

Oxford Revise | AQA GCSE English Literature: Romeo and Juliet | Answers

Mark scheme

Behind each exam question is a set of assessment objectives (AOs). The examiner will use these AOs to help mark your answer. If you answer the question accurately, you will automatically cover all the AOs.

Level	Marks	Explanation
1	1–5	<p>A <i>simple</i> response</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AO1 – occasional focus on the question, simple points made • AO2 – little engagement with ideas, little engagement with methods • AO3 – some misunderstandings • AO4 – phrasing might be unclear
2	6–10	<p>A <i>relevant</i> response</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AO1 – question focus generally secure, relevant if underdeveloped ideas • AO2 – some engagement with ideas, basic grasp of methods • AO3 – generally competent understanding • AO4 – phrasing mainly clear
3	11–15	<p>An <i>explained</i> response</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AO1 – focus on the question secure, points are explained using examples and explanation • AO2 – some engagement with ideas, sound grasp of methods • AO3 – competent understanding • AO4 – phrasing mainly clear
4	16–20	<p>A <i>clear</i> response</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AO1 – focus on the question secure, points are clear and developed • AO2 – clear engagement with ideas, clear grasp of methods • AO3 – clear and secure understanding • AO4 – clear phrasing

5	21–25	<p><i>A thoughtful response</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AO1 – focus on the question secure, points are clear and developed with insight • AO2 – clear and thoughtful engagement with ideas, clear grasp of methods • AO3 – clear and secure understanding with useful details • AO4 – clear phrasing
6	26–30	<p><i>A conceptual response</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AO1 – focus on the question secure, points explore ideas at a high level • AO2 – perceptive engagement with ideas, perceptive grasp of methods • AO3 – insightful understanding with useful details • AO4 – clear/fluent phrasing

Page 106 Question 1

Relevant content may include:

AO1

- comments on how Romeo is presented in the scene on the way to the ball
- exploration of how Romeo is controlled by his emotions throughout the play
- details of what Romeo does that suggests weakness, such as wishing for death rather than banishment
- details of what Romeo does that suggests strength, such as defying the family feud to court Juliet

AO2

- Romeo's use of imagery to describe his gloomy feelings as he goes to the ball: 'soul of lead'
- Romeo's use of clever and witty language with his friends
- the tragic convention of weakness as a fatal flaw in a central character (Romeo)
- how Romeo's actions contribute to the tragic events of the play, such as abandoning his love for Rosaline, and rushing back to Verona with poison when he believes Juliet is dead
- Romeo's personification of death and fate as forces beyond his control: 'he who hath the steerage of my course'

AO3

- Romeo's lack of accountability and impetuous behaviour
- ideas about masculinity at that time
- ideas about fate and free will
- ideas about class and entitlement

Example answer

The answer given below is a full, high-mark answer.

Romeo is presented as a character who is deeply emotional, and frequently controlled by his emotions. Consequently, his behaviour is not always sensible or rational, and it is fair to say Shakespeare clearly shows him to be a weak character because he is so easily led by his impassioned feelings.

At this moment in the play, Romeo is full of self-pity because his love for Rosaline is unrequited. Even though he's on his way to a party with his best friends, he is absorbed in his own problems and casts a gloomy shadow over the fun by refusing to dance and enjoy himself: 'I have a soul of lead'. Shakespeare crafts Romeo's words to juxtapose light/dark imagery that reflects Romeo's mournfulness – 'being but heavy, I will bear the light' – and his feeling that he is hard done by in love and incapable of having any fun. Despite his friends' attempts to lift his spirits, he is determined to feel sorry for himself, plaintively crying 'it pricks like thorns', which shows weakness, but also his immaturity as a young man. In some ways, Romeo's weakness could be seen as natural, given he is still a teenager and unburdened by real problems; he has nothing to do but obsess over how he feels. However, not all the young characters in the play are equally weak – Benvolio, for example, is a reliable and steady young man who is often trusted by the elder characters to report the truth of events. By positioning Romeo beside other such characters, Shakespeare ensures Romeo's weakness is more noticeable to the audience.

But, despite his misery in this scene, Romeo is shown as having some strengths, such as a quick and clever mind that can twist Mercutio's soaring imagery of Cupid and describe how he is 'enpierced' and 'bound' – wounded and enslaved by love. However, he uses his clever mind to build a pathetic image of himself as the victim of a love that makes him 'sink'. At this moment in the play, Romeo wants to be the victim – he does not want to be made to feel better, he just wants to wallow in self-pity.

At other times in the play, Romeo is shown to act very differently: with vigour, purpose, and clear intent. However, at all times he is governed by his emotions and it is difficult to say that these instances are therefore examples of strength. For example, after he has seen Juliet at the party and fallen in love, he acts decisively in seeking her out – 'Can I go forward when my heart is here?' – yet once again he is following his heart and is weak in failing to consider the danger around him: if he is discovered by the Capulets in their grounds they will kill him. He thinks only of satisfying his emotional needs and is reckless and unthinking about the consequences of pursuing Juliet. In this way, Romeo's weakness can be seen to be used by Shakespeare to directly contribute to the tragic events of the play.

Romeo is an incredibly needy character: he needs Rosaline's love and is miserable without it. Then he needs Juliet to be his. When Juliet recognises the danger of their association and challenges him 'Art thou not Romeo, and a Montague?', he casually dismisses his name and his family, suggesting he will change everything and abandon anything to have her approval. This does not show Romeo as a character of strength: it shows him as a man who does not know himself and who does not value anything. Romeo's failure to think things through and to abandon reason for feeling causes him to make weak decisions later in the play. For example, when Tybalt has murdered Mercutio, Romeo blames his love for Juliet for making him weak in refusing to answer Tybalt's challenge: 'thy love hath made me effeminate'. He then uses this as an excuse to fight and kill Tybalt. As he realises what he has done, he refuses to take responsibility and declares himself 'fortune's fool'. At no point in the play does Romeo

recognise that he is the author of his own destruction; this is clear evidence of weakness within his character that goes beyond youthful self-indulgence.

