**Act 1 Synopsis (summary of what happens in Act 1)**

**Act 1, Prologue**
The play starts in Verona, a city that has had its peace shattered by the feud between two important families, the house of Montague and the house of Capulet. The Chorus tells us that during this ancient grudge, a "pair of star-cross'd lovers" will take their lives and that their deaths will end their parents' rage.

**Act 1, Scene 1**
Capulet servants Sampson and Gregory; deliberately start a fight with two servants from the Montague house, Abram and Balthasar. Benvolio, a close friend to Romeo and nephew of Lord Montague, arrives and tries to stop the fight: "Part fools!/Put up your swords; you know not what you do" (1.1.56-7). But as he attempts to keep the peace, Tybalt, nephew to Lord Capulet, comes upon the scene and demands to duel with the passive young Benvolio. They fight violently and others join in.

Prince Escalus breaks up the fight with his men and is outraged at the behaviour of the two families. He vows death to anyone who breaks the peace again.

The Montagues are left in the scene with Benvolio and they discuss Romeo’s strange behaviour. He is ‘in love’ with Rosaline but she does not return his feelings and he is melancholy and unlike his usual self.

**Act 1, Scene 2**

Paris asks to take Juliet’s hand in marriage. Capulet feels she is too young but agrees if Paris manages to win her heart. He orders a large party to encourage the two to meet.

The Capulet servant meets Romeo and Benvolio on the road and he begs Romeo to help him read the names on the party invites. With Rosaline on the list; Benvolio challenges Romeo to sneak into the party and he agrees to it.

**Act 1, Scene 3**
Lady Capulet visits her daughter's bedroom to tell her about Paris. Juliet's nurse is in the room and she begins to ramble, about Juliet as a young child:

**Act 1, Scene 4**
The ball scene. Romeo cannot shake the feeling that something bad is going to happen and refuses to dance.

**Act 1, Scene 5**

Capulet greets his guests and asks them to enjoy themselves. Romeo meets Juliet’s eyes across the room and instantly forgets Rosaline. He is masked and each is unaware that the other is from a rival family. Tybalt recognises Romeo’s voice (as they are all masked) and threatens to fight him. Capulet will not allow this to happen during the party and Tybalt is furious. Both R&J have instantly fallen in love.

**Romeo and Juliet Act 1 Comprehension Questions**

1: Who are Sampson and Gregory?

2: What do they do at the start of Act 1?

3: What do we learn about Tybalt’s character?

4: Who is Tybalt?

5: Does Benvolio want to fight or to have peace restored to the streets of Verona?

6: How does the Prince feel about the fighting?

7: What does he say to both families?

8: What themes do we understand from Act 1? (try to come up with three things)

9: What is Romeo doing in Act 1?

10: Why does this worry his family?

11: What does this suggest about Romeo as a character?

12: Who is Paris?

13: What does he want?

14: Why is a party arranged?

15: What type of ball is the party?

16: What does Juliet’s nurse do in Act 1 scene 3?

17: What is Act 1 Scene 4 an example of in the play?

18: Why is this important?

19: Who gets angry that the Montagues have gate-crashed the party?

20: What does Capulet stop?

21: Why is the ball scene so important?

22: What do we know about the characters of Romeo and Juliet now?

**R&J: Act 2 Synopsis (summary of what happens in Act 2)**

**Act 2, Prologue**
The Chorus opens Act II by announcing that Romeo is madly in love with the bewitching Juliet. But warns that Romeo will not be able to court Juliet t and that they will have to meet in secret.

**Act 2, Scene 1**
Romeo leaves the party and parts himself from his friends. He hops the wall into Juliet’s garden. His friends leave him and go home to bed.

**Act 2, Scene 2**
Romeo is hidden from Juliet by the balcony overhanging the garden. He hears her reflections on the evening but she is not aware that he can hear these (Dramatic Irony). She is clearly longing for Romeo and he reveals that he is there. They have a long conversation and resolve to marry in secret as that is the only way they will be together.

**Act 2, Scene 3**

Romeo speaks to Friar Laurence, tells him of his new love and plans for marriage. Friar Laurence, who has been Romeo's friend and confessor for some time, is confused and concerned about Romeo's sudden change of heart. He agrees however to marry Romeo and Juliet in the hope that it will end the feud between the two families.

