

SECTION ONE – Background	
Courtly love	A medieval, European idea of love dating back to the noble courts of the eleventh century. Courtly love is having a romantic affair without expecting it to be consummated in a sexual encounter. The man loves a noble lady (not his wife), and will do almost anything for her and in her name. Romeo begins as a courtly lover. But he is transformed by love into a lover who ignores society's conventions to marry in order to consummate his love with Juliet.
Honour	Maintaining the honour of a family name is highly significant in the society of the play. Trivial incidents are interpreted as insults to the honour of the Montagues and Capulets, leading to duels and violence .
Patriarchal Society	The society is controlled by men . Men were the heads of households. Their wives and daughters were expected to be obedient to them. A woman was viewed as the property of her father, becoming the property of her husband after marriage.
Religion	In Shakespeare's time it was virtually impossible to be anything other than a committed Christian . People feared for what would happen to their souls after death. Romeo and Juliet are both used to confessing their sins to Friar Lawrence: what they felt they had thought, said or done wrong.
Plague	Life expectancy was around 35 in 1600. This was partly due to high infant mortality rates, and partly due to plague: a deadly outbreak of a disease . London suffered nearly 40 plagues between 1348 and 1665. People were frightened of the plague because it spread very quickly . Victims died quickly and very few recovered. The worst bout of plague was in 1563, when 24% (nearly a quarter) of London's population died.

ROMEO AND JULIET	
SECTION TWO – Plot	
Act 1	In Verona, Italy, two noble families, the Montagues and Capulets, have much bad blood between them. Romeo, son of old Montague, is in love with Rosaline, who does not return his love. As a result, Romeo is depressed. To cure him of his love, his friend Benvolio induces him to attend a masked ball at the Capulets, where he can meet other girls and forget Rosaline. At the ball, Romeo is attracted by a girl who he learns is Juliet, daughter of old Capulet. They seal their love with a kiss.
Act 2	Romeo lingers in Capulet's garden, standing in the orchard beneath Juliet's balcony. He sees Juliet leaning over the railing, hears her calling out his name, and wishes that he was not a Montague. He reveals his presence, and they resolve to be married secretly. Friar Lawrence marries them.
Act 3	Tybalt and Mercutio argue. Romeo appears and, refuses to be drawn into a quarrel with Tybalt, now his kinsman by marriage. Mercutio grapples with Tybalt and is killed. Aroused to fury by the death of his friend, Romeo fights with Tybalt and kills him. He takes shelter in Friar Lawrence's cell. Prince Escalus banishes Romeo to Mantua. Romeo sleeps with Juliet. In the morning, Capulet orders Juliet to marry Paris. Juliet is left isolated.
Act 4	Juliet seeks Friar Lawrence's advice. He gives her a sleeping potion, which will cause her to appear dead. So on the day of her supposed marriage to Paris, she will be carried to the family vault. By the time she awakes, Romeo will be summoned to the vault and can take her away to Mantua.
Act 5	The Friar's letter fails to reach Romeo. When he hears of Juliet's death Romeo procures a deadly poison from an apothecary and secretly returns to Verona to bid farewell to Juliet and die by her side. In the vault, Romeo drinks the poison and dies. When Juliet wakes from her deep sleep, she kills herself with his dagger. Capulet and Montague reconcile as a result of the deaths of their children.

SECTION THREE – Big ideas	
Fate	Romeo and Juliet attempt to “defy” the “stars” that govern their fate by exerting their free will .
Love	The love Romeo and Juliet share is passionate and transformative . But it is also chaotic and destructive , bringing death to friends, family and themselves. The play opposes their love to arranged marriage . It also explores parental love, the dutiful love of a child to a parent, and the protective love of the Nurse and Friar Lawrence for the lovers.
SECTION FOUR – Characters	
Montague	Head of an important family in Verona
Lady Montague	His wife
Romeo	Their son
Benvolio	Peacemaking cousin of Romeo
Mercutio	Witty friend of Romeo's
Capulet	Head of another important family
Lady Capulet	His wife
Juliet	Their 13 year old daughter
Nurse	To Juliet
Tybalt	Juliet's “fiery” cousin
Paris	Capulet intends him to marry Juliet
Friar Lawrence	Priest; marries Romeo and Juliet
Prince Escalus	Ruler of Verona
SECTION FIVE – Vocabulary	
banishment	Forced to leave a place as a punishment
bawdy	Dealing with sex in a humorous way
feud	A long and angry fight or quarrel between two people or two groups
foreboding	A feeling that something bad will happen
masculinity	Possessing qualities traditionally associated with men
disobedience	Refusal or failure to obey rules or laws
melancholy	Showing great unhappiness

