

ROMEO AND JULIET
READING COMPREHENSION
ACT 1
YEAR 5 AND 6

Once upon a time, far away in the city of Verona, in Italy, there lived two great families: the Capulets and the Montagues. Each family was rich, each family was powerful and each family had lived in that city for centuries. Sharing so much, you might think they should have been friends. If only they had been, then this would be a very different story - a happy one. But it isn't.

It had happened so many years ago, that nobody could remember what the two families were fighting about, but everyone knew that there had been an argument. And everyone also knew that it was getting worse. Shouting insults had turned into spitting in faces. Spitting had led to slaps and punches, until swords were drawn and lives were lost. Young blood ran crimson in the streets, stained the steps of churches and blossomed on the paving stones of the markets. And where these bloody flowers bloomed, the people of the city fled, scared that they might end up victims too.

One sunny morning in mid July the market square was full. Traders called out how fresh their fruit was, how delicious their vegetables; people hurried from stall to stall buying food for lunch before the day got too hot. All was just as it should be. And then, one by one, the traders stopped shouting. Silence fell and all turned.

In the centre of the square, gangs of Capulets and Montagues faced each other, eyes blazing, and hands – as everyone noted - on sword hilts. Tense seconds passed with each side waiting for the other to make the first move. Eventually, after a whispered exchange, a young Capulet, one Sampson, hands in pockets, swaggered forward. Taking a slow breath, and checking that his hand was not shaking, Sampson raised his fist to his mouth, the thumb outstretched. Tucking the thumb behind his teeth he flicked a gesture at the Montagues.

There was a sharp intake of breath amongst the Montagues. Thumb-biting? How dare he! This was an insult not to be borne! Abraham Montague stepped towards Sampson, his grip tightening on his sword. “Do you bite your thumb at us, sir?” he challenged. “Do you quarrel sir?”

Insults flew from each side, then suddenly those swords were out, blades flashing in the morning sun. Traders frantically packed up their stalls, everyone else tried to stay out of the way, frightened, but angry too, that this should be happening. Would no one stop it?

A voice rang out. “Part fools! Put up your swords! You know not what you do!” Stepping between the warring families Benvolio Montague stared each side down, daring them to continue. After a moment their swords dropped to their sides, and they looked awkwardly at their feet. All might still have been well in this moment. If only all Montagues and Capulets had been like sensible, steady Benvolio. But they were not.

“Turn thee, Benvolio. Look upon thy death.”

Benvolio sighed and turned, knowing who stood behind him. “Tybalt! I do but keep the peace!”

It was no good. Benvolio might as well have been talking to the air for all the good it would do: Tybalt Capulet hated peace as much as he hated the Montagues.

And with that, all hell broke loose. Montagues stabbed at Capulets, Capulets slashed at Montagues. Shoppers were shouting, sellers screaming and everyone awaited that moment when someone would fall, never to get up.

In and out and amongst the mix of brawling teens and sober citizens someone must have sprinted like the wind for, in what seemed like seconds, the city guard had arrived with Prince Escalus leading them.

“Rebellious subjects, enemies to peace, throw your mistemper’d weapons to the ground,” he roared. In an instant, all were on their knees, bowing before the ruler of their city. He continued, his voice shaking with fury, explaining that anyone caught fighting in the streets would, from this time forward, be condemned to death.

As the square emptied, people muttered to each other. Shoppers and sellers were happy. At last, order would return to the streets of Verona. Montagues and Capulets snarled at each other, backing slowly away. Benvolio stood quietly watching them, and thinking; the Prince could order all he liked, they would never stop hating. He stared into the middle distance, and then, suddenly, a smile spread across his face, rapidly turning into a laugh. There was one Montague who had never STARTED hating. Hate was not his problem.... No, but LOVE was... And here he came, wandering dreamily into the square, sighing: Benvolio’s cousin and dear, dear, always-in-love friend Romeo. Benvolio called out a greeting.

“Good-morrow, cousin!”

So lost in his thoughts was Romeo that it took him a moment to respond but, seeing Benvolio, he smiled. “Is the day so young?”

“But new struck nine.”

“Ay me! sad hours seem long.”

“In love?”

As soon as the words were out of his mouth, Benvolio realised it was a ridiculous question. It was a truth acknowledged by all who knew Romeo that they could not remember a time when he hadn’t been in love. Nor a time when he hadn’t been sighing about it... Not just in love, but sadly in love.

Benvolio understood that the best way to cheer up his friend was to distract him, and, happily, at that moment, a servant arrived to announce that a great party was to be held that very evening at Lord Capulet’s Mansion. And, the servant added, “If you be not of the House of Montague, come and crush a cup of wine with us.”

Of course, Benvolio and Romeo very much were of the House of Montague. But this was an opportunity not to be missed. The party would be full of the most beautiful

young women in Verona, and it would be the perfect way to take Romeo's mind off Rosaline, his current infatuation. All right, even at the best of times, to set foot in the House of Capulet would be foolish.... doubly so now that the Prince had forbidden any conflict. But this was to be a party like no other! And every guest would be wearing a mask. Nobody would know who was who, and what fun to sneak into the very place where you shouldn't be.

