

## **Teachers' Notes**

This 'Romeo and Juliet' study guide forms the fifth part of Film Education's Screening Shakespeares' series. It is aimed at students studying the play at K53 and also at students of GCSE. It is also useful for students working on Media assignments on English syllabuses and for those studying film language on Media Studies courses. This guide compares the text of the film with the written text and investigates the director's film language which brings to life on the screen a new interpretation for a modern audience.

This series of study guides aims to provide teachers with valuable resource materials for the teaching of Shakespeare throughout the National Curriculum.

All references are taken from 'Romeo and Juliet' the Arden edition of the works of William Shakespeare (edited by Brian Gibbons) published by Routledge (1996).

## **Synopsis**

The film 'Romeo and Juliet' is set in the created world of Verona Beach - a violent, other-world set neither in the future nor in the past where the Montagues and Capulets share an enmity that has become the birthright of their offspring. These wealthy, selfish, ruthless and powerful parents rule this created and frequently corrupt world of businessmen and politicians against which unfolds the well-known love story. Stylistically, the film deliberately echoes recognisable film genres with which a modern cinema-going audience is familiar.

### **ROMEO + JULIET**

*Dir: Baz Luhrmann*

*Certificate 12*

*Running time 120 mins*

The most recent filmed version of Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet directed by Baz Luhrmann attempts to link the language of the original play with modern-day themes such as violence in society, love in dangerous situations and the cult of personality. In making the film, Luhrmann has adopted a style which is completely 'of' the 90's' - action scenes, music, soundtrack etc. - but which blends with Shakespeare's words.

Before we look at the film itself, it is worth thinking about the words which are so often applied to 'Romeo and Juliet' - 'tragic' and 'love story'.

### **Shakespeare's 'Romeo and Juliet' is described as a tragic love story**

What do you understand by a love story? Can you name any? Do they follow particular patterns? What do you think are the conventions of a love story? What do you understand by the term tragic? Can you think of any stories or plays that you would call tragic? What are the conventions of a tragic love story?

### **What does the story of 'Romeo and Juliet' mean to us?**

What do you think of these statements made by people when asked that question?

- Intensity and passion (young love which doesn't last)
- Youth
- It has cultural relevance (we all know young people from different ethnic groups whose parents want to either arrange a marriage, or prevent a relationship)
- The division and opposition of generations (the conflict between parents and children)
- Girls finding their independence and standing up for themselves
- Gang warfare
- Young people having to carry the burden of ancient quarrels
- Universal theme of love and passion

## **TASK**

Either - Carry out your own survey among your classmates at amongst another distinct group (e.g. parents) to find out what the story means to them. Compare their responses to those opposite.

Or - Find as many references as you can to the story of 'Romeo and Juliet' in your library resource centre or through the Internet. You could look at advertisements, pop videos, cartoons - anything that makes any kind of reference to the story or aspects of it.

## **Everybody knows the story**

There are many references made to the story of Shakespeare's 'Romeo and Juliet' in our everyday lives, for example: Elvis Presley sings about the lovers in the song 'Fever'; Dire Straits recorded a song called 'Romeo and Juliet'; 'West Side Story' is a famous musical film version of the play set in New York; Jane Austen refers to the lovers in 'Sense and Sensibility'.

## **Background to the Play**

'Romeo and Juliet', Shakespeare's second tragedy, was written between 1594 -1596. The tragedy is brought about by fate rather than the characteristics of the young lovers which makes it a domestic rather than a political tragedy. It is thought to have been written at around the same time as 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' which contains the essence of the Romeo and Juliet' tragedy in the 'Pyramus and Thisbe' play. The story is based on an Italian legend which was well known in England at that time and in 1554 a version of the story was published which introduced the character of the Nurse and a character similar to Shakespeare's Benvolin. In 1559 a new French translation was the foundation of Arthur Brookes poem 'The Tragical Historye of Romeus and Juliet'. It was Brooke's poem which Shakespeare followed closely for the basis of his play bringing the intensity and passion of this love poem into the drama 'Romeo and Juliet'. For the first time Shakespeare was not using a story drawn from ancient classical history, nor was he using royal characters. He also wrote particular parts with certain actors in mind. Other parts, for instance, Mercutio and the Nurse, were expanded and developed from the original story, probably with the theatre audiences in mind who would have enjoyed their word play and rude jokes.

