

Romeo and Juliet: Morals, Ethics, Social Issues

Pillar: Positive Social Environments

Division: III

Grade Level: 9

Core Curriculum Connections: English Language Arts

I. Rationale:

This lesson is designed to help students explore moral and ethical issues they are faced with today by reflecting upon the same timeless moral and ethical issues in the play, "Romeo and Juliet". Students will work through a variety of pre-reading and post-reading activities that require them to analyse the social offenses that occur in the play based on their own personal values and beliefs. Upon evaluating and defending their own thinking and beliefs, students will compare their responses before and after reading the play. Character attributes of respect, integrity, and responsibility are central to this lesson.

II. Positive Social Environment Focus:

Students will:

1. Evaluate, rank, and compare a series of social offenses dealing with moral and ethical situations.
2. Present and discuss textual evidence that supports and justifies own reasoning and point of view.
3. Listen to and consider diverse opinions and determine how these affect their own thinking.
4. Reflect upon how deficits of character are related to social offenses.
5. Analyze, interpret, and evaluate how the choices, motives, and actions of characters can provide insight into those of self and others.
6. Collaborate as a team, take on a specific role, and assess their own contribution to the team and the group's effectiveness as a whole.

III. Curriculum Outcomes: English Language Arts

Specific Outcomes

1.1 Discover and Explore

Express ideas and develop understanding

- talk with others and experience a variety of oral, print and other media texts to explore, develop and justify own opinions and points of view explore and explain how interactions with others and with oral, print and other media texts affect personal understandings

1.2 Clarify and Extend

Consider others' ideas

- integrate own perspectives and interpretations with new understandings developed through discussing and through experiencing a variety of oral, print and other media texts

Combine ideas

- examine and re-examine ideas, information and experiences from different points of view to find patterns and see relationships

Extend understanding

- assess whether new information extends understanding by considering diverse opinions and exploring ambiguities

2.1 Use Strategies and Cues

Use prior knowledge

- discuss how interpretations of the same text might vary, according to the prior knowledge and experience of various readers
- use previous reading experiences, personal experiences and prior knowledge as a basis for reflecting on and interpreting ideas encountered in texts

2.2 Respond to Texts

Experience various texts

- identify and discuss how timeless themes are developed in a variety of oral, print and other media texts
- consider historical context when developing own points of view or interpretations of oral, print and media texts

Construct meaning from texts

- analyze how the choices and motives of characters portrayed in oral, print and other media texts provide insight into those of self and others
- relate the themes, emotions and experiences portrayed in oral, print and other media texts to issues of personal interest or significance

IV. Materials:

- A class set of *Romeo and Juliet* (any version)
- Baron's *Romeo and Juliet Shakespeare Made Easy* (optional)
- "Before Reading the Play" handout
- "After Reading the Play" handout

V. Procedure:

i. Before Reading the Play

1. Arrange students into cooperative groups of three or four. To promote collaboration, assign a role to each group member. Suggested roles are gatekeeper (who makes sure everyone participates), taskmaster (who makes sure the team stays on the topic), reflector (who makes sure the team occasionally reflects on its progress and its use of social skills), and a cheerleader (who makes sure the group stops and celebrates its accomplishments) (*Kagan 2004; Cooperative Roles p.1*).
2. a. Distribute the handout "Before Reading the Play" to each student. First ask students to individually evaluate and rank the list of 14 social offenses in order of seriousness. Then they can continue to answer the questions related to character attributes at the bottom of the page. Tell students to be prepared to defend their decisions in their group discussion.

b. In their groups, ask students to discuss their rankings and provide reasons for their choices. Ask each group to identify the items for which their group finds the most difference of opinion. During their discussion, students may change their opinions based on the discussion of their group. Students then can discuss their answers to the questions.
3. If desired, ask each group to report out the highlights of their discussion to the whole class.

ii. After Reading the Play

After students have read and discussed the play and its themes use the following activity:

1. Arrange students in cooperative groups and assign roles for their discussion (see number one).

2. Distribute the handout “After Reading the Play” and first have students individually evaluate and rank in order of seriousness the 14 social offenses listed from the play. Then the group can discuss their responses, fulfilling their group roles throughout the discussion. The key to this exercise is to determine if, after reading and discussing the play and the actions of the characters, the students change their ranking of the seriousness of the actions. Have students refer to the handout “Before Reading the Play” to do their comparisons of rank order. Ask students to give reasons to support their choices and provide evidence from the text to support their explanations.
3. Students then answer the questions that follow the ranking activity. These questions ask students to reflect on:
 - a. the seriousness of each offense and how these behaviours contribute to the outcome of the play
 - b. the relationship of an individual’s character to the events which occur to him or her in life, and
 - c. their beliefs about the role of fate in life versus the nature of an individual’s character.
4. If desired, ask each group to report out the highlights of their discussion to the whole class. Ask students to dialogue about alternative behaviours that could have been chosen in the play that would demonstrate respect, honesty, fairness, responsibility, loyalty, self-discipline, courtesy,

i. Participation and Discussion:

For the small and large group discussions, assess group and individual preparation, participation, argument detail, use of textual evidence to support arguments and listening skills. The written assignments can be assessed for completeness, detail, use of evidence in the written responses, depth of analysis, and conventions of language. Additionally the Rubric for Writing in Response to Journal Prompts (<http://charactered.ocde.us/ICE/Lessons/index.asp>) can be used to assess in-class writing responses.

