

Social and Historical Context							
Romeo and Juliet is set in a Patriarchal Society . A patriarchy is a social system where men hold primary power and dominate society.			Women were owned by men; they belonged to their fathers and gifted to their husbands, who then owned them. A woman's purpose was to marry and bear children.				
The Monarch at the time R&J was written was Queen Elizabeth. Society was incredibly religious and focused on order and obedience, especially to social norms.			Suicide was considered a sin and a betrayal of God's purpose. Suicide was considered evil, and those who died by it could not be buried in consecrated ground.				
The Plague was a constant threat to society. Mass death had occurred, with the last outbreak occurring between 1592 and 1593 – just before Romeo and Juliet was performed.			Shakespeare wrote three types of play – comedies, tragedies and histories. R&J is a tragedy. One of the key elements of a tragedy is a character's Hamartia (fatal flaw).				
Petrarchan love – a Petrarchan lover is rejected which leads to inner turmoil. In Elizabethan society, it was the role of a woman to reject a man's advances.			Elizabethans believe that children were a gift from God . They were given to their parents. If a child disobeyed their parents, they were seen as disobeying God which was a sin.				
Courtly love was characterised by falling in love at first sight and dying for your true love. For love to be considered courtly, the man cannot eat or sleep and isolates himself; he should forget his old love when a new one comes along; the man should speak in poetry when he is in love.			Fate is defined as the development of events outside of a person's control as it is defined by supernatural forces. In Elizabethan times, it was thought that a greater force (God, the stars) had defined destiny. Fate was a central concept in Elizabethan times and it was highly respected.				
Ordered Great Chain of Being was the basis of Elizabethan society. It is based on a hierarchical ordering of all people and creation. It meant that all people must adhere to their place in the chain – for example, women below men, higher classes above lower classes. If there was a break in the chain, Elizabethans believed that there would be chaos.							
Structure and form			Characters				
Prologue	This outlines the main ideas in the play and tells the audience briefly what will happen. It contains hints about the key themes.		Montague family		Capulet family		
Sonnet	14 lines long; written in iambic Pentameter; has an ABAB rhyme scheme and ends in a rhyming couplet. Associated with love.		Romeo		Juliet		
			Mercutio		Tybalt		
			Montague		Capulet		
iambic Pentameter	The pattern/rhythm of a line of verse which has one unstressed syllable followed by one stressed syllable (de-DUM)		Benvolio		Nurse		
Blank Verse	Unrhymed iambic pentameter		Balthasar		Paris		
Free Verse	A line without a strict rhyme or syllable pattern (meter)		Abraham		Sampson		
Prose	Lines free from the structure of meter or rhyme				Gregory		
Foreshadowing	A warning of a future event		Friar Lawrence				
Dramatic Irony	The audience knows more than the characters		Prince Escalus				
Themes							
Love		Conflict	Gender	Fate	Individual vs Society	Family	Friendship
Act One	The Servants meet on the streets and fight. Escalus threatens the families with death if they disturb the streets again. Paris asks Capulet for Juliet's hand in marriage; Capulet says not yet, but throws a ball for them to meet. Romeo tells Benvolio he is in love with Rosaline, and then accidentally gets an invitation to the Capulet ball. Romeo attends the Capulet ball. Tybalt recognises him and wants to fight him but Capulet stops him. Romeo and Juliet meet, fall in love instantly and kiss.						
Act Two	Romeo climbs the orchard walls to find Juliet on her balcony, declaring her love for him. They discuss their feelings, and Juliet proposes marriage. Romeo agrees, and visits Friar Lawrence to book the wedding. Friar advises him against it, but eventually agrees as he feels it will bring the warring families together. They marry in secret.						