That evening the Capulet Mansion was ablaze with light, and the hot summer night was made hotter by the furious pace at which the musicians played, and the dancers span and twirled. The air was fragrant with wine and the smell of fine food roasting. The morning's fight was forgotten in the joy that all felt at being at this finest of parties, and no one was enjoying it more than Juliet - the only daughter of Lord and Lady Capulet. There she was, at the centre of the dance, whirling wildly, her eyes shining. All who looked upon her were captivated by her radiant beauty, particularly the County Paris, a young lord who hoped to be married to Juliet and who stepped forward to take her hand in the next dance.

As she span beneath the lights, faster and faster, Romeo, together with his friends, Benvolio and Mercutio, made his stealthy entrance. Who knows, perhaps a moment sooner, or a moment later and things might have been so different. But just then, Juliet had never shone brighter, and Romeo could not take his eyes off her.

"What lady's that which doth enrich the hand of yonder knight? Oh, she doth teach the torches to burn bright!"

Time slowed. He looked at her. She turned to see him, and everything changed. It was as if the music stopped and every single other person in the room disappeared. As Romeo stepped closer, taking Juliet's hand, the only sound either could hear was the loud beating of their hearts. They kissed and gazed astonished; they had eyes only for each other. Unhappily, others had eyes for them. Though Romeo, like everyone else at the ball, was masked, Tybalt counted - amongst his several talents - a sharp ear.

"This, by his voice should be a Montague. I'll not endure him!"

His sword ever ready, even at a party, Tybalt would have started a fight there and then. But it was not to be. Determined that nothing should spoil this evening, Lord Capulet seized his nephew, shoving him roughly against a wall and forbidding him to lay a finger upon his enemy. So it was that Romeo and Juliet could stare into each other's eyes for precious seconds longer until Juliet's Nurse interrupted, with news that Lady Capulet wished to speak to her daughter.

Her eyes still shining, Juliet turned to the Nurse and asked, "Oh honey nurse, who is that gentleman?"

The smile that hardly ever left the Nurse's face was nowhere to be seen as she replied, "His name is Romeo, and a Montague, the only son of your great enemy."

The news was hardly welcome, but a force had been put in motion that nobody could stop. The greatest force of all.... Love!

Part 1: Page 1

1. The city of Verona is in which country

India

Scotland

Italy

France

2. What are the names of the two 'great families'

3. *'Each family was rich, each family was powerful and each family had lived in that city for centuries.'*

A. Underline the two adjectives in the sentence above

Fill in the gaps using synonyms for 'rich' and 'powerful'

(Remember, a synonym is a word that has a similar meaning to another word)

'Each family was _____, each family was _____ and each family had lived in that city for centuries.'

4. 'And everyone also knew it was getting worse...'

Put these in the order of which they happened

Swords were drawn

Shouting insults had turned into spitting in faces

Lives were lost

Spitting had led to slaps and punches

5. Explain why you think the Capulets and Montagues hands were ‘on sword hilts’? [‘hilts’ mean handles]

6. Read the paragraph beginning, ‘Tense seconds passed....’

A. Tick **two synonyms** for the word ‘tense’?

Relaxed Anxious Nervous Easy

B. Why do you think ‘each side waited for the other to make the first move’?

C. Why do you think the Capulets ‘whispered’ to each other?

7. **‘Taking a slow breath, and checking that his hand was not still shaking’**

What does this description tell us about how Sampson is feeling? Use words from the text to justify your answer

8. What is the insult that Sampson makes that starts the fight between the Montagues and Capulets? Tick the correct box

9. *'Traders frantically packed up their stalls, everyone else tried to stay out of the way, frightened, but angry too'*

Why were the traders and others 'angry too'?

10. Who says *"Part fools! Put up your swords! You know not what you do!"* and tries to stop the fighting?

Abraham Montague

Sampson Capulet

Benvolio Montague

Tybalt Capulet

11. *'After a moment their swords dropped to their sides, and they looked awkwardly at their feet. All might still have been well in this moment'.*

A. Underline the phrase that shows they weren't sure whether to stop fighting

B. Do you think the Capulets and Montagues wanted to be fighting? Justify your answer with evidence from the text.

Part 2: Pages 2-3

12. *'In and out and amongst the mix of brawling teens and sober citizens someone must have sprinted like the wind'*

Why has the author used the simile 'sprinted like the wind'?

13. *"Rebellious subjects, enemies to peace, throw your mistemper'd weapons to the ground."* he roared.

A. Who roared?

B. Why do you think the author used the word 'roared' rather than 'whispered' or 'said' ?

14. Who came into the square 'wandering dreamily'?

15. Benvolio understood that the best way to cheer up Romeo was to

Laugh at him Sing to him Distract him Fight with him

16. Why did Benvolio and Romeo believe that they would be able to sneak into the Capulet party without other guests knowing they were Montagues? Use evidence from the text to justify your answer

17. Read the paragraph beginning 'That evening...'

Using evidence from the text write three things that were happening at the Capulet party

i. _____

ii. _____

iii _____

18. *'As she span beneath the lights, faster and faster, Romeo, together with his friends, Benvolio and Mercutio, made his stealthy entrance'.*

Why do these two sentences contrast each other?

Use specific words from the text to justify your answer

19.A. Who recognised Romeo?

B. How did he recognise him?

20. *'Capulet seized his nephew, shoving him roughly against a wall and forbidding him to lay a finger upon his enemy'.*

Underline three words that show Lord Capulet was cross with Tybalt

21. Why was the nurse not smiling when Juliet asked 'who is that Gentleman?' Use evidence from the text to justify your answer
