ultimately end the feud.

*Act I,
scene i* On a Saturday afternoon, Sampson and Gregory, servants of the Capulets, joke with each other and brag about what each would do if he encountered members of the Montague household, their sworn enemies. Seeing Abraham and Balthasar, servants of the Montagues, Sampson insults them by biting his thumb. This starts a fight. Benvolio, Romeo's cousin, stops the fight only to be drawn into it again by Tybalt, Lady Capulet's hot-tempered nephew.

Escalus, the Prince, breaks up the fight and declares if another fight occurs both Capulet and Montague will be put to death. Capulet leaves with the Prince while Lord and Lady Montague remain behind.

The Montagues then ask Benvolio to explain the cause of the fight, which he does. Then they ask about their son Romeo. Benvolio has seen Romeo wandering about the edge of the city, acting strangely. Later Romeo admits to Benvolio that Romeo has fallen in love with Rosaline, but is out of favor with her.

*Act I,
scene ii* Paris, a kinsman of the Prince, asks Lord Capulet for permission to marry his daughter Juliet. Although Capulet feels she is too young, his only concern is that his last remaining child be happy. He consents to marriage only if Juliet is in love. Capulet gives an illiterate servant a list of people to invite to a party that night. The servant seeks help of strangers in the street, Romeo and Benvolio. When the young men discover that Rosaline is on the list, they decide to crash the party.

*Act I,
scene iii* Lady Capulet, while being interrupted frequently by the Nurse, manages to ask Juliet how she feels about being married. Juliet makes no promise to consent unless she likes what she sees when she meets Paris that evening.

Romeo and Juliet: Act I Plot Summaries (continued)

*Act I,
scene iv*

Later that evening in the street, Romeo and his friends, Benvolio and Mercutio, a cousin of the Prince, have put on masks to crash the party at the Capulets'. Mercutio delivers the "Queen Mab" speech. Queen Mab is the fairy queen that Mercutio describes as coming to bewitch men in her tiny carriage made of a hazelnut shell, with a cover of grasshoppers' wings and wagon spokes of spiders' legs, all drawn by moths driven by a liveried gnat. Before leaving for the party, Romeo states that he fears some serious events will result from this evening.

*Act I,
scene v*

At the Capulets', Lord Capulet makes his guests welcome. When Romeo (who had come to see Rosaline) sees Juliet, he falls in love with her immediately. Not knowing that she is his family's enemy, he woos Juliet by comparing her to a holy shrine and his lips to religious pilgrims that journey to it. With their kiss, they realize they are in love.

Meanwhile, Tybalt recognizes Romeo and informs Lord Capulet that their enemy mocks them by crashing the party. Capulet decides not to make an issue and lets Romeo and his friends stay.

Romeo discovers Juliet's identity and leaves. Juliet sends the Nurse to discover her new lover's identity. When Juliet learns that Romeo is her enemy, she also recognizes that it is too late, for now, she too, is in love.