**Act 2, Scene 4**
Mercutio and Benvolio are again wandering about the streets of Verona, wondering what happened to the love-struck Romeo. Mercutio is afraid that the fierce Tybalt will kill Romeo. He meets his friends and is extremely happy but doesn’t tell them about his plans. They leave and Romeo and the Nurse are left alone and he tells the Nurse to give Juliet the information about his plan of marriage. The wedding, he tells the Nurse, will be performed that afternoon by Friar Laurence. Juliet is to go to the Friar's cell for the secret marriage.

***Act 2, Scene 5***The nurse tells about Romeo and his plans to marry Juliet. The nurse disapproves but doesn’t stop her. Juliet leaves immediately to be married in Friar Laurence’s cell.

**Act 2, Scene 6**
Friar Laurence and Romeo are anxiously awaiting Juliet's arrival. He marries them after giving Romeo some advice.

* All this action has happened in 2 days.
* The marriage is in secrecy.
* Friar Laurence is taking a huge risk by helping them marry without their parent’s knowledge.
* Romeo has completely forgotten his previous woes about Rosaline
* Juliet is subverting the expectations of society by creating her own destiny

**Romeo and Juliet Act 1 Comprehension Questions**

1: What is the function of the chorus in the prologue?

2: How does Romeo meet Juliet again?

3: Why does Shakespeare have Romeo hidden from view in the garden while Juliet is speaking?

4: Where do we see dramatic irony in Act 2 Scene 2?

5: Why does Friar Laurence agree to marry them?

6: What does he think it will achieve?

7: Why does the action take place so quickly?

8: How are Mercutio and Benvolio feeling towards the events of the night before (at the ball)?

9: Who tells Juliet of the plan to marry and how does this person feel about Romeo?

10: Who disapproves of the marriage and why?

11: How do they manage to marry in secret?

12: How does Act 2 end?

13: Is there a suggestion that this is a very hasty decision?

14: How is Juliet going against the expectations of society?

15: What themes are prevalent throughout Act 2?

**R&J: Act 3 Synopsis (summary of what happens in Act 3)**

**Act 3, Scene 1**
Act 3 opens with Mercutio and Benvolio walking around town. Benvolio feels the tension and thinks there will be trouble. He wants to warn Romeo. Tybalt sees them and demands to see Romeo so that he can slay him with his ever-ready rapier. Mercutio confronts Tybalt, but, because Mercutio is not a Capulet. Romeo, now related to Tybalt, refuses to fight through his marriage can’t reveal to Tybalt why they should not fight but he tries to persuade him against fighting.

 Mercutio steps in, fights with Tybalt and is slain. He curses both the Capulets and the Montagues as he lies dying. In a fit of rage Romeo fights Tybalt and kills him.

The Prince decrees that Romeo should be banished for bringing shame to the streets of Verona and for seeking revenge on Tybalt. If he returns he is warned he will be killed.

**Act 3, Scene 2**
Juliet is distraught thinking that Romeo is dead but relieved when she hears it is Tybalt. She forgives him immediately. The nurse goes to find Romeo to bring comfort to Juliet.

**Act 3, Scene 3**
Romeo hides with Friar Laurence. The Nurse speaks to Romeo and tells him of her anguish. She says he must visit Juliet one more time. He agrees, risking execution. Friar Laurence, after chastising Romeo for his outrageous display of weakness, instructs Romeo that he should flee to Mantua after his final meeting with Juliet. The nurse and Romeo go to the Capulet house.

**Act 3, Scene 4**
Capulet, Lady Capulet, and Paris discuss Juliet's distress over Tybalt’s death. Capulet decides she should marry Paris the following Thursday.

**Act 3, Scene 5**
Romeo and Juliet have spent the night together. She tries to convince him to stay but he realises he has to go as dawn has broken.

The Nurse warns them that Lady Capulet is coming and Romeo climbs out the window to the orchard below. Lady C comes to tell of the news of her marriage to Paris. She refuses. Capulet is outraged and insulted. Neither the nurse, Lady Capulet or Lord Capulet will help Juliet feel better about the news.

She decides she will have to commit suicide rather than marry Paris.

**Romeo and Juliet Act 3 Comprehension Questions**

1: Who are anxious about what Romeo has been doing?

2: What do they think will happen when Tybalt appears?

3: Is this foreshadowing and how does unfold later in the Act?

4: Why is Romeo reluctant to fight Tybalt?

5: Who dies?

6: Why is a plague on both houses such a bad omen?

7: Again, could the plague on both houses be considered to be foreshadowing and why?

8: What do Juliet’s family think is wrong with her?

9: Why does Romeo agree to see Juliet before he is exiled in Mantua?

10: Who is complicit in helping Romeo and Juliet have their wedding night?