Students can also be assessed on their understanding of the following themes for *Romeo and Juliet*:

- Generation gap
- Uselessness of violence
- Stubbornness and pride leading to death and heartbreak
- The strength of young love
- The dangers of dishonesty
- Revenge leads to destruction
- Fate often controls lives

i. Literary Analysis:

Students can develop an essay of literary analysis discussing how the lack of an individual’s positive character traits may be related and contribute to specific tragic actions or outcomes of the play.

Assessment of cooperative skills can occur during class as the teacher monitors student groups and team roles while they work. To process the group work these prompts can be used:

- What worked well in your group?*
- What could have been improved?*
- What did you contribute to the team’s learning?*
- How did the team contribute to your learning?*
- How did team members show respect and responsibility?*
- What other character traits did your team members demonstrate?*

iii. Reflective Journaling Prompts

- When you think of social offenses, what comes to mind? Provide concrete examples to support your thoughts.

- Look at the handout “Before Reading the Play.” Which of the social offenses in the list would you never participate in under any circumstances? Why?
- Look at the handout “Before Reading the Play.” Are there any social offenses listed that you might participate in without much difficulty? Explain.
- Look at the handout “Before Reading the Play.” Chose one of the social offenses that you think might be acceptable for you to do under some circumstances but not under others. Explain when it is acceptable and when it is not acceptable.
- Compare and contrast your rankings on the first list to your rankings on the second list. Are there any differences in your rankings? Explain why.

Name: _____

Date: _____ Period _____

Romeo and Juliet: Exploring Timeless Social Issues

Before Reading the Play

Consider the following 14 social offenses. Rank each action in order of seriousness, with 1 being the most serious and 14 the least serious. Be prepared to give reasons for your choices. When you have completed the ranking, answer each question below. Then, when everyone in your group has completed the assignment, begin your discussion. Discuss the items in which your group finds the most difference of opinion.

- _____ Planning to trick someone
- _____ Lying to parents
- _____ Killing someone for revenge
- _____ Advising someone to marry for money
- _____ Two families having a feud
- _____ Selling poison
- _____ Killing someone by mistake while fighting
- _____ Cursing
- _____ Killing someone in self-defense
- _____ Suicide
- _____ Crashing a party
- _____ Marrying against parents' wishes
- _____ Giving an obscene gesture
- _____ Picking a fight

Questions:

Please respond in detailed sentences.

1. What does each of the above situations have in common? Explain.
2. Select one of the social offenses listed above and discuss which character attributes are lacking in a person that would commit such an act.
3. What factors do you think contribute to a person participating in this offense?

Character Attributes

Respect

Honesty

Fairness

Responsibility

Loyalty

Self-discipline

Courtesy

Trustworthiness

Compassion

Integrity

Name _____

Date _____ Period _____

***Romeo and Juliet*: Exploring Timeless Social Issues**

After Reading the Play

Now that you have read *Romeo and Juliet*, rank each action below in order of seriousness, with 1 being the most serious and 14 the least serious. Be prepared to give reasons for your choices and support your reasons with evidence from the text. When you have completed the ranking, answer each question below. Then, when everyone in your group has completed the assignment, begin your discussion. Defend your choices and try to reach a consensus regarding the rankings.

- _____ Friar Laurence plans a trick
- _____ Juliet lies to her parents
- _____ Romeo kills Tybalt
- _____ Nurse advises Juliet to marry Paris
- _____ Capulets and Montagues feud
- _____ Apothecary sells poison
- _____ Tybalt kills Mercutio
- _____ Romeo kills Paris
- _____ Juliet kills herself
- _____ Romeo crashes Capulet's party
- _____ Romeo and Juliet marry against their parent's wishes
- _____ Sampson bites his thumb at Abraham
- _____ Tybalt picks a fight with Romeo

Questions: Please respond in detailed sentences.

1. Review the themes of *Romeo and Juliet*. Discuss how the social offenses listed above support the themes of the play.
2. How do character attributes contribute to the "fate" of the young lovers? Explain.
3. Think of a person you know who can be described either as *fortunate* or as *unfortunate*. Is his or her fortune, or lack of it, the result of *fate* or *destiny*? Or is it the result of the person's character?

Character Attributes

Respect
Honesty
Fairness
Responsibility
Loyalty
Self-discipline
Courtesy
Trustworthiness
Compassion