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Literature in Context Activity One

TAKE IN A MOVIE

There have been over forty movie versions made of this famous play, beginning with a silent version in 1908. The 1996 adaptation starring Leonardo DiCaprio won an Academy Award for Best Art Direction and Set Decoration. The 1968 version starring Olivia Hussey was nominated for four Oscars (including best picture) – winning two. Another adaptation was the famous musical, *West Side Story*, which was set in a 1960s New York City gang culture and was loosely based on the story of Romeo and Juliet. The film *Shakespeare in Love* is a fictional account of how Shakespeare wrote the play.

Consider this...

Students of Shakespeare consider *Romeo and Juliet* to be the sixth most popular of his plays.

Your task is to take in a viewing of one of the many adaptations of Romeo and Juliet (*West Side Story* may also be included). Write a brief report (approximately one page in length) comparing the actual play with a movie adaptation. You might consider the following:

- How the film brought the play to life (or failed to).
- How suited were the actors to their roles?
- Were any “liberties” taken with the play’s adaptation to the big screen?
- Do you think the media of film is superior to a live performance?
- Consider
 - costumes
 - lighting and sound
 - sets
- Are there any significant changes you would recommend to the producer of the film?

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Activity Two

PUTTING ON A PLAY

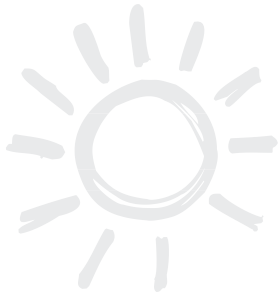
This activity needs to be done with students working in small groups.

As a small group select a passage from the play. The passage should not be more than a page or two long and should contain interesting dialog and/or action. It is probably a good idea to select a passage that does not feature any long passages by a specific character. After some discussion, assign the roles featured in this passage. Practice reading it through once or twice with each actor reading his or her particular part. Remember to use "expression" as much as possible when performing each particular role. Finally, present the passage as a Readers Theater performance in front of another group or the entire class.

Consider this...
Written in the late 1500's, *Romeo and Juliet* has been performed countless times all over the world for the past 350 years.

Good luck and have fun.

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Activity Three

AUTHOR! AUTHOR!

William Shakespeare is acknowledged by many scholars as the greatest writer in the English language. Some marvel that such a man with Shakespeare's education and background could write such masterpieces, and suggest that it was someone else that actually wrote such works of art as *Romeo and Juliet*. Surprisingly, we don't know as much of Shakespeare's personal life as we probably would like.

Research the life of this great writer and write a one-page report highlighting his personal life and accomplishments. You might wish to consider:

- his birthplace, family, early life, close friends
- education and early training
- other interests
- inspirations (especially regarding *Romeo and Juliet*)
- struggles? critics?
- acting career?
- fame and how it affected him
- later life / death

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Activity Four



PARAPHRASING THE BARD

This activity can be done individually or in small groups.

Like all of Shakespeare's plays *Romeo and Juliet* can be a "hard read". Sometimes it takes a little while to get into the rhythm of the language and really make sense of the text without a huge amount of effort.

Imagine your class has been asked to present a scene from the play to a grade four class. It is likely that they will miss a good deal of the play's meaning as it was written by Shakespeare. To help these students appreciate *Romeo and Juliet* a little more, your group is asked to perform the following task:

- choose an interesting scene from the play
- if the scene is lengthy, select a portion that would make an interesting presentation to a grade four class (the portion should be at least 2-3 pages in length)
- with your group rewrite this scene so that it is understandable to a grade four class (i.e. rephrase, use smaller words, remove or modernize outdated words and expressions)
- when you are finished, read the scene as a Readers Theater presentation to another group in your own class for their comments
- if possible, do the scene as a Readers Theater presentation to a class of younger students.

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Activity Five

AN ALTERNATE ENDING

This activity can be done individually or in small groups.

Probably one of the reasons why *Romeo and Juliet* has been such a popular play over the centuries is because of its tragic conclusion: Romeo and Juliet both commit suicide, Paris is killed in a swordfight, Romeo's mother dies of a broken heart, Friar Lawrence faces punishment for his role in the affair, both the Capulet and Montague families are shattered... Imagine, though, if Shakespeare had chosen an alternate (happier) route for his Act 5 plot.

With your group brainstorm possible alternative endings to the play. Remember to consider all of the principal characters of Act 5. From your list of ideas choose one ending to present to the class. Write a detailed synopsis of your alternate conclusion presenting as much detail as possible. After presenting it to the class, you may wish to get their input as to additional changes Shakespeare may have made to the tragic conclusion that he made so famous.

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Activity Six

WEDDING BELL BLUES

This activity can be done individually or in small groups.

Romeo and Juliet's wedding is really nothing to *write home about*. They marry in secret, witnessed only by their friend and spiritual advisor, Friar Lawrence. This must have been a disappointment to Juliet, who came from a prosperous, prominent family, and had probably been looking forward to an elaborate wedding with all the *bells and whistles* of that time and place.

Imagine if things had been better for this doomed pair, and they had been able to marry in a public ceremony with all their friends and family present.

For the next little while, you are the wedding planner! It is your responsibility to plan an elaborate wedding service for this young couple. You may wish to consider the following:

- Your guest list – who will you invite? – how many will you invite?
- Participants – Who will perform the service? – Will you have musicians, entertainers, bridesmaids, ushers?
- What will you have on the day's agenda?
- What food will be served at the reception?
- Who will give the speeches?
- decorations / wardrobe / hairstyles
- What will the wedding service itself look like?

Remember – all that you plan must be a fit with the life and times of Verona, Italy in the days of Romeo and Juliet. You may wish to divide the responsibilities up among your group members.

If possible, interview someone with experience in wedding planning – even modern weddings!

At the conclusion of the project, your group will present its description of the wedding to the rest of the class.

Have fun!