Title: Romeo and Juliet: Who's to Blame?

Description: Students use Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* to look at personal responsibility, individuals' freedom of choice, and the effect of one's actions on others. Students use the *Showing Evidence Tool* to help them sort out the evidence and determine who or what is to blame for the deaths of Romeo and Juliet. They present their findings in Verona's court and submit a jury statement discussing who or what they find guilty.

At a Glance

Grade Level: 8–10

Subject sort (for Web site index): Language Arts

Subject(s): Language Arts

Topics: Shakespeare

Higher-Order Thinking Skills: Literary Analysis, Interpretation, Argumentation

Key Learnings: Literary Devices, Literary Themes, Persuasive Writing

Time Needed: 5–6 weeks, 55-minutes/5 days per week

Background: California, United States

Unit Summary

Students explore the themes in *Romeo and Juliet* and see how the themes apply to modern life and relationships. Students pair with assigned ePALS partners and discuss the differences they see between Shakespeare's time and their own as well as discuss their impressions and reflections. As students read, they collect evidence as to who or what is guilty of murder. They present arguments in Verona's court to support whether the deaths of Romeo and Juliet were the result of fate, other people's decisions and actions, or their own choices. Using these arguments, students then write a jury statement discussing their findings and who or what they find guilty.

Curriculum-Framing Questions

- **Essential Questions**
How does literature help us better understand ourselves?

- **Unit Questions**
How does Shakespeare still speak to a 21st century audience?
Who or what is ultimately to blame for the deaths of Romeo and Juliet?

- **Content Questions**
How do you read and understand Shakespeare's Elizabethan English?
Who are the characters in *Romeo and Juliet*, and how do they contribute to the deaths in the play?
What is imagery, and what are some examples of how Shakespeare uses imagery in *Romeo and Juliet* to present a compelling and powerful message?
What themes and issues in *Romeo and Juliet* are relevant today?

Assessment Processes

View how a variety of student-centered assessments are used in the Romeo and Juliet: Who's to Blame? Unit Plan. These assessments help students and teachers set goals; monitor student progress; provide feedback; assess thinking, processes, performances, and products; and reflect on learning throughout the learning cycle.

Instructional Procedures

Setting Up an ePALS Partner Project

Search for a class wanting a partner class to study *Romeo and Juliet* at ePALS*. If none exists, set up a project proposal. Do this as far in advance as possible.

Beginning of the Year

Introduce a discussion about why people like a good story. *What is it about the writing of characters that helps them "come alive" off the page? What kind of characters can students identify with? What do stories do for us, anyway? Are they just a means of escaping into fantasy?* Then, introduce and discuss the Essential Question that will be used all year, *How does literature help us better understand ourselves?*

Weeks 1–4
Understand the Play
During the first four weeks of the unit, set up a variety of activities to help students understand Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. This helps students gain an initial understanding of Shakespeare and his time. Activities may include:

- Read the passage by Bernard Levin* about the influence of Shakespeare on our everyday speech.

- For homework, ask students to bring in examples of where they see Shakespeare's influence in their world today (movies, TV, magazines, other storylines, and so forth).

- Present background information about Shakespeare, his time, and Elizabethan theater, so students can better understand his work. Resources are available at the Shakespeare Resource Center* and Shakespeare's Life and Times*.

- Discuss the following questions:
  - *What plot elements are usually required in a blockbuster movie?*
  - *Which elements do you think are present in Romeo and Juliet?*
  - *How does Shakespeare still speak to a 21st century audience?*
  - *Do you think Shakespeare still has any impact on what we hear, see, and think today?*

- Hand out the understanding Elizabethan English document for students' use throughout the unit.

Discuss the projects in this unit:

- Trials in Verona's court to determine who or what is at fault for the deaths of Romeo and Juliet

- Use of ePALS partners (an assigned e-mail partner from an English class in another part of the country—or even the world) to help each other analyze the play

Assign each student an e-mail partner from an English class in another part of the country (or world) to help them analyze the play. Explain that students have 30 minutes one day a week to e-mail their ePALS partner. Discuss expectations. Distribute the ePALS discussion document electronically, in hard copy, or both. This document is to be used to write notes, questions, and summaries for each of the scenes and is a scaffold for their discussions with their ePALS partners. Discuss how the questions help them form an opinion about the Unit Questions as to whether Shakespeare still speaks to a 21st century audience. Point out that the questions also help them to gather their thoughts about who is to blame for the deaths of Romeo and Juliet. Assign ePALS partners. Explain that students' reading logs will be checked periodically. Distribute and review the reading log checklist. Have students brainstorm "two truths and a fib" for their ePALS partner introduction. (See the ePALS discussion document.) Students must have the three statements written out as their "ticket" to use the computer. Provide a short amount of time for students to e-mail their introduction to their ePALS partners.