As the final Act begins, Romeo again acts decisively when he hears the news of Juliet's death in deciding to return to Verona, yet his instant determination to kill himself when he can no longer have what he wants shows his personal weakness, not strength. Romeo leaves a trail of destruction behind him in the final Act as he seeks to indulge his broken heart. For example, Paris is, arguably, needlessly killed: if Romeo's true wish had been to die and be reunited with Juliet in death, then he could have allowed Paris to kill him. Instead, Romeo portrays himself as a victim – a 'desp'rate man' – and fights back to kill the innocent Paris because he is obsessed with the idea of dying at Juliet's side. His failure to recognise the possible signs that Juliet is not dead, such as her 'crimson' cheeks, shows he is incapable of rational thought and logic.

In conclusion, although there are elements of youthful impetuosity in Romeo, Shakespeare shows him far more clearly to be a deeply flawed character, whose weakness and self-indulgence contribute to the tragic progression of events and the pitiful outcome of the play.

Page 107 Question 2

Relevant content may include:

AO1

- comments on how Juliet is first presented in the play
- details of the way Juliet speaks to Romeo and challenges him when they meet
- the deception and secrecy that Juliet initiates and takes part in
- Juliet's refusal to marry Paris
- exploration of Juliet's fears during the soliloquy when she drinks the potion
- Juliet's response to finding Romeo dead in the tomb

AO2

- Juliet's use of violent language to show her intentions
- how Juliet commands the Friar
- the recurring imagery of the knife
- the dramatic irony that forces Juliet to refuse to marry Paris because she is already married – and her father's response
- Lord Capulet's descriptions of her as 'headstrong' and 'disobedient'
- Juliet's reaction to the Nurse's advice to marry Paris and its consequences for the plot

AO3

- how Juliet challenges the gender and social expectations for young women of the time
- how and why the Nurse carries out Juliet's bidding
- ideas about fate and free will
- ideas about love and loyalty

Page 108 Question 3

Relevant content may include:

AO1

- details of how the Nurse responds to the male characters in the extract, such as chastising Peter and Mercutio, and warning Romeo
- comments on how Juliet's character develops during the play from meek to commanding
- comments on Juliet's ability to be deceptive in order to determine her own future
- exploration of how Lady Capulet's behaviour is directed by her husband
- Lady Montague's brief role in preventing her husband from fighting in Act 1

AO2

- the Nurse's assertive language in her confrontation with Mercutio: 'scurvy knave'
- the Nurse's use of frequent sexual innuendo in her speech: 'bigger women grow by men'
- how the Nurse's actions enable the love of Romeo and Juliet and allow her to move between the two sides of the feud
- the language Juliet uses when standing up to other characters, such as when Lady Capulet introduces the idea of marrying Paris; when Juliet denies Romeo 'satisfaction'; when she refuses to marry Paris; when she follows the Friar's plan
- Lady Capulet's extended metaphor in describing Paris as a suitable partner
- Lady Capulet's terse rejection of Juliet when she refuses to marry Paris
- Lady Capulet as the only woman to endorse the feud of the play in vowing revenge for Tybalt's death

AO3

- the social position of the women in the play and how this enables or hinders them as strong characters – Juliet as a daughter and Lady Capulet as the wife in a noble family (with some power, yet she is directed by men); the Nurse as a member of household staff (directed by her employers, but freer to speak her mind)
- how the female characters challenge or conform to the gender expectations for women of the time
- ideas about masculinity and femininity at the time

Example answer

The answer given below is a full, high-mark answer.

Although the power of the women of the play is often restricted by their social positions, Shakespeare still presents the female characters as strong women who aren't afraid to speak their minds or act in their own interest.

This scene clearly shows the Nurse as a woman who is not afraid to stand up for herself. She insults Mercutio as a 'saucy merchant' and a 'scurvy knave', and berates Peter for not defending her. Shakespeare's choice of expressions shows she is clearly able to take any cheeky young man to task, yet her appeal to Peter that he did 'stand by' also suggests the Nurse expects a man to come to her defence if she is being insulted. This implies the Nurse believes in a social convention that women need to be protected by men, which slightly diminishes our idea of her as a wholly strong and independent woman. However, her behaviour shows she does not need a man's protection, even if she might expect it. The Nurse then goes on to warn Romeo against acting carelessly with Juliet's feelings as a 'gross kind of behaviour'. This shows both her strength of feeling towards Juliet and her depiction as a strong woman in speaking so plainly to Romeo. However, she goes on to be easily reassured that Romeo is honest, which suggests that although she is feisty, she is weak-minded and easily swayed by a handsome man. The bawdy reaction of Peter to her also implies that she is not a woman held in high regard by others. Lady Capulet is dismissive of her in Act 1 saying 'hold thy peace', essentially telling her to shut up, as does Juliet, yet Juliet is also wholly reliant on the strong Nurse to enable her relationship with Romeo. But the Nurse is always unafraid to speak her mind, even to the fearsome Lord Capulet when she declares 'You are to blame'. Overall, then, it is reasonable to say Shakespeare shows her as a strong character.

Juliet is easily the strongest of all the female characters, though Shakespeare often hides this behind a mask of docility and meekness. She appears to be an obedient daughter in Act 1 Scene 3, promising to behave modestly towards Paris, relying on Lady Capulet's 'consent'. Yet as soon as she meets Romeo, although her speech is modest and full of religious imagery relating to saints and pilgrims, her behaviour is bold and assertive as she allows Romeo to kiss her. She challenges him on the 'satisfaction' he requests when they meet later at her window, and it is she who brings up the idea of marriage. Shakespeare juxtaposes Juliet as a decisive and thoughtful woman against Romeo as impetuous, reckless, and romantic. As a result, her quiet strength is more obvious to the audience. Juliet is often referred to as 'young', by both Lord Capulet and the Nurse, yet Shakespeare breaks the weak and silly stereotype implied by this through Juliet's actions, particularly when it comes to her interaction with Friar Lawrence. When she asks for his help in avoiding the marriage to Paris, she uses imperatives and is commanding: 'Tell me not ... Give me some present counsel'. The Friar is forced into a desperate plan, which Juliet has to have the strength to carry out alone. He refers to 'womanish fear', which she exclaims against, 'Give me, give me! O tell not me of fear'. Shakespeare shows that Juliet has great mental and physical strength in understanding her situation and then acting with strength to get herself out of it. The ultimate act of her strength is killing herself at the end of the play, a final act of defiant autonomy in choosing how her life ends.

