

## ***Alienation in Romeo and Juliet***

*Michael Olson*

### **OVERVIEW**

The institution of education is by itself an alienating arrangement. It separates people and ideas into groups. Teachers and students, Math and Science, English and History, smart kids and dumb kids, jocks and nerds, the list could go on. Surely, groupings and alienation would exist even if the institution of education did not, nor is it unhealthy for such differentiation to exist. However the question that arises is one of relationship. What is the relationship between teachers and students, the smart kids and dumb kids, English and History? What is the relationship between the alienated and those who are not? And further, what are the consequences and outcomes of these relationships? In contemplating the title of this seminar *Adolescence and Alienation: How Can Books Heal Wounds?* I've found that in addition to the literature we will be reading, an important consideration is the very institution the students walk into everyday. For adolescents attending high school, alienation is a lived experience almost every day.

In schools, children learn quickly the practice of social grouping. Vivian Paley, a Kindergarten teacher, explores this issue in her book *You Can't Say You Can't Play*. Paley describes her experience in observing and healing the potent emotional sting of exclusion. Being told, "You can't play with us" is devastating to the young child; it means he or she is not part of a group; he or she does not fit in with the others. Humans are social animals and demand belonging, however, there will always be "inside" and "outside" groups. No matter how clever the social arrangement, there will always be the minority, the outsiders, the disaffected; again the question to be asked is: What is the relationship between those who fit in and those who do not, and what are the consequences for not fitting in? In terms of *Romeo and Juliet*, what is the relationship between the Capulets and Montagues and what are the consequences of this relationship?

History can show us the consequences for being labeled an outside group can be far reaching. African Americans have been denied basic human rights, women have been denied the right to vote, those without class privilege lack the comforts and luxuries of those who do. Perhaps a way to abate negative consequences and discover ways for the disparate groups of people to compliment, rather than disparage each other, is through dialogue. Creating a dialogue between contenders is perhaps the surest, albeit not the fastest nor easiest, way to mitigate the effects of the insider/outsider dialectic.

In the play Friar Laurence tries to force a dialogue between the warring houses through marriage, but the cost is at a terrible price. My hope is that my classroom becomes a place where both the alienated and included have an equally valued voice, whereby variances in social power and standing can be obviated. However for a healthy

dialogue to exist all students must participate and contribute. Too often students are comfortable to just sit by and let the teacher direct the dialogue.

Expressing one's viewpoint or feelings is difficult to do from an alienated perspective, especially when the audience cannot empathize with feeling alienated. For Juliet, talking to her parents about her needs is not easy to do. A meaningful, respectful dialogue does not exist between her and her parents. Instead they spout their feelings in anger toward one another. Likewise in the classroom, teachers and students can fall into a battle of wills where neither listens to the other and a silent standoff ensues. Using a story in the classroom that speaks the emotions and feelings of those alienated, encourages and affirms the alienated experience. It opens the door so to speak; it invites the sharing of similar experience. Maybe most importantly, reading stories that voice the alienated experience reveal the experience to be a source of strength. The story invites the alienated individual back into the group as newfound asset, a member who the group would be amiss not to include. Further, "outsiders" challenge the status quo and often become agents. However before the alienated individual will feel welcome and would want to choose inclusion, his or her experience must be valued.

The act of reading and writing can be used as the medium through which both teacher and student engage in meaningful discourse. I hope to use Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* as the grounds to provide an arena where alienation is explored in terms of relationship. In exploring the relationships between characters and institutions, issues of control, authority, and love and impatience will emerge, as well as communication, anger, and belongingness. Parallels to our own lives will be eagerly encouraged and hopefully the life lessons can be applied. My intended audience is a ninth grade English classroom, for whom formal English is essentially a second language. Weaved into the unit will be certain state curricular components such as comparing and contrasting, identifying literary elements, making generalizations and inferences, and utilizing the writing process.

### **Discussion Points in the Play**

The following are brief examinations of themes or topics within the play. Each is designed to provide a grounds and skeletal framework for class discussion and writing topics.

#### ***Romeo's Rashness***

Often at the end of the play when Romeo is just about to drink the poison students often blurt out "No! Wait! You moron!" This happens almost without fail when we are watching the movie. After students calm down and emotions settle, I am prompted to ask them why they think Romeo is so stupid? Of course the answer is that Juliet is still alive and he only has to wait a couple more minutes and then they can ride off into the sunset together. Usually the students are content to rest at a conclusion as this but it is at this

point that I remind them of what the Friar has said throughout the play. For example when Romeo returns from the Capulet Party and after laying eyes on Juliet for the first time he wants to marry her. The Friar warns Romeo about the dangers of acting hastily, “Wisely, and slow. They stumble that run fast” (Act II scene3). Later, when the Friar is marrying the couple he voices an eerie foreshadow, “These violent delights have violent ends / And in their triumph die, like fire and powder.” (Act II scene 6). I then usually ask them to see if they can locate more instances of this kind of foreshadowing and a discussion ensues.