Assign students to read the play. Read difficult parts aloud in class. Act out some of the scenes. During the reading of the play, explore plot elements, Elizabethan English, metaphors, and imagery. Present the following questions:

- *How do the metaphors help to paint a picture of not only Juliet, but Romeo's state of mind?*
- *How does that imagery affect how we judge Romeo's true intentions or inclinations?*
- *How does the use of imagery add to the mood of this scene?*
- *How does the imagery affect the way we respond to this scene?*
- *Considering how Romeo talks about Juliet, what does that suggest about Romeo's character and primary focus?*

Explain that these initial activities prepare students for trials in Verona's court to determine who or what is at fault for the deaths of Romeo and Juliet.

Set Up Verona's Court
Verona's Court hears four cases. Assign different prosecuting attorneys, defending attorneys, judges, witnesses, and jurors for each case. The cases are against the following as the ones who should be held accountable for the deaths of Romeo and Juliet:

- Romeo and Juliet themselves
- The Montague and Capulet families
- Friar Laurence
- Fate

Assign or ask for volunteers for the following court case members:

- Eight students (each case has a team of two students) as the prosecutors
- Eight students (each case has a team of two students) as the defending attorneys
- Four judges
- Witnesses (if a witness will be called in different cases, assign a different student so all get a chance to participate; costumes encouraged; prosecutors and defending attorneys submit a witness list for their case to determine which witnesses will be required for all the cases):
    - Balthasa
    - Fate (personified)

- Friar Laurence
- Juliet
- Lady Capulet
- Lord Capulet
- Mercutio
- Prince Escalus
- Romeo
- The Nurse
- Tybalt
- When not participating as a character in a case, students act as jurors.

Week 5
Practice Using the Tool
- Click here to set up the practice Is the Nurse Guilty? project in your workspace.
- Open the practice project and, as a whole class, walk through the creation of a claim that the Nurse is to blame for the deaths of Romeo and Juliet. Have a Web site open with the entire play* available so you can copy and paste appropriate quotes. Have the students think of ideas as to why the Nurse might be to blame and evidence that she is not, but be sure to have a few pieces of evidence as backup.
- Discuss what can be used as evidence, such as quotes from the play, historical references, even psychological findings, and remind students that all evidence must have citations. Discuss the rating of the evidence and hand out the rating rubric document. Discuss the sections that should be left to last, after all the evidence has been gathered and assigned to the claim, such as the claim rating, explanation, and conclusion. The following *Showing Evidence Tool* space represents an example of the practice case. You can double-click the evidence and comments to read the descriptions.

Project Name: Is the Nurse Guilty [Click here to set up this project in your workspace]
Prompt: Is the Nurse to blame for the deaths of Romeo and Juliet?

[Insert SE Project: Is the Nurse Guilty?]

- After practicing with the tool, have teams meet to brainstorm evidence on paper. Prosecutors and defenders must turn in their witness lists prior to having students work with *Showing Evidence.*

Prepare the Case

Based on the prosecutors' and defenders' witness lists, assign students (or let them sign up) to be a witness. You may have several Romeos, Juliets, Friars, and so forth, if they are needed in more than one case. If you still have students who have not been assigned a role, you can also have two of the same witnesses per case, one for the defense and one for the prosecution.

Provide teams with their team IDs and passwords, along with the teacher ID. Have them log in at the *Showing Evidence Tool* workspace. Explain that they will work on only one claim at this time. The assigned prosecutors or defenders or specific witnesses will work on a claim and evidence based on their assignment.

Have students use the print feature of the tool to see the layout of their evidence and to prepare for their day in court. Encourage students to use visual aids, timelines, charts, forensic evidence, and other props to help present their cases. However, they must use specific quotes and content from the play to back up their evidence and reasoning. Let them know they will have a maximum of 20 minutes for their case to be heard in court, so they should use their best evidence and witnesses. Hand out the court case scoring guide so they know what will be expected of them in the trial.

