



ROMEO AND JULIET: CONTEXTS KS3

In this lesson, students will be introduced to the world that Shakespeare lived and wrote in. This will help them to build an informed overview of the social and historical contexts important to the dramatic world.

This is a lesson that we have taken from our KS3 *Romeo and Juliet* Scheme of Work, comprised of 20 lessons split into: Text in Performance, Characters, Language, Themes and Context.

We have adapted this lesson to make it suitable for use in a distance learning context. To access the full Scheme of Work for classroom-based learning, click [here](#).

DISTANCE LEARNING ACTIVITIES: CONTEXT

Key Questions for Students

Can I establish how much I know about London in Shakespeare's time and what I would like to find out?

Can I apply what I have learned in a creative task and 'step into the shoes' of someone visiting the theatre in Shakespeare's time?

Key words: *atmosphere, empathy, glossary, questions, research, sources, topics*

EXUENT – Closing questions for students

Ask students to write a response to each of these questions, which they could email to you, or note at the back of their Student Booklet.

What would the atmosphere have been like on Bankside in this period?

What do I think drew people to the theatre?

What do I think were the challenges involved in putting on a play?

Suggested plenary activity – Students apply what they have learned to an empathy task in which they wonder about what it would be like to be an actor, a ticket-seller and a playwright just before the show begins.

Students select one of these roles, and capture their thoughts and feelings, in any of the following media: vlog, diary entry, collage, blog, drawing, etc.

ASIDE – Further resource

The cloze activity in the Student Booklet will help students build a picture of what a visit to the theatre in Shakespeare's time would have been like.

CHALLENGE TASK

The above activities can be used to prepare students for an imaginative writing task on 'a trip to the theatre'. In the Student Booklet, there is a planning sheet that students can use to help them write an account of visiting the theatre in Shakespeare's time to watch a production of *Romeo and Juliet*. They should write from the point of view of an audience member they have imagined, using their research from the activities above to inform their choices.

We have added the relevant pages from the Student Booklet below for ease.



ROMEO AND JULIET

Student's Booklet

Key Stage 3 | Ages 11 – 14

Name

Class

SHAKESPEARE'S
GLOBE

TEXT IN PERFORMANCE

Dramatis Personae.

CAPULETS

JULIET – a thirteen-year-old girl from Verona, only child of the rich Capulet

CAPULET – her father

CAPULET'S WIFE – her mother

COUSIN CAPULET – a relative of her father's

NURSE – Juliet's wet nurse

PETER – Nurse's man

TYBALT – Juliet's cousin

TYBALT'S PAGE

PETRUCHIO – a follower of Tybalt

SAMSON – a Capulet retainer

GREGORY – another Capulet retainer

SERVINGMEN – in the Capulet household

MONTAGUES

ROMEO – sole son and heir of the Montague family

MONTAGUE – Romeo's father

MONTAGUE'S WIFE – Romeo's mother

BENVOLIO – Romeo's cousin

BALTHASAR – Romeo's man

ABRAHAM – a Montague retainer

SERVINGMEN – in the Montague household

THE PRINCE'S KINDRED

PRINCE ESCALUS – governor of Verona

MERCUTIO – his kinsman, and friend of Romeo's

COUNTY PARIS – another kinsman, suitor to Juliet

PARIS' PAGE

MERCUTIO'S PAGE

OTHERS

CHORUS

CITIZENS – of Verona

FRIAR LAURENCE – a Franciscan

FRIAR JOHN – another Franciscan

APOTHECARY – of Mantua

THREE WATCHMEN

THREE MUSICIANS – Simon Catling, Hugh Rebeck, and James Soundpost

Attendants, Masquers, Torchbearers, Guests and Gentlewomen

CONTEXTS

Shakespeare's London and Theatre.

Jim Bradbury, Shakespeare and his Theatre (Longman, 1975):

London was still a walled city with its medieval gates: Bishopsgate, Aldgate, Cripplegate and so on. There were so many newcomers that London was growing outside its walls, to the west around Westminster, over the river on the south bank, and along the main roads that came into the city. But there were still fields in many places that are now built over, such as Moorfields and Chelsea. You could still go duckshooting... to Islington ponds. Hackney was a village that sent turnips to the city.

