



ROMEO AND JULIET

Lesson 1: Main activity (25 mins approx.)

Explain to students that Act 1 Scene 1 takes place in the public square in Verona. You could show students some pictures of the main town square in Verona to give them an idea of the environment (all while reminding students that Shakespeare never went to Italy, as far as we know, so he is not basing it on the real geography of the city or on any direct knowledge of a specific space in Verona). Look together at the first 33 lines of the play - the exchange between Sampson and Gregory up to the entrance of Abram and the other servingman. This first activity is all about establishing facts - which is a key technique of the rehearsal room - before trying to launch into interpretation and analysis. The first thing we learn about Sampson and Gregory is that they are wearing swords and bucklers, and that they're 'of' the house of Capulet. Lines 20-21 tell us that the Capulets are their 'masters' and they are their 'men', so the master/servant relationship is established here. Depending on the confidence level of your class, you can ask them to read the first 33 lines independently to establish the facts on their own, to work in pairs, or to do it collectively as a class. Facts we can discover from these opening lines are:

- Sampson and Gregory are servants
- Sampson and Gregory work for the Capulets
- Sampson and Gregory are both carrying weapons
- There is a quarrel going on between the Montagues and Capulets
- This quarrel is supported by the servants
- Sampson and Gregory are both misogynistic (much discussion of ill-treatment of women)
- Sampson and Gregory are both prepared to use their weapons and carry out acts of violence

Ask students to provide evidence of each of their facts. Refer them back to the lesson on world building - how do these facts tie in with what we know about the rules of the world?





ROMEO AND JULIET

Now we understand the facts of the situation, how does this further our understanding of the world the characters are living in and what is acceptable behaviour? There is no information in the stage directions at this point regarding how many other people are in the square - but in a city in the morning, it would be unusual for there to be no-one else around to hear or see these characters. So, the fact that they feel very comfortable walking around in public doing what they're doing, tells us a lot about the society of Romeo and Juliet's Verona.

Now move through the scene more rapidly (it is not important to read or make sense of every line at this stage) - who joins the scene and what do they do when they join? Benvolio arrives with a sword and tries to restore the peace, Tybalt arrives with a sword and refuses to help Benvolio and instead fights him, some ordinary citizens arrive with weapons and join in the fun, Old Montague and Capulet arrive and are also itching to get involved, and are held back by their wives, and then the Prince arrives and puts a stop to everything. Ask students what this succession of arrivals and events tells us about space and place in Verona? Firstly, it tells us that this is a small city - it doesn't take very long at all for word to spread to Benvolio, Tybalt, Old Montague and Old Capulet and their wives and the Prince that there is a fight going on in the public square. This therefore is a world where everyone knows everyone else's business and news passes quickly between public and private spaces. The fact that servants and masters are all sharing the same public spaces and that servants have the right to walk freely around the city also tells us that there is a thin line between the worlds of master and servant - people from all social classes are mixing together regularly, which also allows information to pass across class boundaries quickly and easily - even information that may be considered private.





ROMEO AND JULIET

This opening exchange makes it very clear that this is a world full of conflict, and that conflict is something that is played out very publicly. The Prince says this is the third time recently when what should be a private issue between Old Montague and Old Capulet has become a public order issue. When people have disagreements in this world, those disagreements become everyone's business - and that makes them have very far-reaching consequences beyond the originators of any argument. At this stage it might be interesting/useful to watch a couple of film or theatrical versions of this part of the scene and see how different directors have interpreted it, and discuss what students find interesting in the choices that have been made, particularly with regard to the use of space and place.