## Performance

Shakespeare's play would have been performed on a stage with little or no scenery and with just a few props such as a bed or a table. There were very few stage directions and the actors would have worn the most up-to-date fashions of the day. The text of the play would not have been published, therefore each actor would probably only have had his own speaking part in front of him. There would have been corrections and versions changed as the play was in rehearsal. A collected volume of Shakespeare's plays did not appear until after his death.

## The Film Text

Two rival families, the Montagues and the Capulets, rule Verona Beach which is a sexy, violent world neither set in the future, nor the past. Wealthy, selfish, ruthless and powerful the parents of each family share an enmity that has become the birthright of their offspring.

Baz Luhrmann's film *Romeo and Juliet* is introduced to the audience as a segment from a news bulletin. During an interview, Luhrmann explains:

*"I've always wanted to do 'Romeo and Juliet'. The themes it explores, the tragedy that is born of a prohibited love in a world of learned hate is one of those primary myths that appeals to all people. 'Romeo and Juliet', like all of Shakespeare's plays touched everyone from the street sweeper to the Queen of England. He was a rambunctious, sexy, violent and entertaining storyteller. We're tried to make this movie rambunctious, sexy, violent and entertaining the way Shakespeare might have if he was a filmmaker."*

*"Everything that's in the movie is in the play. Violence, murder, lust, love, poison, even drugs that mimic death. - it's all in there. It's just that we have come to associate productions of 'Romeo and Juliet' with a certain style of speaking and certain types of costumes. In fact, those costumes tend to be 19<sup>th</sup> century Victorian interpretations of Shakespeare, or even Renaissance versions. When Shakespeare staged his productions the actors wore their street clothes or costumes from the previous season."*

*"He is just such an extraordinary storyteller" says Luhrmann. "What I really loved is that he had this dilemma in terms of audience. He had to knock dead those people selling pigs, the prostitutes and the nobles because they were all in the same theatre. They had to have a different experience of the material but enjoy it equally."*

*"That's what is so phenomenal about it - everyone can experience his work albeit in different ways. That's an incredible accomplishment. Everyone, from a child to an adult can have a very rich experience from 'Romeo and Juliet' and I think that's why it's still performed and why it's worth doing. Shakespeare had an amazing genius for capturing who we are and revealing it to us. My job is just to re-reveal it."*

## TASK

What does Luhrmann mean by re-reveal it? Who is the target audience he has in mind to reveal it to? Do you think he has succeeded in doing this? If so, how has he achieved it?

## The Created World

To enhance and de-mystify Shakespeare's language, Baz Luhrmann set 'Romeo and Juliet' in what he calls a created world; a collage of modern and classical images drawn from religion, theatre, folklore, technology and pop culture. The idea behind this is that "...it's a made-up world comprising twentieth-century icons" says Luhrmann "and these images are there to clarify what's being said, because once you understand it the power and the beauty of the language works its magic on you. The idea was to find icons that everybody comprehends, that are overtly clear. The hope was that by associating the characters and places with those images the language would be freed from its cage of obscurity."

Luhrmann and his scriptwriting partner, Craig Pearce, decided that, although they didn't want to set the film against an Elizabethan backdrop, they agreed that the social, religious and political aspects of Shakespeare's time certainly influenced the play. Pearce explains the process:

"When we started to describe the created world we considered Shakespeare's views on Verona. In the research we found that he was not historically or geographically accurate in his depiction of Verona. To Shakespeare and to Elizabethan audiences, Verona was a hot, sexy, violent, Catholic country. So we needed to find a place that exists in an equivalent way for our audience. It didn't necessarily have to be naturalistic but we wanted it to ring true. Essentially, we wanted to create heightened circumstances where the characters do the real things."

The filmmakers finally decided on Mexico as the location for the created world. Pearce continues: *"There are textual facts in 'Romeo and Juliet' connected with Elizabethan society that exist in Mexico. For instance, during Shakespeare's time religion was involved in politics and there was a very small percentage of great wealth with a large population of poor. It was violent and people were openly armed. We've interpreted all of these Elizabethan things in the context of the modern created world. In fact, much of this occurs in modern-day Mexico, in varying degrees...It has a mysticism about it and for me it's exotic."*

## TASK

What does Luhrmann mean by an icon? Make a list of as many modern day icons from the film as you can. They could be from the film world, modern western culture or religious icons. If you were creating a world for your film interpretation of 'Romeo and Juliet' what icons would you use to signpost the world they lived in?

