COURSE PLAN METHODOLOGY: Romeo and Juliet by William Shakespeare is represented by the abbreviation RJ. The student should become familiar with the course plan, determining, with the help of parents, whether to read each synopsis beforehand, afterward, or as a study aid. The final week will offer students the opportunity to read and respond to one of the critical essays that follow the novel—doing so is optional.

COURSE TEXTS:

RJ


RJSG


A NOTE ON IGNATIUS CRITICAL EDITIONS: Kolbe Academy is fortunate in having Ignatius Critical Editions to offer for many titles in its British Literature Course, including for Romeo and Juliet. The Critical Editions series “represents a tradition-oriented approach to reading the Classics of world literature.” It “concentrates on critical examinations informed by our Judeo-Christian heritage.”1 We at Kolbe could not hope for a better tool to help students of all ability levels learn to appreciate the beauty, artistry, and wisdom to be found within the pages of a great book. Those students who are inclined to a deeper study of literature will thrive on learning how to examine a work to gain insights like those contained in the critical essays; those not so inclined will discover how to examine a text to learn what it truly has to say.

CHARACTERS:

Chorus:
Prince Escalus: Prince of Verona. He is unable to keep the peace of the city.
Romeo Montague: A youth whose name is synonymous with one half of a pair of star-crossed lovers who are caught in the middle of warring families. Romeo is dreamy, sensitive, intelligent, and in love with Rosaline at the beginning of the play. When he falls in love with the daughter of his father’s greatest enemy, he cannot know that his love will end in tragedy.
Montague: Romeo’s father and head of the Montague clan.
Lady Montague: Romeo’s mother.
Benvolio: Nephew of Montague. A friend to Romeo.
Abraham: Servant to Montague.
Mercutio: Romeo’s friend, a natural wit, a brawler. He is a kinsman of the prince.
Balthasar: Servant to Romeo.

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Romeo and Juliet

**Juliet Capulet**: The famed maiden in her early teens who is destined to a tragic end. Her resourcefulness, determination, and bravery are used in the service of a passion for which she is not mature enough to understand.

**Capulet**: Juliet’s father and head of the Capulet clan.

**Lady Capulet**: Juliet’s mother. She seeks vengeance against Romeo.

**The Nurse**: Juliet’s nurse and confidant. She is not wise enough to help Juliet act in a prudent way.

**Peter**: Servant to Juliet’s nurse.

**Tybalt**: Nephew to Lady Capulet

**Sampson and Gregory**: Servants to Capulet

**Paris**: A young nobleman, kinsman to the Prince

**Friar Lawrence**: a Franciscan friar, confidante, and guide to both Romeo and Juliet. Friar Lawrence officiates at Romeo and Juliet’s secret wedding hoping for peace between the two families. He is also an amateur maker of potions.

**Friar John**: A Franciscan friar.

**An apothecary**: a druggist

**Three Musicians**: Called upon to play Juliet’s wedding song, they end by playing her dirge

**An Officer**

**Citizens of Verona; Gentlemen and Gentlewomen of both houses; Maskers, Torchbearers, Pages, Guards, Watchmen, Servants, and Attendants**

### WEEK 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>READING</strong></th>
<th><strong>RJ</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Read Introduction to the book by Joseph Pearce</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Read Act I and Act II</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Study Guide</strong></td>
<td><strong>RJSR</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Do Study Guide Questions for Act I and Act II</td>
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**Synopsis**

