

Open Forum 1

Web Site Transcript

Chapter 2

A = Teacher

B = Student 1

C = Student 2

A: By now you should be finished reading all of Shakespeare's play *Romeo and Juliet*. So today I want to review the play and focus on one of the characters: Juliet. I think that Juliet really makes this love story interesting and I want to talk about why.

A lot of people think of Shakespeare as an author who wrote novels that people read. But Shakespeare never actually wrote books; he wrote plays meant to be acted. So as we look at *Romeo and Juliet*, I want you to imagine that the story is performed by actors, not read quietly to yourself.

As you know, the story of *Romeo and Juliet* happens in Verona, Italy and is a very old story. Two important families, the Montagues and the Capulets, are enemies. They're very angry with each other. Romeo Montague falls in love with Juliet Capulet. So from the start, we know that this relationship is going to have some very big problems. And it does.

Can anyone give me a quick summary of the story?

B: Well, Romeo and Juliet... they get married... secretly. And only Romeo and Juliet and their priest know about the wedding. After the wedding, Romeo gets in a fight and kills Juliet's cousin and so he has to leave Verona. Then Juliet's parents tell her that she has to get married to another man, a guy named Paris. So the priest and Juliet make a plan.

A: And what is their plan?

B: Well, Juliet will pretend she's dead to avoid the wedding with Paris. But unfortunately, Romeo doesn't know that she is actually alive, and he rushes back to Verona. When Romeo sees Juliet's body and thinks she's really dead, he kills himself. Then Juliet wakes up, and, when she sees Romeo's dead body, she kills herself, too.

A: Good. Very good summary!

Now *Romeo and Juliet* is one of Shakespeare's earlier plays. It's really a favorite of many, many people. Both Romeo and Juliet are very well developed characters. They have real emotions and personality. They come alive as we watch or read the play.

So, let's take a closer look at Juliet. What did you think of her?

C: I really liked her. I was kind of surprised how strongly she loved Romeo. She went against her whole family so she could be with him.

A: Exactly! But notice that she doesn't start off as this strong young woman. Juliet changes in the story. When we first meet Juliet, she's a 13 year old girl. She's quiet and she usually does what her parents want her to do. At the beginning of the play she's a "good girl." She wants to please her family. But by the end of the play, Juliet moves from being this young girl to being an independent, mature young woman. Juliet's independence is almost shocking. For instance, she tells her parents that she will not marry Paris, the man they've chosen for her. She questions why Romeo must be an enemy to her family. Juliet even asks Romeo to marry her! All of this was very unusual for a girl in the sixteenth century. But Juliet knows who she loves; she is even willing to die for her love of Romeo.

Here's another thing. Juliet grows more mature in the story. She knows the danger of her relationship with Romeo. For instance, Juliet tells Romeo to be careful when he is outside her balcony talking of love. Juliet also realizes that their relationship can never be happy. Several times in the play, she even refers to her own death. It is Juliet's growing maturity and independence that make her such an interesting character. She's changing... becoming stronger each day.

Now *Romeo and Juliet* is a tragic, horribly sad story. But it has some universal themes of love and youth. It's been produced many, many times for stage and cinema. And it's my opinion that the strong and beautiful Juliet is the character who makes this love story so popular.

Now can anyone tell me...