Week 6
Court is in Session
Provide guidelines for the roles in the court, explaining the following:
- Attorneys can object if a witness makes a statement that is contrary to what is written in the play or goes beyond accepted interpretation.
- The judge must know the play well enough to rule on the objections.
- The prosecution will call its witnesses and the defense can cross-examine.
- After the prosecution, the defense can call any witnesses not already heard, and the prosecution can cross-examine.
- Both the prosecution and defense must provide closing statements, which should be based on the conclusion stated in the *Showing Evidence Tool*.
- Students not currently acting in their roles are jurors and take notes to use in their future *Showing Evidence* case as well as their jury report (essay).

Return to Showing Evidence

Before proceeding with the next activity, click here to set up the CSI Verona project in your workspace.

After the cases have been heard, have the teams return to *Showing Evidence* and complete at least two other claims based on the evidence they heard in the trial and on their own ideas supported in the text or other appropriate sources. Remind them to use the rating rubric as a guide.

After teams have worked on their cases, demonstrate how teams can leave comments. Provide some time for teams to review each other's work using the claim and evidence rubric. Be sure teams have time to review comments and make changes as necessary.

After students complete three to four claims and their associated evidence, discuss the process for writing a jury report (essay). A jury report presents and supports a three-part jury finding (thesis statement) on who or what is found guilty. Explain that in their jury reports, each student identifies the top three characters or elements most to blame, and ends the report with an analysis and conclusion of the one who ultimately must take responsibility. Hand out the jury report checklist for students to self-assess and peer review their work.

Examine the Showing Evidence Activity

The *Showing Evidence Tool* space below represents one team's investigation in this project. The case you see is functional. You can double-click the evidence and comments to read the team's descriptions.

Project Name: CSI Verona [Click here to set up this project in your workspace]

Prompt: Who or what is ultimately to blame for the deaths of Romeo and Juliet?

[insert active student workspace—see file management spreadsheet]

Wrap Up and Revisit the Essential Question

Discuss what students have learned from *Romeo and Juliet* and whether Shakespeare still speaks to a 21st century audience. Reflect on how literature helps us better understand ourselves.

Prerequisite Skills

- Basic computer skills
- Essay writing experience

Differentiated Instruction

Resource Student
- Provide a parallel text of *Romeo and Juliet* in modern English
- Provide fill-in-the-blank plot worksheets to help the student simplify and identify the characters and action
- Include scaffolds for the jury report (essay) to help the student identify the form and content of the report
- Allow the student to choose the type of participation in the trial that draws upon on the student's strengths

Gifted Student
- Pair the student with another gifted student for the ePALS partners discussions
- Encourage the student to support the cases creatively and appropriately
- Encourage the student to look beyond the obvious text quotations and come up with creative but appropriate evidence to support claims
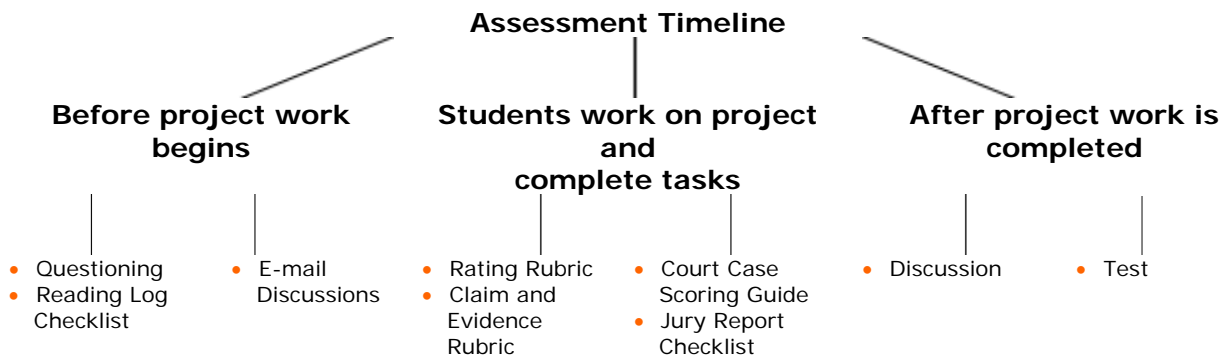
English Language Learner
- Provide a parallel text of *Romeo and Juliet* in the student's native language whenever possible or use a modern English version of the text
- Use some of the scaffolds provided for the resource student, such as the fill-in-the-blank plot worksheets, if appropriate
- Allow the student to choose the type of participation in the trial that draws upon on the student's strengths

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Credits

Some resources in this unit were developed by teachers participating in the Intel® Teach Program. A team of teachers expanded the plan into the example you see here.