The feud between the Montagues and the Capulets sets the stage for our pair of star-cross’d lovers. The play opens in petty strife as two attendants of the house of Capulet, Sampson and Gregory, quarrel with two attendants of the house of Montague, Abraham and Balthasar. Benvolio, a Montague, tries to break up the quarrel which has escalated, but Tybalt, a Capulet, draws him into the fray. Soon the townspeople present attack both sides as public menaces. Capulet and Montague, the heads of the two households, arrive and barely restrain themselves from joining in. When Prince Escalus, lord of Verona, appears, he quells the brawl and pronounces the following sentence: “If ever you disturb our streets again, Your lives shall pay the forfeit of the peace.” (l.1.94—95). As the crowd disperses, Montague and his wife talk to Benvolio of their concerns about Romeo who seems melancholy. Romeo is lovesick for a young woman named Rosaline who wishes never to marry. Benvolio promises to cure Romeo’s sadness by showing him other beautiful girls. Romeo is not interested. At the Capulets, the young nobleman Paris is paying suit to gain the hand of Capulet’s young daughter, Juliet. Capulet encourages him, but advises him to win Juliet gently and to give her time to mature before they are married. Paris would prefer to hurry the marriage, but Capulet persuades him to make his desire known to Juliet at a lavish party he means to give that very night. Capulet has a servant issue invitations for the event, but the man cannot read. When Benvolio and Romeo chance upon the servant, the servant begs their help. Of course, Romeo learns of the party at
Capulet’s house. Benvolio states that Rosaline will be at the feast. He and Romeo decide to break into the party—Benvolio hoping that Romeo will see another that makes him forget Rosaline, Romeo hoping to see his lady fair. In Scene 3, we meet Juliet. Lady Capulet and her nurse have called upon her to prepare her for the prospect of marriage. The nurse, who loves Juliet, conducts a running reminiscence on Juliet’s life that borders on the bawdy, until censured by Lady Capulet. Juliet is informed of Paris’ suit and told to consider it seriously. A servant announces the start of the party. Romeo, joined by a merry group of his friends, all in mask, enters the party. Benvolio is among them, and Mercutio, Romeo’s witty and moody cousin. As the dance starts, Romeo catches his first sight of Juliet and realizes he had never loved until then. Tybalt recognizes his voice as that of a Montague and grows restless to punish him for invading the party. Capulet, however, forbids such action. Romeo, in the meantime, has spoken to Juliet and kissed her twice. As the nurse calls Juliet away, and as Romeo departs, they both discover to their horror that their chosen one is descended from the house of their most bitter enemy. Act 2 includes the famous balcony scene. While secreted in Capulet’s garden, Romeo glimpses Juliet. Praising her as the sun, he listens avidly as she speaks his name. Juliet utters the famous “What’s in a name?” speech. Juliet tutors Romeo to not swear by the oaths of common lovers, but by himself alone. After the nurse calls her away, Juliet returns. She tells Romeo that if he offers love in honorable fashion, she will marry him the next day. Romeo must make arrangements with Friar Lawrence to officiate at the marriage. The friar is shocked by his precipitous love and his choice of a mate. In scene 4, Benvolio and Mercutio wonder at Romeo’s disappearance. Benvolio notes that Tybalt has written Romeo and assumes the letter contains a challenge to fight. Finally Romeo appears and reveals nothing. The Nurse arrives and is caught up in Mercutio’s merciless jesting. At last she speaks to Romeo. He discloses his plan to marry Juliet that afternoon. In Scene 5, the Nurse discloses Romeo’s plan. Later they meet and marry.

Paper Topic: Examine the Balcony Scene in Act II, Scene 2, and offer proof regarding whether or not Juliet and Romeo truly love. Keep your answer based on the text. Areas that you may want to examine are whether Juliet and Romeo have a solid basis for their love (The portion where Romeo swears his love may help you resolve this.), whether they decide on the right course of action, and whether or not they are in earnest.

Key Points:

Introduction: Romeo and Juliet is one of the most famous and best known of Shakespeare’s plays. In its rich poetic language Shakespeare invites us to witness the course of a passionate and doomed love. When one is young, one reads or views the play as though plot matters above all else. Why could not the Capulets have waited to arrange a marriage for Juliet? Why could not Tybalt have held his tongue? Why could not Mercutio have walked away from the brawl? Why could not Friar John have moved faster? Why could not Friar Lawrence have done the same? Why did that fool of a Paris have to go to the tomb? It is no good. Nothing could save the two lovers from their fatal end. That anxiety one feels throughout the swift action of the play provides the basis for asking a few key questions upon more calm reflection. Did all the characters play their
parts because the social order had broken down? (Chaos tolerated by Prince, Family Heads, Clergy); were they acting on false ideas (inherited feuds, false ideas of love, vengeance), were they truly star-cross’d (fate determine all)? The wonder of the play is that the answers can be discovered through close examination of the text and through the process of debate and argument. Of course, to enjoy the play as Shakespeare intended, one has to see the play.