Luhrmann and Pearce resolved to stick absolutely to the Shakespearean text and to keep as many of the Elizabethan customs as possible, such as, a highly evolved code of etiquette and honour (even in the use of violence) all in the context of a created world, based on twentieth century icons. Pearce explains further:

"In fact what we've done was set 'Romeo and Juliet' in the world of the movies...what that means is that none of it particularly adds up, chronologically. Some of it looks like it's from the seventies, and some of it looks like it's from the forties. Stylistically, it changes very dramatically echoing recognisable film genres. We've taken identifiable film styles so part of it looks like 'Rebel Without A Cause', part of it looks like a "Busby Berkeley" musical and another part of it looks like a Clint Eastwood 'Dirty Harry' picture. These film styles collectively make up Verona Beach. Audiences are familiar with these changes of style, looks or worlds at some level."

### **TASK**

If you don't know very much about the films Pearce is talking about, do some research on them and find out when they were made and what genre of film they are. What are the icons associated with these films?

Leonardo DiCaprio, who plays Romeo says:

*"The created world really helped me as an actor. It heightened everything which made it more dangerous, more interesting and more liberating. It gave me more freedom to try different things with the character and the scene because we were not held down by traditional rules."*

## Film Language

Cinematographer Donald McAlpine explains the approach the filmmakers took:

*"I guess the problem in doing Shakespeare is that most people know it as a highbrow, stage piece called 'a classic'. We wanted to get away from any hint of a stage. We also tried to develop as much movement and change of perspective as possible using every cinematic trick we can think of to make it look as much like a movie as we can. What we're not using is the classic two shot followed by an over-the-shoulder type coverage. We rarely used the usual Hollywood language of the classic, matching singles. The movie, while true to the story and language of 'Romeo and Juliet', flies in the face of what is considered classical Shakespeare and we attempted to echo that in the construction of the cinematography. We developed a particular film style, a new film language, if you will."*

Filmmakers use the term film language to mean everything they can use to deliver the story most effectively to the audience. This language includes:

- cinematography/camerawork
- mise en scene
- sets, costumes and make-up
- locations
- lighting
- casting
- editing
- music and sound

Explore these various aspects of film language and see how they are used in Romeo and Juliet.

## Cinematography

The essential elements of cinematography are lighting, cameras, and lenses. The way moving images are photographed is crucial in a film and the position of the camera is of key importance. For example, if a camera is looking down on its subject its position is one of power. By manipulating camera angles the filmmaker can tell us a lot about the relationship between two characters looking at each other. The camera can also take on a character's point of view and allow the audience to identify with that particular person.

### TASK

Look closely at the scene where Romeo and Juliet meet at the masked ball.

Why are all the shots in close-up? Why has the director chosen an aquarium for their eyes to meet across? What is the effect of the water and the fish floating past? How does this sequence contrast with what is going on around them?

### TASK

Look closely at the scene between Juliet and her father, Fulgencio Capulet, when she opposes his plan for her to marry Paris. How does the camera intensify this emotional scene? Does the camera linger on one person or go backwards and forwards between the two? What position does the camera take to make Juliet's father appear violent and threatening? What effect do the close-ups have on us, the audience? Do we share anyone's point of view in this scene? If so, how does the camera do this?

Look at Shakespeare's written text of this scene (Act 3 Scene V: Page 187) from where Lady Capulet introduces the subject of marriage to Juliet and compare the two versions. What has the filmmaker cut from the text? What aspects has he emphasised and how has he used the camera to do this?

When choosing camera shots and lenses filmmakers have to decide what is more important to bring across the desired meaning. Should the emphasis be on the expression of certain feelings or moods or on realism for that particular moment in the film?



## Mise en Scene

When we watch a film everything we see on screen is enclosed within a film frame. Sometimes it is as if we are looking through a window and a scene is passing naturally in front of our eyes. In fact, what we are looking at has been carefully arranged within that frame by the director of the film. The director chooses where to place people and objects within the frame in order to give us a particular point of view or understanding of what is going on in front of our eyes.