SECTION SIX - Genre	
Tragedy	The play is a tragedy. It follows some of the conventions formulated by the Greek philosopher Aristotle in the fourth century BCE. <i>Romeo and Juliet</i>: • has a tragic hero, a man 'who enjoys prosperity and a high reputation'; • focuses on the hero's downfall from an initial high status in a 'reversal of fortune' (peripeteia); • his downfall is not the result of chance or accident, but is brought about by an act carried out by the hero that sets in motion the chain of events that will lead to his eventual death. The fatal character flaw (hamartia) of Romeo is his passion and impulsiveness; • the effect on the audience at the end is catharsis: a purging of the emotions in us that draws out feelings of pity and fear.
Prologue	Shakespeare begins the play with a prologue that establishes Romeo and Juliet as "star-cross'd lovers" whose deaths leads to their parents' "rage" ending.
The ending	There is a restoration of order , when Montague and Capulet agree to end their feud. This is one of the conventions of tragedy .

SECTION SEVEN – Writers' Methods	
Structure	• The settings are important: the balcony, the masked ball, the public places in which fights happen, Mantua. • Scenes foreshadow or anticipate other scenes – for example, the fight at the beginning of Act 1 foreshadows the fight at the beginning of Act 3. • Moments recall or echo other moments. • Shakespeare juxtaposes moments and scenes to create a contrast in atmosphere: for example, Juliet speaks of "gentle night" immediately after Romeo kills Tybalt; Tybalt rages while Romeo and Juliet speak for the first time. • Shakespeare develops tension: e.g. the build up to Romeo's death in Act 5.
Stagecraft	• <i>Romeo and Juliet</i> is a play, so use the words 'stage' and 'audience' in your answer to show you know this! • Exits and entrances: Tybalt's entrances; Romeo fleeing in Act 3, Scene 1. • Rhyming couplets to indicate the ending of scenes. • Dramatic irony: e.g. Juliet on the balcony is unaware of Romeo's presence.
Characterisation	• Dialogue e.g. Mercutio's wit. • Function e.g. Benvolio as peacemaker, Nurse as go-between. • Relationships with other characters e.g. Capulet's treatment of the Nurse. • Stereotypes e.g. Tybalt as stereotypical villain.
Dramatic speech and language	• Soliloquies e.g. Juliet before taking the sleeping potion. • Iambic pentameter. • Sonnet e.g. the shared sonnet between Romeo and Juliet. • Prose: anything that is not poetry – often spoken by lower-class characters or in moments of low tension. • Repetition e.g. Mercutio repeating "a plague on your houses". • Imagery e.g. light/dark.

SECTION EIGHT – Key Quotations (Act and Scene Numbers in brackets)	
Romeo	"O brawling love, O loving hate" (1.1)
	"Did my heart love till now?" (1.1)
	"It is the east and Juliet is the sun!" (2.2)
	"I am fortune's fool" (3.1)
	"I defy you, stars!" (5.1)
Juliet	"My only love sprung from my only hate" (1.5)
	"O Romeo, Romeo! Wherefore art thou Romeo?" (2.2)
	"Come, gentle night, come, loving black-browed night" (3.2)
	"O God, I have an ill-divining soul!" (3.5)
Friar Lawrence	"These violent delights have violent ends." (2.6)
Mercutio	"O calm, dishonourable, vile submission!" (3.1)
	"A plague o' both your houses. They have made worms' meat of me" (3.1)
Nurse	"If ye should lead her in a fool's paradise, as they say, it were a very gross kind of behaviour" (2.4)
Capulet	"My child is yet a stranger in the world" (1.2)
	"Hang thee, young baggage, disobedient wretch!" (3.5)
Lady Capulet	She tells Capulet he is "too hot" (3.5) when he rebukes Juliet and the Nurse
Tybalt	"Talk of peace? I hate the word..." (1.1)
	"Romeo, the love I bear thee can afford no better term than this: thou art a villain" (3.1)
Benvolio	"I do but keep the peace: put up thy sword" (1.1)
	"I pray thee, good Mercutio, let's retire. The day is hot...and if we meet, we shall not scape a brawl" (3.1)