Setting: Verona, Italy
Themes: Ancient Feuds; Romantic Love (particularly poking fun at the conventions of Petrarchan poetry)
Symbols: Names
Conflict: Man vs. Man
Genre: Tragedy

Discuss:
♦ How the disorder in the streets in the opening scene runs from the highest to the lowest levels
♦ What is the character of Romeo’s relationship with his parents?
♦ What is the character of Juliet’s relationship with her parents?
♦ Does Romeo know anything about love?
♦ Does Juliet know anything about love?
♦ What are the failings of the authority figures in the play?

WEEK 2

| READING | RJ | Read Act III
| Study Guide | RJSG | Do Study Guide Questions for Act III

Synopsis

Act III begins in violence. Mercutio, Benvolio, and an assortment of friends are in the streets. It is hot. Benvolio fears Mercutio, who is mercurial, as his name suggests, will pick a fight, and urges him to go home. Mercutio refuses to leave. Tybalt appears with other members of the Capulet clan and attempts to provoke a fight with Mercutio. Mercutio trains his wit on Tybalt but refuses to fight. Romeo arrives, and Tybalt, angered over his violation of the Capulet home, taunts him. Romeo deflects every barb. Mercutio, however, offended for Romeo’s honor, draws his sword and challenges Tybalt. Tybalt eagerly responds. Romeo steps between them to stop the fight, but Tybalt thrusts beneath his arm and kills Mercutio. Before he dies, Mercutio calls out a curse on both the Capulet and Montagues, and wonders of his friend, why he interfered. Benvolio carries him off, repeating his curse. Romeo fears that his love for Juliet has softened him to the point of cowardice. Benvolio announces Mercutio’s death. The foolish Tybalt returns and Romeo kills him and then flees. The city is in an uproar, demanding that Tybalt be found. The Prince and his attendants, as well as Montague and Capulet and their wives, converge on the scene. The Prince demands an account. Benvolio steps forward to explain that Tybalt, now dead by Romeo’s hand, slew Mercutio. Lady Capulet, Juliet’s mother, demands justice—Montague blood must be spilled. Benvolio gives a further account, explaining Romeo’s resistance to Tybalt’s assaults. The Prince softens the death sentence to exile. In her home, Juliet is unaware of what has happened. Her Nurse enters and tells the girl the news. Juliet loved her cousin Tybalt, but grieves terribly for Romeo. With the nurse’s help,
she will say a final farewell to Romeo that night. In Scene 3, Romeo is in hiding in the cell of Friar Lawrence. The Friar informs him that he has been exiled. Romeo laments his banishment. When the Nurse arrives and reports how Juliet grieves, Romeo threatens to take his own life. The Nurse and Friar Lawrence chastise him. In Scene 4, the Capulets consult with Paris and decide that Juliet should be married on the following Thursday. Lady Capulet will carry the news to Juliet. In Scene 5, the two lovers resist the moment of parting. Juliet insisting that it is a nightingale they hear, not a lark heralding the morn. Romeo wishes to accept her fancy, saying he would accept death to stay with Juliet. At the mention of death, Juliet admits it is a lark that sings and urges Romeo to leave before it is too late. The Nurse enters and tells them that Lady Capulet is coming to talk with Juliet. Romeo bids his love a sorrowful farewell. Juliet receives her mother. Lady Capulet admonishes Juliet for carrying her grief for Tybalt too far. She speaks warmly of the day when Romeo will receive his just desserts. Juliet artfully deflects her mother’s remarks. Lady Capulet informs Juliet of the agreement they have entered into with Paris regarding her impending wedding. Juliet storms, refusing the match, insisting that it is too soon. Capulet enters and hears her concerns with patience at first, but then grows angry with her. He threatens to disown her if she should not appear in church to marry Paris. After he leaves, Juliet begs her mother to have the marriage delayed. She too threatens the girl with disinheritance. Juliet turns to the Nurse. That simple lady advises Juliet to marry Paris and forget Romeo. This ill-considered advice creates a breach between Juliet and the woman who had been her trusted accomplice. Juliet pretends to acquiesce. She announces her intention to visit Friar Lawrence in order to confess and receive absolution for her headstrong ways. Secretly, she curses the nurse for her betrayal. Her last hope for a solution will be placed in the hands of Friar Lawrence. Perhaps he has a remedy for her situation. She makes it clear that she thinks that suicide is preferable to union with Paris.