THINGS YOU NEED (highlight box)

Assessment Plan

Assessment Timeline

Before project work begins
- Questioning
- Reading Log Checklist

- E-mail Discussions

Students work on project and complete tasks
- Rating Rubric
- Claim and Evidence Rubric

- Court Case Scoring Guide
- Jury Report Checklist

After project work is completed
- Discussion

- Test

Throughout the unit, students engage in discussions about the Curriculum-Framing Questions, which prompt them to explore their analysis and interpretation of *Romeo and Juliet*. As students read *Romeo and Juliet*, they keep reading journals and share their questions and thoughts with ePALS partners. Reading journals are assessed with a reading log checklist. The ePALS partners e-mail discussions are spot-checked throughout the unit to identify and verify the quality and depth of knowledge of the concepts being discussed. The rating rubric is used to assist in the development of the teams' *Showing Evidence* cases. The claim and evidence rubric is used to evaluate the individual student *Showing Evidence* claims and to help teams evaluate each other's work.

A court case scoring guide is used to evaluate the students' work in the trial, with adjustments to the group score based on individual effort and contribution. A jury report checklist provides students with a scaffold to review their own essay and peer review another's. Typical assessments may also be used, such as quizzes and a final test on plot development, literary devices, characters, and so forth.

Standards and Objectives

California State Standards

Reading
3.3 Analyze interactions between main and subordinate characters in a literary text (e.g., internal and external conflicts, motivations, relationships, influences) and explain the way those interactions affect the plot.
3.7 Recognize and understand the significance of various literary devices, including figurative language, imagery, allegory, and symbolism, and explain their appeal.

Writing
1.1 Establish a controlling impression or coherent thesis that conveys a clear and distinctive perspective on the subject and maintain a consistent tone and focus throughout the piece of writing.
1.6 Integrate quotations and citations into a written text while maintaining the flow of ideas.
2.3 Write expository compositions, including analytical essays and research reports:
      a. Marshal evidence in support of a thesis and related claims, including information on all relevant perspectives.

Listening and Speaking

1.1 Formulate judgments about the ideas under discussion and support those judgments with convincing evidence.

1.5 Recognize and use elements of classical speech forms (e.g., introduction, first and second transitions, body, conclusion) in formulating rational arguments and applying the art of persuasion and debate.

1.6 Present and advance a clear thesis statement and choose appropriate types of proof (e.g., statistics, testimony, specific instances) that meet standard tests for evidence, including credibility, validity, and relevance.

2.2 Deliver expository presentations:

>   a. Marshal evidence in support of a thesis and related claims, including information on all relevant perspectives.

Student Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Define, understand, and properly use the Elizabethan English used in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*
- Identify the characters and plot of *Romeo and Juliet*
- Analyze the actions, themes, and social issues of the play and relate them to actions, themes, and social issues that are relevant today
- Recognize and understand the use and purpose of various literary devices
- Write a literary essay that cites appropriate text-based information to support the thesis

Technology and Resources:

Printed Materials

Text of *Romeo and Juliet*, preferably with footnotes to define archaic words. Modern parallel version available for resource and second language learners, if desired.

Internet Resources

- *Romeo and Juliet*
  www-tech.mit.edu/Shakespeare/romeo_juliet*
  The complete text of *Romeo and Juliet* organized by scene
- Mr. William Shakespeare and the Internet
  http://shakespeare.palomar.edu/*
  A complete annotated guide to the scholarly Shakespeare resources available on the Internet as well as resources not found elsewhere
- Shakespeare's Grammar—Glossary Search
  www.bardweb.net/grammar/04gloss.html*
  A glossary for archaic terms used in Shakespeare's plays
- Shakespeare Help—Romeo and Juliet
  www.shakespearehelp.com/romeo/main.htm*
  Links to resource sites for *Romeo and Juliet,* including lots teacher resources
- Shakespeare Illustrated
  http://shakespeare.emory.edu/illustrated_index.cfm*
  Art reflecting Shakespeare's works

Technology—Hardware

- Computers with Internet access for using the *Showing Evidence Tool* and accessing Web-based e-mail

- Printer to print *Showing Evidence* cases and Jury Report (essay)

Technology—Software

- Word processing software for writing the Jury Report (essay)