

SHAKESPEARE

Romeo and Juliet: Fate and Premonition

Have you ever had a sense that you knew something was going to happen? This is called a premonition. Perhaps you have had a dream that came true. Or you can sense when the telephone is about to ring. Shakespeare's characters often have premonitions, usually of a bad thing that's going to happen to them. If you have seen a performance of Romeo and Juliet - either on film, video, or on the stage - you will know that the story ends tragically: both Romeo and Juliet die at the end. If you were listening to the story very carefully, as you watched you would have noticed that their impending deaths were signaled to the audience on several occasions throughout the play. For example, when Romeo is on his way to the Capulets' ball where he meets Juliet for the first time, he has a sudden premonition of what is to come; and although he quickly forgets about it, the audience doesn't.

Benvolio This wind you talk of blows us from ourselves.

Supper is done, and we shall come too late.

Romeo I fear too early, for my mind misgives

Some consequence yet hanging in the stars

Shall bitterly begin his fearful date

With this night's revels,

and expire the term

Of a despised life clos'd

in my breast

By some vile forfeit of

untimely death.

(Act 1, Scene 4)

ACT IT OUT

Read these lines aloud with another person. Imagine that you are saying goodbye to someone you love very much (it might be a relative or a friend), when you have a sudden fear that you might never see them again. In pairs, write and then perform a "leave-taking" scene in which you show your concern for their leaving - but without making them feel as though they aren't able to go. Choose an appropriate setting and choose your words carefully. Be subtle, rather than overly dramatic.

Don't try to copy Shakespeare's style. Use your own language.

Later in the play, Romeo secretly marries Juliet but he gets into a fight with Tybalt, Juliet's cousin, on his way back from the church and kills him.

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For this crime, the Prince of Verona banishes Romeo to another city. Romeo and Juliet manage to spend a secret night together before he has to get out of town. As Romeo leaves Juliet's bedroom and climbs over the balcony to the garden below, she seems to have a vision of his death, and says:

Juliet O God! I have an ill-divining soul,
 Methinks I see thee, now thou art so low,
 As one dead in the bottom of a tomb.
 Either my eyesight fails, or thou look'st pale.

Romeo And trust me, love, in my eye so do you –

(Act 3, Scene 5)

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Teachers' Notes

Before proceeding to complete this worksheet, it is **strongly** recommended that you organize a showing of Romeo + Juliet for your students. The 1996 "modern" version starring Leonardo DiCaprio, Claire Danes, and John Leguizamo is available at most video rental stores. Keep in mind that this (at times irritating) teenage melodrama is 120 minutes long – plan accordingly and don't forget the popcorn.

Review the film. Did the students like the music or is it already outdated? Ask the students if they have ever had a sense that they knew something was going to happen? Tell them that this is called a premonition. You may also like to discuss the ideas of fate and intuition with them at this point. The story of Romeo and Juliet ends tragically – they both die at the end. Ask them to discuss in small groups:

If you were on your way to a party with a large group of your friends and you were worried that something bad could possibly happen there, would you still go to the party?

Proceed to the worksheets and help them through the "Old English". You will find an excellent Shakespeare dictionary here:

<http://www.kidzworld.com/article/3989-shakespearean-glossary>

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