### ***Love or Lust?***

Related to Romeo’s rashness is his love for Juliet. I ask the students whether or not they think that Romeo and Juliet are truly in love. Students are usually split as to whether or not love at first sight exists. When pushed to act on such a supposition, that is would they marry someone they have just known for less than two weeks, most think the idea is ridiculous. I ask the students for evidence in the play of people who told the couple to wait. Again the Friar comes up, but from a different angle. I ask them to consider Romeo’s relationship before he met Juliet. Prior to being married, Romeo was rejected by Rosaline, who placed her heart with God, then he falls hopelessly for Juliet. The Friar seems to favor lust being the impetus for Romeo’s enthrallment with Juliet: “Is Rosaline so soon forsaken? Young men’s love lies truly / Not in the hearts but in their eyes.” (Act II, scene 3).

Then I highlight Romeo and Benvolio’s conversation at the beginning of the play. Romeo is heartbroken over not being returned his affections for Rosaline. Benvolio tells him to come to the party that night and Benvolio will solve his problems by finding him another girl who is much more attractive than Rosaline.

Go thither, and with unattainted eye  
Compare her face with some that I shall show,  
And I will make thy swan a crow. (Act I, scene 2)

Indeed Romeo does find someone else who catches his eye at the party – Juliet. For evidence of that love at first sight does exist, we can look at the power of Romeo’s words upon setting his gaze upon Juliet. Romeo says, “Did my heart love till now? Forswear it, sight! / For I ne’er saw true beauty till this night.” (Act II, scene 3). Also we can consider the fact that Romeo and Juliet would prefer death over living apart. Romeo is ready to stab himself until the Friar comes up with a plan to reunite the couple. Juliet runs to the Friar telling him she would rather die than have to marry Paris and live without Romeo. “O bid me leap, rather than marry Paris, / from off the battlements of yonder tower” (Act IV scene 1). I ask my students to tally the evidence for both love and lust in order to determine what really brought the couple together.

### ***Control and Parental Authority***

It could also be argued that the only reason Juliet wants to marry Romeo is to defy her parents, especially her father. The play doesn't say exactly how many children Capulet may have had but, we know that Juliet is now the only child. He says to Paris, "The earth has swallowed all my hopes but she; She is the hopeful lady of my earth." (Act II, scene 2). Capulet is a man of high esteem in the small community of Verona. He is aware that he is judged by the actions of his daughter and he is sensitive to this fact. This sensitivity is evident in the relationship with his daughter. When he understands all is well in the city in regards to the feud between the two houses, he is willing to be patient. A fight between Montague and Capulet has forbidden further quarrels and although tensions might be high between the clans, Capulet feels no pressure to defend the honor of his house. In fact when Paris first approaches him about Juliet, he wants Paris to wait maybe two more years because she is too young. Also he says that Paris should win her heart because that is more important than his permission to marry Juliet. However, when tensions rise later in the play after Romeo kills Tybalt, his reputation and name are at stake. He contradicts his earlier statement to Paris and tells him that Juliet will obey him dutifully and will consent to marry Paris, whether she loves him or not.

The relationship between Juliet and her father is colored by the idea that Juliet is a possession. She is merely an extension of him and he uses her to his advantage. No doubt Juliet's marriage to a noble will give him political and financial gain. When Juliet does not consent to this arrangement, Capulet flies into a rage and reveals, up until now undisclosed opinions about his daughter. Capulet's possessive, objectified image of his daughter is revealed in Act III scene 5

"Hang thee young baggage! Disobedient wretch! .... An you be mine, I'll give you to my friend; An you be not, hang, beg, starve, die in the streets"

Her father has reduced their relationship to that of being owned by her father for him to use to serve his own needs or being an autonomous individual with the freedom to act of her own volition. By threatening disownment Capulet compounds the difficulty of Juliet's choosing her independence.

Lady Capulet is of little comfort; she tells Juliet that she has "done with thee." In agreeing with her husband's ultimatum, she reinforces the notion that Juliet is just a piece of property for her parents to use and profit from.