The River Thames was as important to London then as it is now. Ships came and went from all over the world, to ports on the continent, to the Mediterranean, sometimes to the New World of America, or perhaps just up and down the Thames, or round the English coast. Water transport often seemed more reliable than the badly made roads. London Bridge was still the only bridge over the river into London.

People often crossed by ferry. The watermen got very annoyed when the authorities closed the theatres on the south bank, because they lost all the customers they usually took across to see the plays. London Bridge was the old bridge you have probably seen in pictures with houses and shops actually on the bridge itself, with a covered way and just a narrow road. It had twenty arches between the large piers or 'starlings'. They caused the water to flow through so fast that it made dangerous currents. On the Gatehouse tower of the bridge the heads of traitors were stuck on poles as a warning. In 1592 a foreign visitor counted thirty-four heads on show.

CONTEXTS

Shakespeare's London and Theatre.

Glossary

Attic	
Cabbage	
Discovery Space	
Frons Scenae	
Gentleman's Boxes	
Groundlings	
Heavens	
Hell	
Iambic Pentameter	
Jig	
Lord Chamberlain's Men	
In the Round	
Lords' Rooms	
Musicians' Gallery	
Pillars	
Thrust Stage	
Ring House	
Traps	
Vomitorium	
Yard	

CONTEXTS

Shakespeare's London and Theatre.

Cloze Exercise:

By 1600 London theatres could take up to ____1____ people for the most popular plays. With several theatres offering plays most afternoons, this meant between ____2____ and 20,000 people a week going to London theatres. With such large audiences, plays only had short runs and then had to be replaced. Between 1560 and 1640 about 3,000 new plays were written. To attract the crowds, these plays often re-told famous stories from the past, and they used violence, music and humour to keep people's attention. This was vital because, if audiences didn't like a play, they made their feelings known. In 1629, a visiting French company were hissed and ____3____ from the stage. This was because the company used ____4____ to play the female roles, something which outraged the audience.

In open air theatres the cheapest price was only 1 penny which bought you a place amongst the ____5____ standing in the 'yard' around the stage. (There were 240 pennies in £1.) For another penny, you could have a bench seat in the lower galleries which surrounded the yard. Or for a penny or so more, you could sit more comfortably on a cushion. The most expensive seats would have been in the ____6____. Admission to the indoor theatres started at 6 pence.

The groundlings were very close to the action on stage. They could buy food and drink during the performance – ____7____ (apples), oranges, nuts, gingerbread and ale. But there were no ____8____ and the floor they stood on was probably just sand, ash or covered in ____9____.

In Shakespeare's day, as people came into the theatre they had to put their money in a ____10____. So the place where audiences pay became known as the box office.