'Mise en scene' is a French term which refers to the arrangement of actors, props and action on a film set. It is used to describe everything that can be seen in a frame, the setting, lighting, visual composition, costumes and the action. The director controls the mise en scene and sets up the scene for the camera. The composition of the individual frame can strongly influence the way we understand a character's behaviour. The setting, lighting, costumes and make-up etc. all contribute to the meaning of 'mise en scene' and to our understanding of filmmaking.

Every scene that we see on the screen could be filmed in a different way according to the meaning the director wants to convey to the audience.

The setting - this is much more than simply a container for the action and can greatly influence the meaning of a scene. The setting can evoke calmness, excitement or drabness which can reflect the emotions of the characters in a scene. Colours can also be used to give a certain feel to a scene.

In 'Romeo and Juliet' several important scenes take place in Juliet's bedroom. Few stage settings accompany Shakespeare's written text and he did not give any details about the decor of Juliet's bedroom. Catherine Martin, the production designer, had to produce a setting that would immediately relay certain elements about Juliet and the Capulets in a visual language that would support the spoken one. The result is a spacious, high-ceilinged powder-blue and pale yellow room, framed by French windows with blue and white filigreed curtains that open out onto the famous balcony. This is very much a young girl's room where a legion of pastel-coloured porcelain saints keep company with a group of fluffy stuffed animals and a collection of dolls. Catherine Martin explains:

*"I've tried to simplify Juliet's bedroom so that when people see the sets they think of a rich girl's bedroom with religious iconography in a place where religion is still important and the trappings of wealth aren't embarrassing. The plan was to convey ideas through the sets in a way that wasn't very subtle, that was very clear; so that people will know instantly where they are and will be able to concentrate on the language the actors are speaking."*

## TASK

Look at the scene in Juliet's bedroom again but this time concentrate on the decor.

Make a list of all the objects that you can remember that give you an impression of her age, character, social position and her interests.

## TASK

Either - Choose one of the characters in the play e.g. Romeo, Mercutio, Tybalt, the Nurse etc. and in the role of production designer create a bedroom or study for that character. Examine Shakespeare's written text of the play to see where the character you have chosen appears and what characteristics they display. Decide what character traits or information you want to convey through your set. Think about colours and objects.

Or - Design a bedroom for a Juliet amongst your contemporaries. What information are you trying to give about her? How would you do this on your set? You may need to look at Shakespeare's text more closely to find out what sort of girl Juliet is. What posters might she have on her wall? What books is she reading? What kind of objects would be around?

The director of a film has to decide between using a studio set or a real location. This is not just a question of money but also of the overall desired effect. A studio construction gives the director almost total control over decor, weather conditions and colours. On the other hand, a real location conveys an atmosphere and character which is hard to recreate in a studio. (A period drama, for instance, set in mediaeval times, is best filmed on location in order to achieve historical authenticity.)

Production designer, Catherine Martin explains:

*"For me the created world came down to the fact that Shakespeare's plays were always a bit of a pastiche. They were never one pure period. He never went to Verona and studied in detail the workings of Verona society when he wrote 'Romeo and Juliet'. It was his vision as an Englishman, of this mythical Italianate country, where everyone was passionate and hot-blooded...I think the created world is basically about devising situations or environments in which people believe that the action could take place."*

## TASK

Think of locations in the film 'Romeo and Juliet' which emphasise and intensify ideas about the characters and the atmosphere. Look at the scene on the beach where the two gangs meet. Write down your ideas.

How is the scene lit? What are the predominant colours? What do you see in the background? Is it day or night? How did the director's choices contribute to the meaning of this particular scene?

## Sets, Costume and Make-up

The overall appearance of characters in a film is extremely important for the way we see them. Costumes and make-up play an important role in providing information about characters, their motivations and their significance within the story. Characters are often dressed to underline their personality and mood, and this helps to explain why they act in a certain way. When choosing the costumes the filmmaker has to decide whether it is more important for the characters to look natural and realistic, or whether their significance can be better conveyed through a more stylised and exaggerated look.