While Lady Montague has the smallest female role, even she is shown to be strong when she prevents Lord Montague from entering the fight at the start of the play saying 'Thou shalt not stir one foot to seek a foe'. At that moment, Lady Capulet also mocks her husband's age, suggesting he needs a 'crutch'

rather than a sword. However, Shakespeare's presentation of her as a strong woman is more complicated. Both the Nurse and Juliet obey her, yet Lady Capulet is often shown to be at the beck and call of her husband, ordered to tell Juliet of the decision that she will marry Paris, for example, and not listened to when Lord Capulet brings the date of the wedding forward. It could be argued that Lady Capulet is only strong when in the company of women; when she is with men, whom Verona society might see as her superiors, she does what she is asked, rather than giving the orders herself.

Page 109 Question 4

Relevant content may include:

AO1

- the contrast of Juliet's shock at discovering Romeo with Romeo's positive and disarming attitude
- Juliet's concern that they fall in love too quickly
- comments on how they influence each other
- consideration of how their relationship influences other relationships, such as Romeo's behaviour with his friends and Juliet's behaviour with her Nurse and parents
- Romeo's reference to his love for Juliet after Mercutio is killed: 'thy love hath made me effeminate'

AO2

- Romeo's use of religious language and imagery
- wider comments on the types of imagery used in their language
- the introduction of their relationship as 'star-crossed' in the Prologue and its place in the tragic structure of the play
- the consequences of their relationship for other characters, such as the deception that Friar Lawrence and the Nurse engage in, and the death of Mercutio when he challenges Tybalt in Romeo's place

AO3

- portents and foreboding that both Romeo and Juliet experience
- ideas about young love
- love against the backdrop of hatred and violence
- ideas about family, loyalty, and honour

Page 110 Question 5

Relevant content may include:

AO1

- comments on how Romeo is led by his heart to seek out Juliet
- exploration of how Mercutio and Benvolio's response suggests Romeo's behaviour is impulsive
- examples of steadfast or controlled behaviour, such as Benvolio refusing to allow Romeo to feel miserable, and Tybalt's written challenge to Romeo
- examples of impulsive behaviour, such as Sampson's insult to Abram in Act 1; Romeo switching his love from Rosaline to Juliet; Friar Lawrence's agreement to marry Romeo and Juliet; Mercutio's challenge of Tybalt in Act 3; Romeo's fight with Tybalt in Act 3; Lord Capulet's decision to force Juliet into marrying Paris in Act 3; and Romeo's decision to kill himself in Act 5

AO2

- imagery of the heart as Romeo's 'centre'
- Mercutio's bawdy language to try and provoke Romeo
- Friar Lawrence's reaction to Romeo's change of heart
- how instances of impulsive behaviour are used as turning points in the plot
- celestial imagery that suggests the characters are not in control of events

AO3

- how impulsive behaviour is connected to ideas about masculinity
- ideas about fate and free will
- ideas about youth and age

Page 111 Question 6

Relevant content may include:

AO1

- comments on how Juliet is prepared to sacrifice her family for her love of Romeo
- consideration of different ways love is shown as powerful, such as the Nurse's motherly love for Juliet; Friar Lawrence's fatherly love for Romeo; the love between the young male friends/cousins; and Romeo avenging Mercutio's murder
- consideration of ways in which love is shown to be weakening or a negative thing, such as Romeo's unrequited love for Rosaline; the Friar's suggestion that young male love is lustful; the blind family loyalty to the feud that results in Mercutio's and Tybalt's deaths, then the deaths of Romeo, Juliet, and Paris

AO2

- Juliet's use of simple, expressive language in the extract
- wider comments on how other characters describe love, such as Romeo's descriptive metaphors: 'Juliet is the sun'
- the juxtaposition of violent language to describe love: 'What is it else? a madness', 'violent delights have violent ends'
- natural imagery to show love as empowering: 'with love's light wings did I o'erperch these walls', 'My bounty is as boundless as the sea'
- the effects of love on different characters and the decisions they take because of it, such as marrying in secret, or taking a potion to pretend to be dead
- how scenes of intense love and violence are often juxtaposed within the play's narrative

AO3

- ideas about what true love means: 'What's in a name?'
- ideas about family loyalty and honour
- love against the backdrop of hatred and violence

Example answer

The answer given below is a full, high-mark answer.

Of all the themes in *Romeo and Juliet*, Shakespeare places love as the most important, and frequently demonstrates that love is one of the most powerful forces humans can experience. Although violence is often a counterpoint to love, the frequent violent events serve to illuminate the precious and powerful nature of true love. As Juliet states when she discovers who Romeo is: ‘my only love sprung from my only hate’ – this careful wording suggests that we should see love as something so wondrous that it can come from hate. However, love is also shown in other ways: as a weakening force, as something that drives people to make dangerous decisions, and as something that can be consuming and obsessive. Shakespeare does not always show love as a positive thing, although arguably it is always a powerful force.