groundlings toilets Lord's Rooms 10,000 women

pippin-pelted box pippins 3,000 nutshells

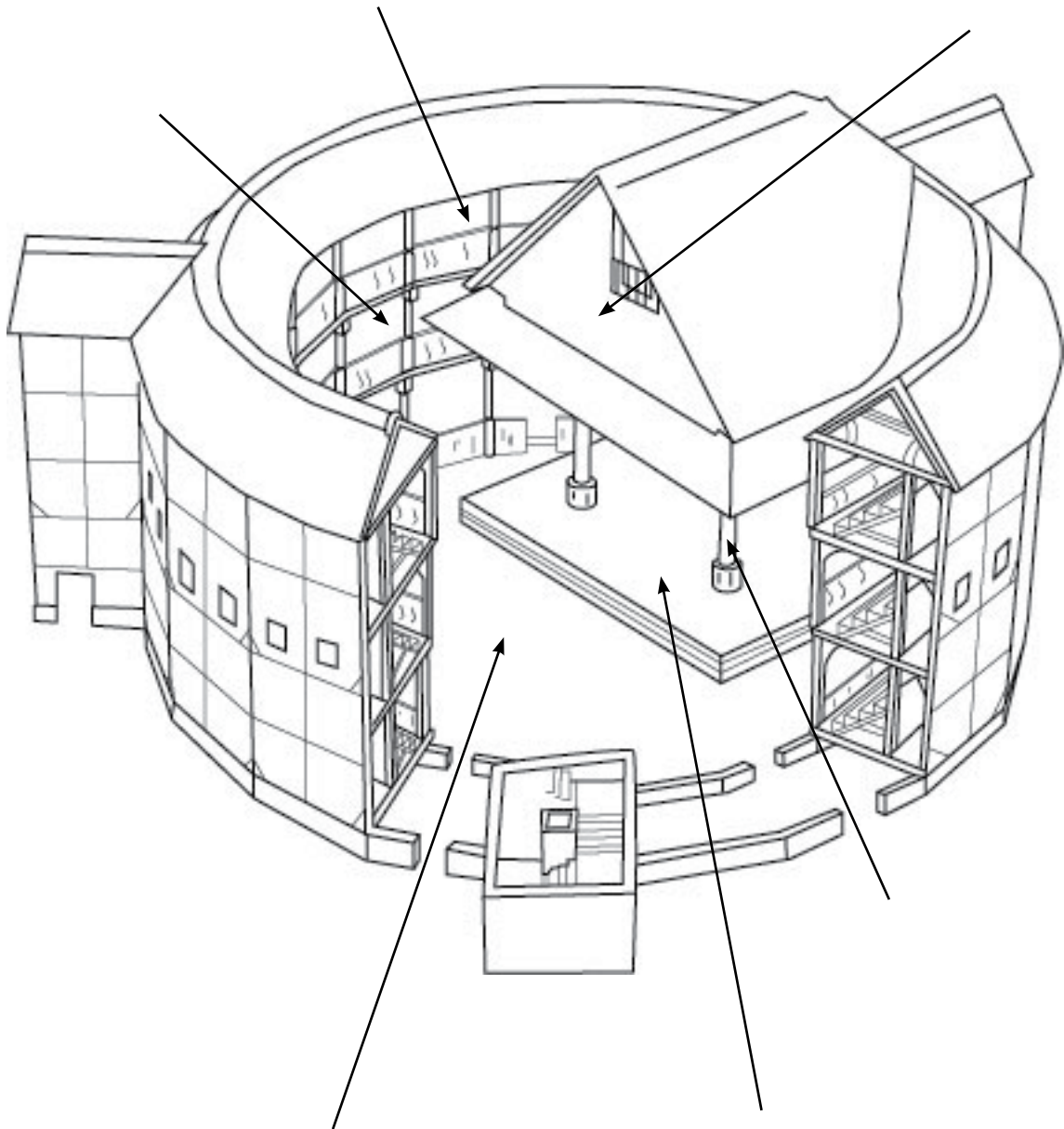
Shakespeare's World:

Will Kemp was one of the star attractions of the Chamberlain's Men, the company Shakespeare was part of although the part he played – Peter, the Capulets' servant – does not have many lines in the script. But clowns often said more than the author wrote, improvising anew every performance. Will Kemp would also have dominated the jig that ended every play, a feature that was extremely popular with audiences.

CONTEXTS

Shakespeare's London and Theatre.

Label the different parts of the Globe Theatre in the picture below.



CONTEXTS

A Trip to the Theatre.

Planning Sheet:

On the next page you will find a Planning Sheet. Use this to plan and write an account of visiting the theatre in Shakespeare's time to watch a production of *Romeo and Juliet*. Write from the point of view of an audience member you have imagined. What kind of person are they? How much money can they afford to spend on a seat? Where will they sit?

In your account you should aim to:

- describe the atmosphere at the theatre in Elizabethan times
- include textual details about *Romeo and Juliet* that
- demonstrate your knowledge and understanding of the play
- describe your reactions to the play from the perspective of your 'character'

Here are some tips and suggestions to bear in mind.

Context:

- Remember you will be writing about going to see *Romeo and Juliet* in around 1595.
- Queen Elizabeth is the reigning monarch.
- We believe that *Romeo and Juliet* was a very popular play from its earliest performances.
- The Globe Theatre didn't yet exist but early performances were probably staged at the Theatre and the Curtain in Shoreditch.
- Richard Burbage may have been the first actor to play Romeo.
- Juliet would have been played by a boy / young man, as would all female parts. The first actor to play Juliet might well have been the boy Robert Goffe.
- The part of Peter would have been played by Will Kemp, a celebrity actor in Elizabethan times known for his clowning and dancing

Suggested structure:

- arrival, atmosphere
- description of performance including textual details
- what your 'character' enjoyed most

CONTEXTS

A Trip to the Theatre.

Planning Sheet

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

CONTEXTS

A Trip to the Theatre.

Planning Sheet

[illegible]