Costume designer, Kym Barrett explains:

*"Shakespeare's language, for most people, is a little daunting at first. In most movies, what people say conveys the facts but in this it will take the audience some time to get into listening to the language and relaxing into the rhythm of it. What I tried to do with the costumes was help smooth the way. The first information they may get is through what they see. The language will reinforce what they see and, sooner or later, the audience hopefully, won't be able to tell which came first. At one point during the story, and for everyone it'll be a different place, the language and the visual information will become interchangeable."*

Director, Baz Luhrmann comments:

*"Everything was about revealing the language, making it less distant and more potent."*

For Instance, Shakespeare refers to Romeo's enemy Tybalt as the 'Prince of Cats' and 'King of Cats' and alludes to his "...quick feral and deadly prowess with the sword." Luhrmann keeps the words and describes them visually.

### **TASK**

Look at the moment when Tybalt steps from the car onto the beach.

Do his actions and dress remind you of a cat-like animal? What does he do? What are the details of his clothes? How does he move? Mercutio refers to Tybalt as the 'Prince of Cats' in (Act 2 Scene IV: Page 142). Can you find any other references to these qualities in Shakespeare's written text?

## The Masked Ball

The ballroom is a key location as it is the setting in which 'Romeo and Juliet' fall in love. The garish film set was designed to provide a contrast to the purity of the two young lovers. Kym Barrett, the costume designer, remarks:

*"The ballroom set was a way of contrasting the simplicity of Romeo and Juliet and their love to the harshness of the world that surrounds them- a world that is more concerned with appearances. It also makes it very clear that there is a reason they are together. They are both outsiders in the extraordinary over-the-top place."*

Barrett continues:*"...I thought Romeo and Juliet should be different from everyone else in the piece, but they couldn't be so different that they'd be conspicuous or so that the audience would think they were special. The result was that we made their clothes the simplest of all with very clean lines and not embellished at all."*

Romeo appears mostly in blue tones or pale silvers, while Juliet appears in pure white.

*"Every time I read through a scene and saw Catherine's set, it just always seemed that Romeo and Juliet would stand out against the background, without being too obvious... I thought that simple tones would emphasise that they are, in a way, like spectres, the ones whose hold on life is the most tenuous."*

The hair and make-up team, together with the costume designer, created guests at the ball to fit in with the lavish and decadent surroundings.

*"Baz told me he wanted the look of the party to be a bit sinister, not all fun and frivolity. He wanted Romeo and Juliet to walk into a grotesque, Bacchanalian example of what their parents' world is...Catherine had designed walls in very dark reds and so I thought, ok, if I make really strong silhouettes with the costumes, using very strong colours and we spend a lot of time on their hats and hair (and they wear extraordinary make-up) then these people will look gaudy and ornate and slightly sinister and dark."*

For the masked ball, Kym Barrett deliberately dressed the principal players in costumes that reflected exaggerated versions of their personalities.

*"What I tried to do was convey the universal qualities of each character. Everyone knows these characters. They may recognise them in a different form or age group, but they are figures who appear in every type of society, every social strata, every family...My job was to make that feeling expand across as wide an audience as possible so that people will identify with them, so they'll say 'I get that. I know that character. I know someone like that.'"*

Look at the references to the ball in Shakespeare's written text (Act 1 Scene V: Page 113) and consider how the director, Baz Luhrmann, has picked this particular event out to convey so much visual information. To recap, what information do we get from simply looking at the ballroom scene?

### **TASK**

Look at the ballroom scene. Pick out some of the details of the costumes. Do you remember how the Capulet parents dressed for the ball? How does this emphasise or extend aspects of their personalities? How are Paris and Tybalt dressed?

## **The Gangs**

Costume designer, Kym Barrett, felt that it was important to differentiate between the young Montagues and Capulets. This was quite difficult as she also wanted to indicate that they came from the same socio-economic class, as she clarifies here:

*"The Capulets' style is more decorative and the Montague kids are more utilitarian...The Capulets wear ornamental and expensive pieces of clothing, and bullet-proof vests have become required accessories...it's a place where guns are the norm so life and clothing would have changed to adapt to that. The Capulets are more manicured and preening and wear clothes that are extremely well-cut and body conscious."*

The designers, Dolce and Gabbana, were the inspiration for the Capulets' clothing; the Montagues, on the other hand, are quite different. They have a distinctive, colourful style with Hawaiian shirts and short hair.