In the first four lines of this scene, Juliet makes her declaration of love for Romeo by suggesting that by abandoning their names (and by implication their family feud), they could be free to love one another. This suggests that Shakespeare feels that love transcends all the limits that the physical world can place on it – it can overcome any obstacle, including the hatred between the families. The way that Juliet delivers this idea is significant – in the previous lines of the play, Romeo describes his love for her through complex imagery referencing the stars, the heavens, and the sun. Shakespeare does not give Juliet any figurative language: her words are simple and honest. This suggests that love is so powerful that it is enough in itself – it doesn’t need embellishing. However, later in this scene, Shakespeare does allow Juliet more dramatic and descriptive language to describe the love she feels for Romeo. She says, ‘My bounty is as boundless as the sea, / My love as deep’. This natural imagery connects a powerful force of nature (the sea) with love, suggesting love is just as powerful and endless.

Juliet’s words in Act 2 Scene 2 show that love can have a powerful effect on individuals in making them want to act in dramatic and momentous ways. The idea that two young people would go against their families, particularly in the sphere of love and marriage, seems unthinkable given how much time the Capulets are taking to arrange Juliet’s engagement to Paris. In suggesting such a bold step, Juliet is also acting against the earlier image we had of her as a subservient female who looked for her mother’s approval, which marks this moment in the play as a significant development in her character arc.

At other points in the play, Shakespeare shows other characters making dangerous decisions because of love. Tybalt loves his family so deeply he is prepared to kill members of the Montague family and their friends in retribution for the perceived slights against them. Friar Lawrence agrees to marry Romeo and Juliet, despite his feeling of foreboding and knowing the families would not be happy, because he loves Romeo and wants to turn ‘rancour to pure love’. Finally, Juliet undertakes a dangerous gamble when she takes the Friar’s potion in order to avoid marrying Paris, calling on Romeo’s love as a power that can give her strength: ‘Romeo! Here’s drink – I drink to thee’.

Conversely, Romeo has experience of love as a weakening force. When Tybalt kills Mercutio, who fights instead of Romeo, Romeo is wracked with guilt and feels his refusal to fight was not a noble defence of his love, but the result of being weakened by love: ‘made ... effeminate’. As a result, he rebels against the merciful feelings his love for Juliet had nurtured and strikes Tybalt down. Romeo’s first experience of love in the play was also a negative experience. He described his unrequited love for Rosaline as ‘a madness most discreet, a choking gall’ which left him miserable and wretched. Yet while it was a false

love, it was also powerfully consuming, leading Romeo to reject the fun of his friends and to feel that he had 'lost myself, I am not here'.

In conclusion, although love takes many guises in the play, it is a key motivator of characters and is at the heart of the plot. It is therefore shown as an incredibly powerful force.

Page 112 Question 7

Relevant content may include:

AO1

- the physical effects of conflict, such as violence and death
- the effect of conflict on the friendship of Romeo, Benvolio, and Mercutio
- other instances of conflict in the play, such as between Juliet and her family
- conflicts that are resolved in the play, such as between Romeo and Friar Lawrence
- how the Prince responds to conflict as a representative of Verona

AO2

- Mercutio's use of imagery and puns
- Romeo's language in response to Mercutio
- how dialogue is used to inflame or resolve conflict
- the dramatic function and position of conflicts within the plot
- how conflicts connect to the events foretold in the Prologue
- the motivation of characters involved in conflict

AO3

- the connection between conflict and ideas about masculinity
- how conflict is viewed by the state of Verona
- ideas about family, loyalty, and honour
- ideas about friendship

Page 113 Question 8

Relevant content may include:

AO1

- comments on how and why the behaviour of the characters in the extract leads to violence
- exploration of the negative and debasing effects of violence on different characters, such as Romeo and Tybalt: 'you men, you beasts'
- ideas about the feud as the main source of physical violence
- ideas about love as a violent feeling, such as from Romeo towards Rosaline, and later between Romeo and Juliet
- ideas about the personal violence and self-harm shown by Romeo and Juliet, as a consequence of losing love

AO2

- the ironic use of the word 'sir' in building tension in the extract and the illusion of respect
- how Benvolio's peaceful behaviour contrasts with the violence of the other young male characters
- how violence is used to change the direction of the play at key moments, such as to introduce the feud; to force Romeo from the path of love; to fulfil the tragic prophecy of the Prologue
- how violent language seeps into the love story of the play and corrupts it: 'beautiful tyrant', 'I dreamt my lady came and found me dead'
- the use of puns and wordplay in inciting violence, such as in the extract, then when Mercutio goads Tybalt to fight

AO3

- violence as a masculine characteristic in the play
- the effects of violence on morality and honour
- religious ideas used to justify violent actions
- the illegality of the feud, as outlawed by Prince Escalus at the start of the play, but what its continuance suggests about the Capulets and Montagues

Example answer

The answer given below is a full, high-mark answer.

Although 'Romeo and Juliet' is renowned as a love story, it is telling that Shakespeare opens the first Act with employees of the two main families roaming the streets, insulting their rivals and intent on violent disorder if the opportunity arises. Violence is a simmering, malevolent presence throughout the play and it erupts at key moments: to open the play; to force Romeo from the path of peace and love; to fulfil the tragic prophecy of the Prologue. Shakespeare uses violence as the foundation for the dramatic structure of the play.

Violence is typically shown as a masculine characteristic, although there are some exceptions. Only the male characters engage in the public brawls in Acts 1 and 3, and the women present in Act 1 attempt to stop the older male characters from becoming involved. While the women are appalled at the violence, the men speak easily about it and boast of the things they will do. For example, the household staff member Sampson declares he will be a 'tyrant' when he fights the men, then 'cut off the [maids'] heads'. This quickly descends into vulgarity as he implies he will sexually assault Montague women. This exchange shows how violence degrades those involved in it. The extract also shows how keen many of the young men are to provoke one another to violence, and suggests that there is a great deal of bravado attached to the verbal sparring that takes place. The men bicker over Sampson's insult of biting his thumb. Shakespeare adds the word 'sir' to each line, ironically suggesting the characters feel this legitimises their exchange and gives it some refinement or politeness. The men know they are skirting round the illegality of fighting in the street, but their desire to break into violence is shown as impossible to ignore.