Overtone of parental authority ring true to modern day readers. We all can relate to our parents telling us what is best for us. It is a parental conundrum as well, to let children learn for themselves without our intervention, thereby causing great pain to themselves, however, perhaps the pain is greater for those who see loved ones suffer. Who knows what is worse, emotional or physical suffering? Or if it is the duty of the parent to decide what is best for our children. Maybe wisdom teaches us that we can make the best of any situation. In the case of the play, it seems that the marriage between

Paris and Juliet is of political convenience, with little regard for Juliet's interests. The mother as well seems to not like the affront to parental authority that Juliet shows, and in her own words toward Juliet says, "I have done with thee."

### ***Responsibility***

I ask my students at the end of the play, "So who is responsible?" Who is responsible for the deaths of Romeo and Juliet? And who should be punished? The first character we can look to is Friar Laurence.

Friar Laurence embodies the phrases he utters when Romeo encounters him for the first time in the play:

Virtue itself turned vice, being misapplied,  
And vice sometimes by action dignified  
Within the infant rind of this small flower,  
Poison hath residence, and medicine power; (Act II scene 1)

The Friar's plan to bring the feuding families together with the marriage of Romeo and Juliet is born of a good intention, unfortunately his plan goes awry. Shakespeare could have concealed the reasoning behind the failure of the plan in the fact that Friar Laurence is ultimately serving his own purposes in wedding the youths too hastily. Because he is not patient he feeds Romeo's rashness and joins two that should not be joined. While his intentions are good to end the war, he pushes forward an agenda that is his own, and in doing so does not realize that it may unfold differently than how he plans. Indeed, a truce between the families is found at the end of the play, but not because of a wedding but a funeral. Evidence for his guilt can be found in the words he speaks of himself: "Miscarried by my fault, let my old life / be sacrificed, some hour before his time, / Unto the rigor of the severest law." (Act V scene 3).

Maybe the heads of the families, Capulet and Montague, should bear all the blame. For without the hatred between the families there would be no problem. Romeo and Juliet complain about it throughout the play. At the end of the party at the Capulet mansion both Romeo and Juliet discover their love will be endangered because of their parents feud. Romeo says, "Is she a Capulet? / O dear account! my life is my foes debt." (Act I scene 5). Likewise, Juliet speaks:

My only love sprung from my only hate!  
Too early seen unknown, and known too late!  
Prodigious birth of love is to me  
That I must love a loathed enemy. (Act I scene 5).

We can look to Prince Escalus to see where he lays blame. It seems that he thinks that there has been enough suffering and needless death to warrant anymore punishments.

In fact he seems to be satisfied that peace will now finally prevail, even though the cost has been great. He says:

A glooming peace this morning with it brings  
The sun for sorrow will not show his head.  
Go hence, to have more talk of these sad things;  
Some are pardoned, and some punished;  
For never was a story of more woe  
Than this of Juliet and her Romeo (Act V scene 3).

## STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

While the language and historical setting of Shakespeare's romantic tragedy is distant from the contemporary teenage experience, the universal issues are applicable and enticing. Fighting, first love, defiance of parental authority, and death are the experiences Shakespeare uses to tell his story of "woe." William Monroe in his book *The Power to Hurt* emphasizes that sometimes life is not sweet and being alienated is part of the bitterness with which we must contend. Further, in order to gain meaningful insight, we cannot turn away and focus solely on the uplifting, instead we ought dive into the malaise.

A foremost challenge in actively engaging students in the text is, of course, the language. This challenge is amplified considering that for a majority of the students, English is not a first language. Also the ever-shrinking attention spans of ninth grade students is another factor that merits consideration. Shakespearian language is distant and many words and phrases require translation. To mediate the distance between students and text not all of the play will be read in the original language. Rather than read a "watered-down" version of the play, focused attention is given to key scenes essential to the plot, as well as, structured reading activities.

Indeed, Shakespeare was a master of drama and each scene and line were no doubt carefully chosen, but his audience was vastly different than the students at Jefferson Davis. Also the purpose of reading the play is different. My students are unaccustomed to focusing attention on material that is not easily accessible and understandable. Perhaps the same could be said of the audience in Shakespeare's time, however the obvious difference is that Shakespeare wrote in a language and style familiar to his audience. The difference in audience begs the question, "Why read Shakespeare to ninth graders in the first place? Why not choose something that is specifically written to the young adult audience?" The proliferation of young adult literature in the past decades is evidence that there is definitely an audience and need for Young Adolescent Literature.

Maybe it is important for literature to take the reader outside a comfortable, known experience. Literature can serve as a time travel device; it can transport us outside ourselves to delve into the experiences of others and develop compassion and

understanding. Two values that the world is in need of. Also, from a more literary perspective, few can compare to Shakespeare's poetic articulation of human emotions and universal life experiences. In short, maybe it is relevant to study Shakespeare because he is portrays human drama well.