### **TASK**

Look at the beach scene. Write down more details of the style and dress code of the two gangs. Design the style and look of two opposing groups in your neighbourhood. Like the Montagues and the Capulets they should come from the same socioeconomic background and both want to convey a distinct and immediately recognisable 'look'. Think of what a gang might like to convey and then design a typical outfit. Think about items of clothing, emblems, tattoos, head gear etc

## Lighting

The way a lighting director lights objects and characters on a set can greatly influence our understanding of a scene. Our attention can be guided by a brightly lit object, a gesture or facial expression important to the storyline, whilst keeping other details in darkness. An evenly lit room with few shadows can convey a feeling of calm and security, whereas highly contrasted light and shade can create fear or unease. Lighting can be used to create a sense of place, atmosphere and the state of mind of the character.

### TASK

Do you associate certain types of film or film genres with special or highlighted effects? You will have expectations of different types of lighting used in different types of film and as a member of a film audience you have come to understand each particular lighting effect. What lighting do you associate with the following film genres?

**horror**

**westerns**

**love stories**

**action**

Look at the beach scene and think about how the lighting affects our understanding of the situation and the characters' behaviour and then take a contrasting scene (either a night-time or an indoor sequence) and carry out the same exercise.

## Casting

Actors not only bring to films their physical presence but an 'image' from other films they have previously appeared in. Stars have images that they might have acquired through publicity (good or bad press) relating to a particular life style or by playing similar lead character roles in other films. When an actor appears in a certain film we cannot help associating the character they play with this Image. Think of some stars associated with particular images.

Leonardo DiCaprio (Romeo) made his film debut in 'This Boy's Life' and his performance in 'What's Eating Gilbert Grape' merited an Oscar nomination for Best Supporting Actor. Other films include 'The Basketball Diaries' and 'Marvin's Room' opposite Meryl Streep. Claire Danes (Juliet) has won a Golden Globe Award and earned an Emmy nomination for her work on the television drama 'My So-Called Life'. Her performance as Beth in Little Women also earned her a high degree of praise.

Baz Luhrmann, the director, cast these young American actors and invited them to speak Shakespeare's lines in their own American accent. This was a deliberate choice on Luhrmann's part as he rationalises:

*"When you do Shakespeare with an American accent, it makes it very strong-makes the language very alive. It may, or may not, make the language sound less pretty but I wanted to address this piece as a very boisterous, very real and passionate piece of storytelling - the way in which I believe Shakespeare wrote it."*

*"I thought that Leonardo was an extraordinary young actor and I thought he'd make a great Romeo. It's important to reveal these eternal characters anew for every generation...I just thought he'd be a perfect Romeo. It was as simple as that."*

*"To me the language in Leonardo's mouth is a wonderful thing to hear because the words have resonance. He speaks as if they really are his words and that's something you don't always get in a Shakesperean performance."*

The role of Juliet appealed to Claire Danes as she recalls here:

*"Juliet is a remarkable part because she is so determined and mature but, at the same time, she has an innocence about her, a youth and freshness... She is very thoughtful, smart and passionate. She is an incredibly modern character. She makes her own decisions and takes fate into her own hands which, for a woman, was unheard of in Shakespeare's time."*

Claire Danes found Juliet's spectrum of emotions intriguing and exhausting at times as she explains:

*"That was the biggest challenge to reach the extremes in the gamut of emotion Juliet feels. Baz and I used to joke about it; we'd talk about the scene we were going to shoot of Juliet in the coffee shop with her best friend when she'd complain about maths class being such a bore... Of course, Juliet's life is never normal. She's falling in love or defying her parents or taking a sleeping potion or dying. Everything about her is real; it's just heightened and very dramatic..."*

## **TASK**

What qualities do you associate with the following stars? Robert de Niro, Al Pacino, Whoopi Goldberg, Julia Roberts, Michelle Pfeiffer, Sylvester Stallone, Jodie Foster, Brad Pitt and Arnold Schwarzenegger.

## TASK

Think about Juliet as a daughter, or a schoolgirl, or imagine her with a group of friends (we never actually see her with her contemporaries in the film) in an everyday situation. Write a short dialogue or scene which highlights aspects of her personality that you have seen/learnt about or have picked up hints of. You may need to go back to Shakespeare's written text to find out more about her - read her conversations with the Nurse, her mother, her father.