This is echoed in Mercutio's behaviour later in Act 3. He refuses to leave the streets when Benvolio (a lone voice for peace) worries 'these hot days, is the mad blood stirring'. Shakespeare uses pathetic fallacy to convey the heat of the day as a reflection of the men's violent desires. Violence is suggested to be a kind of madness, and by implication uncontrollable, as though the men act on base animal instinct by wanting to fight. As Tybalt arrives on the scene to speak to Romeo, Mercutio goads him to 'make it a word and a blow'. Shakespeare uses puns to raise the tension with each new insult and to draw the characters in to fight. However, the ease with which Tybalt turns his attention away from Mercutio shows that there are different kinds of violence in the play, and while general fights might break out over general feelings of dislike between the Montagues and Capulets, Shakespeare shows that a personal violent grudge is much more dangerous and insidious.

Tybalt takes Romeo's intrusion at the ball as a personal insult and declares 'to strike him dead I hold it not a sin'. Tybalt's reference to sin shows that he feels morally justified in trying to kill Romeo. This suggests that violence corrupts the moral viewpoint of those involved in it: Tybalt places family honour above the order from God in the Ten Commandments not to kill another human being. After Mercutio's violent death, Shakespeare shows how Romeo's placid and gentle instincts are challenged by the act. He allows himself to be consumed by 'fire-ey'd fury' to avenge his best friend's death by killing Tybalt. This series of events shows how violence infects pure virtues such as love and honour, and that passionate emotions such as hatred and vengeance can fuel violent acts and thoughts in non-violent characters.

Even Romeo and Juliet's love becomes tainted once Romeo has given in to violence. This is shown through the changing images they use when they speak. When Romeo and Juliet first met, they talked of their hands in reverent terms as those of pilgrims, used in prayer to saints in 'holy palmers' kiss'. Yet, in Act 4, Juliet threatens to kill herself by her own hand: 'this hand ... shall be the label to another deed ... this bloody knife shall play the umpire'. The gentle beauty of her language is diminished as violence seeps into their relationship.

As the play draws to its final climax, Juliet becomes the only female character to engage in physical violence and stabs herself. In doing so, she fulfils the prophecy and the feud is ended. However, Shakespeare offers a solemn judgement on the 'glooming peace' that ends the play. While violence drives the action of the play, after it is done, all that is left is silence and 'woe'. At its heart, 'Romeo and Juliet' is a play that shows how futile violence is, and it is the tragedy of the characters that they allowed themselves to be deceived by it.

Page 114 Question 9

Relevant content may include:

AO1

- comments on how Lord and Lady Capulet blame death for stealing Juliet
- the presentation of death in the Prologue as a central theme of the play
- Romeo's unafraid attitude to death and his connection of it to his own fate and destiny
- the Nurse's emotional reaction to Tybalt's and Juliet's deaths, yet her practical statement in Act 3 that 'death's the end of all'
- ideas about how Juliet's fear of death comes from her fear of separation from Romeo, shown by the portent of Romeo dead in a tomb following their night together

AO2

- the personification of death by Lord and Lady Capulet
- the contrast in tone and language choices between Romeo's invitational attitude to death, and other characters' resentment/fear of it
- how references to death and fate are used as portents by Juliet and Friar Lawrence
- the extended metaphors used by Lord Capulet in the extract, and Romeo in Act 5, in describing death

AO3

- ideas about fate and free will
- ideas about youth and age
- ideas about death as something to fear vs something to embrace
- death as an essential part of tragedy

Example answer

The answer given below is a full, high-mark answer.

Death is an ever-present threat within the play 'Romeo and Juliet', partly because of the violent conflict that is always simmering and threatening mortal injury, but partly because Romeo has a particular lingering obsession and preoccupation with the character of death.

Many of the characters refer to death during the play and there are five deaths in total. Ironically, in this scene of grief where death is referenced so clearly, there actually has been no death. Juliet's false 'death' has been used to escape her marriage with Paris, but the reactions of her parents and 'fiancé' are genuine and grief-stricken. Both Lord and Lady Capulet personify death and they feel he has robbed them of their only beloved 'poor and loving' child. Lady Capulet describes death as 'cruel', suggesting that the young age at which Juliet has been taken is unfair and particularly hurtful. Shakespeare chooses adjectives such as 'wretched' and 'accurs'd' to emphasise her negative attitude towards death.

Shakespeare gives Lord Capulet an extended metaphor to convey his desperation at Juliet's early death, comparing death to the bridegroom that Paris should have been: 'Death is my son-in-law'. Lord Capulet's expression of grief shows his hopelessness and the feeling that death has tainted everything 'life, living, all is Death's'. It also suggests that he feels death is all-powerful and able not just to control the souls it takes, but those remaining behind who are still alive. This feeling connects to the theme of fate which is also omnipresent in the play. It builds on the idea that Romeo and Juliet are walking a pre-destined path, which no mortal can change, and which is guided by supernatural elements such as death, God, and the heavens.

The character who makes the most references to death is Romeo, and his attitude towards death is in marked contrast to that of other characters. While the Capulets, the Nurse, and Paris show a very typical attitude in resenting the intrusion of death, Romeo frequently invites death into his life and challenges it to thwart his destiny. His attitude could be dismissed as one of youthful bravado – he is young and therefore he feels invincible – yet Romeo does seem a particularly superstitious character and closely connects death to fate and destiny, seeing it as an intrinsic part of these.