Act Three	Tybalt wants to fight Romeo, but Romeo declines – Tybalt doesn't know it, but he and Romeo are now related following Romeo's marriage to Juliet. Mercutio steps in, and Tybalt stabs Mercutio under Romeo's arm – Romeo becomes enraged and kills Tybalt. The Prince banishes Romeo. Juliet finds out and is distraught. She sends a message to Romeo through the Nurse and he arrives at her room. They spend a final night together before he leaves Verona. Capulet decides Juliet should marry Paris – she refuses, and he threatens to disown her. She decides to visit the Friar to ask for help, and tricks her parents into believing she will marry Paris after all.						
Act Four	Juliet visits the Friar and they make a plan. Friar sends a letter to Romeo to tell him what they are going to do, and Juliet takes a potion from the Friar which will make it seem like she is dead. At night, she is frightened of taking the potion but does so as she loves Romeo. The nurse finds Juliet and thinks she is dead.						
Act Five	Romeo has not received the letter from the Friar as the plague meant that the messenger could not deliver it. Balthasar tells Romeo that Juliet is dead, and he decides to return to Verona to kill himself on her grave. He buys a poison and returns to Verona. He is apprehended by Paris, so Romeo kills Paris. He finds Juliet's body, and drinks the poison and dies. Juliet awakes, and seeing Romeo dead, kills herself with his dagger. The families are distraught, but decide to make amends as they have lost their beloved children and realise the error of their ways.						

Character	Key word	Example
Romeo	Subvert	Romeo subverts the gender stereotypes for a young man in Elizabethan society.
	Impulsive	Romeo's impulsive nature is shown several times through the play.
	Irrational	His irrational nature forces him to act on impulse.
	Impetuosity	His Hamartia is his impetuosity when under pressure.
	Foil	Benvolio and Mercutio are a foil to Romeo's character
Juliet	Impassioned	Juliet is an incredibly impassioned character who acts on her emotions
	Submissive	There are key moments in the play where Juliet is submissive, and key moments when she decides that she no longer wishes to be that submissive character.
	Resolute	Once Juliet makes up her mind that she will stand by Romeo, she is resolute.
	Deceitful	Juliet becomes deceitful when she tricks her parents and the nurse into believing she will agree to marry Paris.
	Courageous	Her courageous nature is shown when accepts the dangers she may face before drinking the potion, and also in the way she chooses to die.
Lord Capulet	Pugnacious	Lord Capulet becomes pugnacious when Juliet refuses to obey him.
	Domineering	His domineering nature means that he asserts control over Juliet, which was typical of most fathers in those patriarchal times.
	Imperious	When Juliet tries to take control of her own destiny, his imperious nature means he finds it difficult to accept that she will stand up to him.
	Nurturing	At the beginning of the play, Lord Capulet seems nurturing as he wishes for Paris to wait two more years before marrying his daughter, who he calls 'the hopeful lady of my earth'.
	Erratic	Whilst Lord Capulet can be pugnacious and imperious, he shows a different side in the Capulet ball when he forces Tybalt to leave Romeo alone and allow him to enjoy the Capulet party.
Tybalt	Antagonistic	Tybalt is an antagonistic character whose purpose is to create conflict and violence.
	Imperious	His hamartia is his imperious nature; he is unable to allow others to live peacefully if he feels hatred towards them.
	Feisty	We see Tybalt at the centre of all the moments of conflict in the play, which demonstrates his feisty nature.
	Contentious	Tybalt's contentious nature is shown when he is ready to disobey Lord Capulet in the Capulet ball in order to confront Romeo.
	Instigator	In all the scenes which contain violence, Tybalt could be argued to be the instigator.
Mercutio	Impulsive	Mercutio is an impulsive character; he is fun-loving and is seen to act immediately on his impulses without taking time to think and be rational.
	Mercurial	His name is an insight to his mercurial character – he is unpredictable and this can led to humour or have dark consequences.
	Witty	During Act one, his Queen Mab speech shows his witty and playful nature and demonstrates how he brings moments of light to the play.
	Ridicules	He ridicules the Nurse, antagonising her and showing no respect for her – he seems to do this for fun and to bring laughter to the audience.
	Gregarious	It is Mercutio's gregarious nature which takes Romeo to the Capulet ball.