11: Do you think these characters are happy about Romeo and Juliet being together?

12: Why does Capulet change his mind and start the process of a wedding between Paris and Juliet?

13: How do Juliet and Romeo manage to spend the night together?
14: What does Juliet resolve to do instead of marrying Paris?

15: Why does the nurse not comfort Juliet about the upcoming news of her wedding to Paris?

**R&J: Act 4 Synopsis (summary of what happens in Act 4)**

**Act 4, Scene 1**
Friar Laurence speaks to Paris of his upcoming marriage. Juliet arrives and together they plan to pretend that Juliet has died so she can avoid marriage to Paris.

**Act 4, Scene 2**
Capulet moves the wedding up a day when Juliet goes to say she will wed Paris.

**Act 4, Scene 3**
She sees the ghost of Tybalt and then Juliet takes the poison with a heavy heart.

**Act 4, Scene 4**

Wedding plans are moving ahead. Capulet sends the Nurse to fetch Juliet while he visits Paris.

**Act 4, Scene 5**
The Nurse rushes to Juliet's chamber and finds her dead. Paris grieves for the love he will never know and Friar Laurence hastily arranges for Juliet to be entombed and for her funeral.

Important to note:

The action speeds up and scenes become much shorter.

**Romeo and Juliet Act 4 Comprehension Questions**

1: What does Friar Laurence plan to stop the marriage of Paris to Juliet?

2: Why do you think he is keen for this wedding not to take place?

3: Capulet moves the wedding up a day – What does this mean for Juliet?

4: Why does Juliet say she will marry Paris?

5: How does she feel about taking the sleeping draught?

6: Why is this course of action risky?

7: How does the nurse react when she thinks Juliet is dead?

8: Why does Friar Laurence take over and sort out funeral arrangements.

**R&J: Act 5 Synopsis (summary of what happens in Act 5)**

**Act 5, Scene 1**

This opens in Mantua, where Romeo is waiting anxiously for news of Juliet and his family. He greets his servant, Balthasar with excitement but learns of her death. Romeo distraught tries to buy poison to end his life. He comes out of exile and returns to Verona.

**Act 5, Scene 2**
Friar Laurence learns from Friar John that he could not deliver the letter to Romeo. They try again.

**Act 5, Scene 3**
Paris and his page enter the churchyard and stand before the Capulet tomb.

He is interrupted by his page's whistle, warning him that someone is coming. He hides and sees Romeo and Balthasar enter with a torch, a mattock, and a wrenching iron. Romeo hands Balthasar a letter and asks him to deliver it to Lord Montague in the morning. Balthasar leaves, but hides in the shadows to observe Romeo.

Paris challenges Romeo to a fight as he thinks he is the enemy regarding Tybalt’s death. Paris attacks, Romeo fights and kills him and then enters the tomb sees the sleeping Juliet, assumes she is dead and takes the vial of poison and kills himself. Friar Laurence arrives; Balthasar comes out to say Romeo is in the vault. Juliet awakes confused and sees that Romeo is dead.

Hearing the Watchmen in the distance and fearing they will be caught, Friar Laurence begs her to move, but leaves her as he is afraid for his reputation. She takes the poison left in Romeo’s hands it doesn’t work so Juliet stabs herself with Romeo’s dagger.

The Friar retells the tragic story to the captive audience of the Capulets, Montagues, Balthazar and the Prince and Watchmen. They both vow to erect gold statues in tribute to their dead children and that the feud has ended. The Prince ends the play.

**Important to note:**

Action speeds up

Final act is very long with many hints to Romeo that Juliet is still alive – Shakespeare appears to recurrently signpost this fact and Romeo appears blind to it

Denouement of the play explores moralistic aspects of the deaths of both characters and the futility of their parents rage

**Romeo and Juliet Act 5 Comprehension Questions**

1: How does Romeo react to the news of Juliet’s supposed death?

2: What does this tell us about his character?

3: How does he acquire poison?

4: What will happen to him if he is caught entering Verona?

5: How did the Friar’s plan go wrong?

6: Who instigates the fight at the tomb of Juliet?

7: Who dies and is this just/fair?

8: After the death what happens?

9: Is Friar Laurence to blame for the deaths of both Romeo and Juliet?

10: How do the Capulet and Montague families react?

11: What will they erect in the memory of their children?

12: Is the feud really over or are both families now competing to show their love publically for their children?

13: What is the moral purpose of the story?
14: What does it teach us about the focus on religion at the time?

15: Why should we still learn about Shakespeare today?