Shakespeare structures Romeo's references to death and fate to occur at key moments during the play. In Act 1, just before he meets Juliet, Romeo states that fate has 'the steering of my course' and later in Act 5, when he learns of her death, he states that he is a victim of fate: 'I defy you stars'. As he waits for Juliet to arrive for their wedding, he taunts death as 'Love-devouring' who should 'do what he dare'. When he wakes after spending the night with Juliet he teases her when she won't let him go, saying 'Come, death, and welcome!' Shakespeare seems to want to show that Romeo has an easy acceptance of death's existence. This could suggest he is either immature or extremely practical. However, when he

hears of his banishment, he says ‘be merciful, say “death”’, which shows he is less afraid of death than being sent away. This is evidence of a very immature attitude, which strengthens the argument that Romeo’s attitude towards death is fanciful and shows a lack of mature understanding of the world and the reality of life and death.

Unlike Romeo, Juliet is fearful of death and sees it as a portent of doom when she has a vision of Romeo dead at the bottom of a tomb. The cold contrast of this image with the personified creature that Romeo conjures reflects that Romeo and Juliet are very different kinds of people, despite their shared love. At their own moments of death, Juliet thinks only of her separation from Romeo and how to end that through death as an action. Romeo dwells on death’s presence and gives it an active role in events, personifying it again as an ‘amorous ... monster’ who has taken Juliet prisoner. He echoes the idea of Lord Capulet that death is a powerful ‘engrossing’ force that takes everything from the living in ‘a dateless bargain’. Romeo’s attitude is that death is not just a final end to life: it is a part of life, something that is ever-present, conscious, and feeling – and ultimately inescapable.

Page 115 Question 10

Relevant content may include:

AO1

- exploration of the positive feeling created in this scene between Romeo and Friar Lawrence
- comments on the evidence that Romeo completely confides in Friar Lawrence
- consideration of how Friar Lawrence acts as a friend and mentor to Romeo throughout the play
- Romeo's desire to be alone at the start of the play
- Romeo's interaction with Benvolio
- Romeo's behaviour with Mercutio, including Mercutio's comment: 'now art thou sociable, now art thou Romeo'
- Romeo's reaction to Mercutio's death

AO2

- how Friar Lawrence shows understanding of Romeo
- the layers of meaning in using 'son' and 'father'
- why Romeo withholds information from Mercutio and Benvolio concerning first Rosaline and then Juliet
- the use of dramatic irony in Mercutio failing to understand why Romeo won't fight Tybalt
- the dramatic function of Mercutio's death in Romeo's character arc
- the puns and wordplay between Romeo and his different friends

AO3

- Romeo's behaviour as a young man in Verona society
- ideas about friendship
- ideas about youth and age

Page 116 Question 11

Relevant content may include:

AO1

- Juliet's growing maturity in her relationship with Romeo
- how Juliet's attitudes and ideas contrast with those she demonstrated earlier in the play
- exploration of how Romeo is presented as a romantic, impulsive, and emotional man, and how this compares/contrasts with Juliet
- exploration of Mercutio as a cynical and realistic young character
- exploration of Benvolio as a steady and dependable young character
- exploration of Tybalt as a hot-headed, proud, and violent character

AO2

- the use of soliloquy
- Juliet's imaginative choice of imagery and figurative language, including light/dark, mythology, and the personification of night
- the juxtaposition of this scene to immediately follow the deaths of Mercutio and Tybalt
- how young people are used as catalysts for action within the plot
- how the speech of the young people changes in different situations

AO3

- how the young people challenge or fulfil the different expectations Verona society has of them
- ideas about youth and age
- ideas about friendship

Page 117 Question 12

Relevant content may include:

AO1

- comments on how relationships between older and younger characters are referenced from the start of the play within the Prologue
- the positive relationships between older and younger characters, such as between Friar Lawrence and Romeo, and the Nurse and Juliet
- the negative relationships between older and younger characters, such as between Lord Capulet and Tybalt, Lord and Lady Capulet and Juliet

AO2

- how the relationships between older and younger characters are used to create moments of conflict within the play, such as Lord Capulet and Tybalt in Act 1, and also the Nurse and Juliet in Acts 2 and 3 when the Nurse delays sharing information about Romeo, then speaks against him
- how Lord Capulet's humiliation of Tybalt at the ball works to inflame the conflict between Tybalt and Romeo
- rhyme and rhythm in exchanges between Romeo and Friar Lawrence to show the positivity of their relationship
- the contrast of exaggerated imagery from Romeo and frank realism from Friar Lawrence to show the honesty of their relationship
- the ways Friar Lawrence and the Nurse develop the characters of Romeo and Juliet through their worldly experience
- the contrast in language form between Lady Capulet's conversations with Juliet compared to the Nurse's, in revealing a cold and distant mother–daughter relationship

AO3

- ideas about youth and age
- ideas about control and freedom
- ideas about the Friar and Nurse as substitute parents/confidantes
- how the older characters could be seen as responsible for the tragedy of the play

Example answer

The answer given below is a full, high-mark answer.

'Romeo and Juliet' is notable for its theme of youth and age – from the beginning of the play we are aware of the 'ancient grudge' that stems from the older generation, to the 'new mutiny' that is simmering among the younger generation. The relationships between the older and younger generations directly affect the events of the play and its resolution.

Shakespeare uses the relationships between characters to create conflict within the play. For example, Tybalt's love of violence and pride ensures he is at odds with every young Montague; however, it is also a source of conflict with his older uncle, Lord Capulet. Lord Capulet represents the domineering and absolute attitude of an older generation who believe they are right and that the young are foolish. He chastises Tybalt and insults him as a 'boy' when Tybalt attempts to defend the family against 'a Montague, our foe'. His humiliation of Tybalt hurts the young man's pride and Shakespeare uses this to inflame the conflict between Tybalt and Romeo. This shows how the older generation negatively – and unwittingly – influence the actions of the younger characters, and can be seen as further responsible for the terrible tragedy that unfolds.

Shakespeare seems keen to show that relationships between generations are incredibly important. When there is genuine love and affection between the characters of different generations, such as the Nurse and Juliet, or Romeo and Friar Lawrence, then the relationships are predominantly positive and balanced – each side seems to gain something more through the mutual respect that is allowed to exist. But when the older generation seeks to control or restrain the younger generation, or to impose their own view of what is right and correct, such as with Juliet and Lord Capulet, then the relationships break down and tragic events occur.