**Paper Topic**
Write a Shakespearean Sonnet. Use one of the following as your model. Write on the topic of an idealized love taking a man or woman as your subject. See appendix A for further help.

**William Shakespeare’s Sonnet 18**
Shall I compare thee to a summer’s day?<br>Thou art more lovely and more temperate.<br>Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,<br>And summer’s lease hath all too short a date.<br>Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,<br>And often is his gold complexion dimmed;<br>And every fair from fair sometime declines,<br>By chance, or nature’s changing course, untrimmed;<br>But thy eternal summer shall not fade,<br>Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow’st,<br>Nor shall death brag thou wander’st in his shade,<br>When in eternal lines to Time thou grow’st.<br>So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see,<br>So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

**William Shakespeare’s Sonnet 130**
My mistress’ eyes are nothing like the sun;<br>Coral is far more red than her lips’ red;<br>If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;<br>If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.<br>I have seen roses damask’d, red and white,<br>But no such roses see I in her cheeks;<br>And in some perfumes is there more delight<br>Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks.<br>I love to hear her speak, yet well I know<br>That music hath a far more pleasing sound;<br>I grant I never saw a goddess go;<br>My mistress, when she walks, treads on the ground:<br>And yet, by heaven, I think my love as rare<br>As any she belied with false compare.
**Key Points:**

**Introduction:** Love seems to have transformed Romeo as Act III opens. He is determined to overthrow the weight of blind tradition and family custom to keep the peace in the name of love. He all but embraces the fractious Tybalt. He is transformed again, however, at the death of his friend Mercutio. This time he will be transformed into a man of action, setting tragic events in motion. When we next see Romeo and Juliet together, they will once more speak in the language of poetry in the form of an aubade, a complaint against the dawn; but their very words will be tinged by considerations of death. Juliet will be forced into action herself, action that she will take in absence of true friends, solid counsel, and wise guides.

**Setting:** Verona

**Themes:** Young love crushed by a disordered society, ancient feuds, a failure of authority.

**Discuss:**

- Lady Capulet’s call for vengeance at the death of Tybalt
- Juliet’s relationship with her father
- Juliet’s relationship with her mother
- Juliet’s relationship with her Nurse
- The soundness of Friar Lawrence’s thinking

**Synopsis**

Juliet encounters Paris at the cell of Friar Lawrence. He has been receiving instruction about his upcoming marriage to her, although the good friar tells him that it is too hastily contracted. Paris speaks to her in a manner befitting their future espousal. After he leaves, Juliet threatens to kill herself unless the friar can help her. The Friar tells her that he will give her a potion that will bring on the appearance of death. He will send word to Romeo of the plan. Romeo can find her in her family tomb and flee with her to Mantua. Juliet returns and finds that all is in preparation for her wedding. She seems to submit to her father’s will in the matter. In Scene 3, Juliet will request to sleep apart, unattended by her Nurse or mother. Juliet takes up the potion and wonders whether or not she is drinking her death. However, she does drink it and succumbs to its effects. In Scene 4, the Capulet household is lively with marriage preparations. The Nurse is sent off to awaken Juliet and ready her for the ceremony. Soon the Nurse’s wailing can be heard throughout the house. Juliet’s parents soon join in. Friar Lawrence and Paris arrive, but discover the household’s sorrow. Act 5 begins in Mantua. Romeo seems to have adopted a more mature outlook.