Baz Luhrmann, drew upon film references to help to identify Shakespeare's characters for contemporary audiences. For example, in the play, Juliet's mother, the venerated Lady Capulet is a woman so self-absorbed that she cannot even fathom the emotional gulf between herself and her daughter. In the film Lady Capulet becomes Gloria Capulet who Luhrmann describes as "...a little bit like the quintessential Tennessee Williams' southern belle, like Blanche DuBois." Juliet's father is also blind to his daughter's distress. He tries to speed up the marriage between Juliet and Paris, a match that Capulet views as politically, socially and economically expedient. Luhrmann sees Capulet as "...the classic Godfather patriarch."



## Editing

When films were first made, filmmakers set up their cameras and kept the film rolling taking one continuous shot of an event so the time it took for the action to really take place was the amount of time that the event was shown on screen.

As cameras were developed to take more film, filmmakers realised that their audiences were becoming more sophisticated and experimented with putting together different scenes, editing together strips of film showing different scenes. They saw that audiences did not need to be shown an event in real time, consequently a technique of editing a film together began to emerge. Filmmakers could build up the narrative using different sequences not necessarily in chronological order.

### TASKS

1. Look at the scenes between Friar Laurence and Romeo where they are discussing Romeo's love for Juliet. During their conversation Friar Laurence imagines this 'new love' uniting the warring Montague and Capulet families and these images of peace are edited into the conversation. Compare this scene with Shakespeare's written text and look at how the director has cut the written text and yet reinforced the meaning. (Act II Scene III: Page 137)
2. The trailer for the film is a good example of shots being selected and edited into a sequence. Look at the trailer and discuss why these particular shots were chosen to sell the film and what effect on the audience the editing of a particular sequence may have. Comment on the pace of the trailer. What does this contribute to our idea of the film?
3. What shots would you choose from the film 'Romeo and Juliet' if you were selling the film as a love story or as an action drama. Select the shots you would use for two trailers. Consider one trailer for a love story and the other as an action drama about gang warfare. Write the voice-over for both trailers and think about the kind of music you would like to use. If you have access to an edit suite you can cut your own trailer from all the clips shown at the end of the television programme.

## Sound

What do we hear on the soundtrack of a film?

Voices, background conversation, voice-overs (thoughts, commentary, explanation) special effects noises, music.

Sound effects are used to create a feeling of realism and they can also act as clues - we may hear a sound before we know where it is coming from. Sound can anticipate action or let us know that something important is about to happen.

The soundtrack for 'Romeo and Juliet' was supervised by the musical director Nellee Hooper who is the co-creator and co-producer of the band Soul II Soul. He won the 1995 Brit Award for Best Producer for producing and co-writing Massive Attack's million-selling album 'Protection'.

Music is a powerful tool in creating and enhancing mood and atmosphere and Nellee Hooper and Baz Luhrmann carefully chose pieces and recorded songs to underline and pinpoint the mood and meaning of particular moments in the story. Market research has shown that music is a key feature in films to a young audience; the sound tracks of 'Trainspotting' and 'Dangerous Minds' have both been commercial successes. The compilation album for 'Romeo and Juliet' is currently number two in the American album charts and includes 'Kissing You' by Des'ree, a cover version of 'Young Hearts Run Free' by Kim Mazelle, 'Talk Show Host' by Radiohead and other songs by The Cardigans, The Wannadies and Garbage.

Can you identify the music used in 'Romeo and Juliet'? Can you pick out moments when the music contributed to the atmosphere and the mood? Look again at the ballroom sequences and listen to the singer. Look again at the beach scenes. Select two sequences from Shakespeare's written text and break them down into camera shots with your own soundtrack.

### TASK

What are the different ways that music is used within a film? There are theme tunes for particular films. What other kinds of music do filmmakers use and for what purpose? You have already carried out an exercise on the lighting we associate with particular genres of films (page 14). Go back to the work you have done and add the music that you associate with these particular genres.

### FURTHER READING

Film Education's study guides:  
Film Concepts: Language  
The Storyboard Pack  
The Scriptwriting Pack