One relationship between the older and younger generations that is hugely positive is that of Friar Lawrence and Romeo. Although Romeo's parents do seem to genuinely care for him, wishing they could 'give cure' to his melancholy mood at the start of the play, Romeo has a close friend in the Friar. It seems that he confides everything in him, including his unrequited love: 'thou chid'st me oft for loving Rosaline / For doting, not for loving, pupil mine.' This rhyming exchange between the characters is notable for several reasons. It begins with a set of couplets that reflect the close affection between the characters and are light-hearted, even though they touch on important ideas such as the family feud. The characters share the lines and the rhymes in a rhythm that suggests familiarity and understanding.

Shakespeare positions Friar Lawrence as someone Romeo can depend on and turn to for advice. This allows the Friar to serve an important function in the play when both Romeo and Juliet are in need. As an older, trusted character, the Friar offers advice based on experience, logic, and reason, which allows the audience to give credence to his dangerous plan working successfully for Juliet later in the play. Although the Friar's relationship with Romeo is later tested when Romeo is distraught over his banishment, the long and frank exchanges between the characters only deepen the idea that an older, wiser, and selflessly motivated character can have a beneficial impact on a character from a younger generation. Shakespeare shows Romeo to be petulant and inclined to self-pity in his exaggerated imagery, 'Thou cutt'st my head off with a golden axe, And smilest upon the stroke that murders me'. Yet the patient Friar does not coddle the man 'on the ground, with his own tears made drunk'. Instead, he

insults and invigorates him and gets him to see sense – not for his own benefit, but acting in the best interests of Romeo so he can return from banishment with ‘twenty hundred thousand times more joy’.

Both the Friar and the Nurse have a far more worldly view than the younger characters. Shakespeare allows Romeo and Juliet’s horizons to be widened through their respective relationships with the Friar and Nurse. Although Juliet is often exposed to the bawdy wit of the older Nurse, who describes women who ‘grow by men’ and ‘bear[ing] the burden’, the Nurse opens Juliet’s eyes to the reality of love between men and women, and the pleasure it can bring. It could be said that Juliet is influenced by the Nurse’s encouragement to ‘seek happy nights to happy days’ and this is evidenced in her behaviour at the ball in allowing Romeo to kiss her, and in pursuing a romantic relationship with him.

Juliet’s relationship with Lady Capulet is very different: distant and unaffectionate ‘Ho, daughter’, reflecting the calculating matchmaking of Lady Capulet that focuses on the social advantages of the match with Paris, rather than Juliet’s happiness. Juliet’s relationship with the Nurse is then an important surrogate source of maternal affection and good humour. In the given scene, Shakespeare demonstrates this through the Nurse’s teasing of Juliet ‘Fie how my bones ache!’ rather than telling her the news. Shakespeare does push the audience to consider whether there is an element of unkindness in the Nurse’s behaviour, yet the easy interplay of the speech, where Juliet cleverly twists each of the Nurse’s complaints into a platitude, or challenges them, shows this is a verbal dance they have engaged in before. Both Romeo and Juliet are able to respond to their elder confidantes with ease and honesty, confident in their unwavering affection.

Page 118 Question 13

Relevant content may include:

AO1

- comments on how Lady Capulet presents the news of the wedding to Juliet as something pleasant
- comparison of Lady Capulet’s presentation of Paris as a suitor to Juliet, and Juliet’s response
- exploration of Lord Capulet’s reaction to Juliet’s rejection of Paris
- Juliet’s recognition at the end of the party that Romeo is ‘my only love sprung from my only hate’
- the contrast of Romeo and Juliet’s attitude towards the feud, compared with their families’ attitude
- the role of Prince Escalus, whose duty is to keep the peace of Verona
- consideration of whether Friar Lawrence is reckless in marrying Romeo and Juliet, or following his true religious duty in working for peace

AO2

- the effects of Juliet repeating her mother's words
- how Shakespeare creates a feeling of apprehension about Lord Capulet's reaction
- use of dramatic irony in Juliet's statement about preferring to marry Romeo
- the violent language of Lord Capulet when accusing Juliet of not doing her duty

AO3

- how Juliet rebels against the idea of duty that would be expected in Verona society
- the interpretation of what duty actually is
- ideas about youth and age
- ideas about family, loyalty, and honour

Page 119 Question 14

Relevant content may include:

AO1

- comments on Lady Capulet wanting the best for her daughter
- comments on Lady Capulet's motivation for making a good marriage and social position for Juliet
- comments on the Nurse as an essential member of the Capulet family
- how Lord Capulet is presented as a protector of his daughter
- references to 'consent' and 'will' in Lord Capulet's exchange with Paris in Act 1, and how this changes following Tybalt's death when he promises Juliet to Paris
- Lord Capulet's behaviour when Juliet refuses to marry Paris
- comments on what Lady Capulet's and the Nurse's attempts to intervene show about their attitude towards Lord Capulet and Juliet
- Juliet's feelings and behaviour towards Lord and Lady Capulet, the Nurse, and Tybalt
- Tybalt's motivation as a loyal Capulet

AO2

- Lady Capulet's extended metaphor of lavish praise for Paris in the extract, comparing him to a 'fair' book
- how Juliet is presented as a 'cover' and the implication that she is a decoration
- the contrast of Lord Capulet's loving language towards Juliet in Act 1, 'the hopeful lady of my earth', with his angry smear of her in Act 3: 'you green-sickness carrion'
- how the loss of trust between Juliet and the Nurse changes the direction of the play and isolates Juliet as a character
- how the theme of violence and dominance is used to create instability within the Capulet family

AO3

- ideas about marriage and its purpose within Verona society
- ideas about Lord and Lady Capulet as obligated to find a suitable partner for Juliet
- ideas about men in Verona society as the protectors and rulers of women
- ideas about what a modern audience might feel familial love really means, including in the choice of marriage partner
- ideas about public and private personas

Example answer

The answer given below is a full, high-mark answer.

