

ROMEO AND JULIET

READING COMPREHENSION

ACT 5

YEAR 5 AND 6

Does a faint cold fear – like Juliet’s – trickle through your veins? Can you smell the stench of the tomb where she lies? Do you hear the ticking of that clock as the power of the potion runs out? And are you hoping that the messenger that Friar Laurence sent to Romeo – with his crucial information about their plan – travels quickly? Cling on to that hope – it’s a precious thing.

As Juliet’s coffin was carried through the streets of Verona, the crowds stood in stunned silence. All believed her to be dead, and in that sense, the plan was working brilliantly. All deaths are sad, thought those who watched, but the passing of one so young? That was a tragedy.

You and I know that that is not true. That was no tragedy: Juliet was not dead. But what is just about to happen? It hardly bears thinking about. For, amongst the weeping crowd was Romeo’s manservant and close friend, Balthasar, who, as soon as the funeral procession had passed, leapt onto his horse and rode straight to Mantua to pass on this dreadful news, not knowing, of course, that Juliet was still alive.

Romeo’s legs gave way beneath him on hearing what Balthasar had to say. “Is it e’en so?” he groaned, his voice barely more than a whisper.

Balthasar tried to find some words of comfort, but there were none to be had. Romeo, however, had decided already upon a course of action – to gaze upon his love one last time. He quickly gave his orders. “Thou know’st my lodging. Get me ink and paper and hire post-horses; I will hence tonight.”

After Balthasar had left, Romeo’s mind was full of images: Juliet at the Capulet party, burning brighter than the torches, Juliet on the balcony shining like the sun, and he himself illuminated in her radiance. Now that light had been snuffed out and there was nothing but darkness left. Let it be so, Romeo decided; once he had seen her face one more time he would hide himself in that darkness forever, joining his love in death.

In order to make that death sure, he paused on his journey to Verona to purchase poison from an Apothecary.

At first, the Apothecary was reluctant to sell the young man such deadly goods, but Romeo’s coins were too tempting for such a poor man. Reluctantly, he handed over the venomous liquid. “My poverty but not my will consents. Put this in any liquid thing and drink it off, and if you had the strength of twenty men it would dispatch you straight.”

That hope you cling onto – do you still have it? Keep clinging: Juliet was still breathing, Romeo’s heart was still beating, and there was still time for Friar Laurence’s message to get through.

At that very moment, indeed, as Romeo set off for the Capulet tomb, carrying the poison with him, Friar Laurence's messenger had just arrived back at the priest's dwelling, bearing news. Friar Laurence was eager to hear what he had to say. "Friar John! What says Romeo?"

But Friar John had a terrible tale to tell. A plague had broken out, and the Friar had been forbidden to leave the city. The message was still in his hand! This news could not be worse. Friar Laurence needed to act immediately.

"Friar John, go hence – I must to the monument alone. Within this hour will fair Juliet wake." And with that, Friar Laurence set off, running as fast as he could towards the Capulet tomb, desperately hoping that he could arrive in time to tell Romeo the truth.

Inside the tomb however, Romeo had already arrived, clutching the poison in its vial. As he gazed upon his love, the brightness that had disappeared from his life briefly returned: "Here lies Juliet, and her presence makes this vault a feasting presence full of light. Death that hath sucked the honey of thy breath hath had no power yet upon thy beauty. Thou art not conquered."

Holding that image of his dearest love in his mind's eye, he raised the poison to his lips and drained the bottle. Scarcely had he swallowed the last drop before the fatal drug took effect. Romeo was dead.

Seconds later, panting for breath, Friar Laurence arrived. "Romeo! O, pale! Ah, what an unkind hour is guilty of this lamentable chance!"

Perhaps not all was lost – Juliet was stirring, the potion wearing off. Could he prevent another death? He begged her to leave, but the sound of the guards outside frightened the priest away.

Juliet was alone with the body of her husband. "What's this?" she gasped. "A cup closed in my true love's hand?" Eager to join him in death she raised the bottle to her lips, only to be disappointed.

"O churl. Drunk all and left no friendly drop to help me after?"

Outside, the Captain of the Watch and his guards were breaking their way into the tomb – time was running out for Juliet. With no poison left to help her on her way, she seized Romeo's dagger and plunged it deep into her own heart.

Where is your hope now? Have you abandoned it? Nobody would blame you. Not Friar Laurence who looked down at the bodies of the bride and groom whose marriage he had so recently blessed. Not the Montagues and Capulets, who arrived to gaze upon their children, so young and now gone.

But what of the Prince? Did the Prince have hope? The Prince, summoned by the guards, saw the bodies; he saw the tears; he felt the sorrow. But he saw something else too: an opportunity. From this great loss, could, perhaps, come healing – and peace for his city.

He turned to face the parents of this tragic couple. "Capulet, Montague," he began "see what a scourge is laid upon your hate, that heaven finds a means to kill your joys with love."

There must be no more deaths, only forgiveness. And, at last, the Montagues and Capulets agreed. More than that, between them, they pledged to raise statues of pure gold to the memory of their children and the love that, in their brief lives, they had shared.

1. *'As Juliet's coffin was carried through the streets of Verona, the crowds stood in stunned silence'*.

Which word is **NOT** a synonym for 'stunned'. Tick one box

unsurprised	<input type="checkbox"/>	bewildered	<input type="checkbox"/>
dazed	<input type="checkbox"/>	horrified	<input type="checkbox"/>

2. What did the people watching Juliet's coffin being carried think was particularly sad about her death? Use evidence from the text to justify your answer

3. Was Juliet really dead? Tick one box

YES NO

4. What was the name of Romeo's servant who watched the funeral procession?

Benvolio	<input type="checkbox"/>	Mercutio	<input type="checkbox"/>
Paris	<input type="checkbox"/>	Balthasar	<input type="checkbox"/>

5. What did Romeo's servant do when he saw the funeral procession?

6. Re-read the paragraph that begins
'Romeo's legs gave way beneath him on...'

Using evidence from the text write down two things that show Romeo was shocked and heartbroken

i. _____

ii.

7. What did Romeo decide to do when he heard the news of Juliet's death?

8. A. Where did Romeo stop at on his way to Verona?

B. What did Romeo buy there?

9. *"Reluctantly, he handed over the venomous liquid. "My poverty but not my will consents. Put this in any liquid thing and drink it off, and if you had the strength of twenty men it would dispatch you straight."*

A. Which word tells us that the Apothecary didn't want to give the poison to Romeo?

B. Why does the Apothecary give the poison to Romeo?

He wants to see if it works

He needs the money

He wants Romeo to die

He doesn't like Romeo

10. Why hadn't Friar John been able to get the message to Romeo? Give two reasons.

11. Who arrived at Juliet's tomb first?

Friar Laurence

Romeo

12. *'He begged her to leave, but the sound of the guards outside frightened the priest away'.*

Do you think if Friar Laurence had stayed there would have been a different ending to this story? Explain your answer.

13. *'But what of the Prince? Did the Prince have hope?'*

Read this paragraph again until the end of the story.

Did the Prince have hope?

Explain, using evidence from the text to justify your answer

14. In this final act, there are several passages of text where the narrator keeps asking you, the reader, whether you still have hope?

What does this do, to you as the reader?