In order to assess how far the Capulets are a caring family, we must consider each character's motivation, but also be mindful of the impact of Verona society and the expectations that may have constrained or influenced them, specifically Juliet, in how they behaved towards each other. I will therefore consider the Capulet family, including Lord and Lady Capulet, Juliet, and also the Nurse, who lovingly describes Juliet as 'the prettiest babe'.

The Nurse's long descriptions of Juliet as a beautiful baby and engaging child take up a large portion of Act 1 Scene 3. Juliet and her mother tire of the long account, which suggests they have heard this all before, but it is clear evidence that the Nurse cares for Juliet, and has a fondness for recollecting such evidently happy times. Shakespeare shows that Juliet grew up as a child who was doted upon, by the Nurse at least, and this is evidenced through their continued close relationship and Juliet's absolute dependence on her 'honey Nurse'. Although the Nurse speaks freely with Juliet and chastises her at times, such as when she returns from visiting Romeo, she does whatever Juliet asks of her and is a trusted confidante who enables Juliet's romance with Romeo: 'Hie you to church, I must another way, to fetch a ladder'. Juliet in turn speaks fondly to the Nurse, using frequent terms of endearment such as 'honey', 'sweet', 'good', and 'honest'. However, the moment that the Nurse tells Juliet something she does not want to hear – that Juliet should forget Romeo following his banishment and her forced

engagement to Paris – Juliet abruptly stops showing the Nurse any kind of affection or gratitude. From Juliet’s point of view, she has been betrayed; from the Nurse’s point of view, she is taking care of her charge, who is in an impossible situation. Although the Nurse is willing to help Juliet in a secret love affair, Shakespeare implies she will not support her in open defiance of her parents, and see her cast out of good society. The Nurse clearly believes she is continuing to demonstrate care for Juliet in offering this advice. Shakespeare takes advantage of this change in their relationship as a plot device to isolate Juliet from those who care for her.

Both the Nurse and Lady Capulet are keen for Juliet to make a good marriage, which suggests they care for her in wanting her to have a settled and secure future. However, Lady Capulet’s recollections of other local girls who are married – ‘ladies of esteem’ – suggest there is an important social element for Juliet to consider and that it is important she marry well. This implies that Lady Capulet cares less about whether Juliet is happy in marriage, and more that it should be a socially acceptable match. Although Juliet is young, Lady Capulet married when she was younger and uses this as a justification for pressuring Juliet – this is arguably not a fair or caring thing to do. Yet Lady Capulet may honestly feel that marriage is so important to a woman’s future that it is her duty as a mother to help Juliet marry well. Lady Capulet presents Paris in positive terms: he is ‘valiant’ and a ‘man of wax’, suggesting he is to be admired as a perfect model of man, as well as being handsome and someone who would make Juliet’s social position ‘no less’. Lady Capulet may believe she is being a caring mother by bringing Juliet a wonderful suitor. However, Juliet is not allowed much time to think or express her wishes as Lady Capulet orders her to ‘think of marriage now’ and ‘speak briefly’. This demonstrates a less caring attitude and implies that Juliet’s being consulted is something of a sham: the Capulets have decided Paris is suitable and either through Lady Capulet’s persuasion, or Lord Capulet’s later insistence, she will end up married to him.

Lord Capulet’s behaviour towards Juliet is quite contrary. At first, an audience might feel he is a very caring father towards Juliet. Shakespeare crafts a scene in Act 1 in which Paris is pressing his suit, but Lord Capulet defends and protects Juliet, declaring that young brides are often ‘too soon marr’d’ and suggesting Juliet will have a choice even though he wants her to accept Paris: ‘my will to her consent is but a part’. Shakespeare’s presentation of Lord Capulet as a caring protector then acts as a counterpoint to his later transformation into the tyrannical ogre who decides to insist on ‘our decree’ that she will marry Paris. Shakespeare turns Lord Capulet into a vile and cruel father who uses insulting language towards Juliet such as ‘you green-sickness carrion! out, you baggage’. He treats Juliet as something he owns, ‘And you be mine, I’ll give you to my friend’, then threatens to disown her to ‘starve, die in the streets’. Nothing in his behaviour is caring or reasonable.

Although we can understand that Lord Capulet is clearly disappointed that his devotion to Juliet and offer of a good husband have been rejected, ‘Day, night, work, play ... still my care hath been to have her match’d’, his response to her is completely unacceptable, given that Juliet is ‘thankful’ for his care, even though she does not accept it. Shakespeare uses Lord Capulet’s unfeeling ultimatum as a plot device to back Juliet into a corner where she is forced into desperate measures. In assessing how far we can see them as a caring family, this situation is the final evidence that, while Lord and Lady Capulet’s motivations may come from genuine care for their daughter, the way they behave and enact their wishes means that this care is lost and destroyed through their inability to consider Juliet’s feelings and to allow her genuine choice in her own future.

Page 120 Question 15

Relevant content may include:

AO1

- comments on how Benvolio tries to tempt Romeo to look at other women
- details that show Romeo is determined to be loyal to Rosaline
- details of Romeo's reaction to seeing Juliet for the first time and his encounter with her after the party
- how Romeo justifies his change of heart to Friar Lawrence
- Romeo's marrying of Juliet
- Romeo's refusal to fight Tybalt, and the reason for his change of heart
- Romeo's killing of Tybalt and Paris

AO2

- how other characters view Romeo's sense of honour
- the difference in Romeo's language in describing his love for Rosaline compared to Juliet
- the idea that Romeo's dishonourable behaviour is a tragic character flaw and a necessary part of the tragic structure of the play

AO3

- social context of what honourable behaviour towards women looked like for young men
- whether Romeo's refusal to fight is a more significant act of dishonour than his change of affection
- the fickleness of young love
- ideas about family, loyalty, and honour