That being said, just like a movie director deciding what parts of a novel to put into a movie, I am deciding what aspects of the play need most attention to keep students motivated in reading the play. Some scenes will be read in entirety, others will be structured with teacher prepared paraphrases, while other will be simply summarized. The following table displays the structuring of the text.

(See Table 1 below).

### **Guided Reading Notes**

Students will match the notes written below with the text in the book. The use of sticky notes can be used in place of writing directly on the play.

#### Act I scene 1

- ◆ Montague wants to know what happened
- ◆ Benvolio blames Tybalt
- ◆ Mark an example of personification
  
- ◆ Benvolio asks Romeo what's wrong
- ◆ Romeo loves someone who doesn't love him
  
- ◆ Romeo laments being in love
- ◆ Mark examples of oxymorons

#### Act I scene 2

- ◆ The age of Juliet
- ◆ Paris wants to marry Juliet
- ◆ Capulet invites Paris to the party
  
- ◆ Romeo reads the invitation
- ◆ Rosaline will be at the party

#### Act I scene 3

- ◆ Lady Capulet asks Juliet if she would like to marry Paris

- ◆ Juliet doesn't have much interest
- ◆ Identify a metaphor
  
- ◆ Mercutio wants to party
- ◆ Rosaline will be at the party
  
- ◆ Mercutio and Romeo talk about dreams
- ◆ Identify a pun
  
- ◆ Example of foreshadowing
  
- ◆ Romeo sees Juliet
- ◆ Example of a simile
- ◆ Tybalt sees Romeo
  
- ◆ Capulet tells Tybalt not to cause a scene
- ◆ Tybalt promises revenge
- ◆ Identify metaphor
- ◆ Romeo and Juliet realize they are from different houses

#### Act II scene 1

- ◆ Identify a metaphor
- ◆ Identify an example of personification
- ◆ Romeo sees Juliet but Juliet doesn't see Romeo
- ◆ Juliet professes her love for Romeo
  
- ◆ Only their names keep them apart
- ◆ Tell me you truly love me
- ◆ Romeo tells Juliet he loves her
- ◆ Romeo wants her promise
- ◆ They agree to meet tomorrow at nine
  
- ◆ Identify an oxymoron

#### Act II scene 3

- ◆ Something good can do evil and something evil can do good
- ◆ Good and evil come from the same source.
  
- ◆ Friar asks what happened to Rosaline
- ◆ Friar hopes the marriage will end the feud.



#### Act II scene 4

- ◆ Nurse is made fun of
- ◆ Romeo tells Juliet to come to the church this afternoon to be married
  
- ◆ Nurse teases Juliet and tells her the news
- ◆ Identify a metaphor
- ◆ Identify a simile
  
- ◆ Paraphrase on your own the following possible lines: 9-10,14-15, 35-37
- ◆ Identify a simile

#### Act III scene 1

- ◆ Paraphrase lines 1-5
- ◆ Paraphrase line 30
  
- ◆ Tybalt wants to fight
- ◆ Romeo doesn't want to
- ◆ Mercutio wants to fight Romeo
  
- ◆ Mercutio is stabbed
- ◆ Identify a simile
  
- ◆ Paraphrase lines 106-112
- ◆ Identify a metaphor between lines 115-120

#### Act III scene 3

- ◆ Paraphrase lines 17-23, 25-29
- ◆ Even a mouse can see Juliet but Romeo can't
- ◆ Summarize the argument between Friar Laurence and Romeo
- ◆ Summarize what the Friar says to calm Romeo down
- ◆ Summarize the plan of action

#### Act III scene 4

- ◆ Capulet tells Paris the wedding will be on Thursday
- ◆ Example of personification
  
- ◆ Lady Capulet thinks Juliet is sad because of Tybalt's death

- ◆ Lady Capulet tells Juliet she will marry Paris
- ◆ Paraphrase lines 117-124
  
- ◆ Capulet calls Juliet ungrateful
- ◆ Paraphrase lines 161-169
  
- ◆ Summarize what Capulet tells Juliet
  
- ◆ Juliet asks her mother to delay the marriage
- ◆ Paraphrase lines 204-205
- ◆ Summarize what the nurse tells them
  
- ◆ Summarize Juliet's plan

#### Act IV scene 4

- ◆ Paraphrase lines 50-67
  
- ◆ Identify an example of imagery
- ◆ Summarize the Friar's plan
  
- ◆ Letter explaining plan sent to Romeo
- ◆ Paraphrase lines 15-20
  
- ◆ Identify example of dramatic irony
  
- ◆ Summarize what Juliet is concerned about

#### Act IV scene 5

- ◆ Capulets think Juliet is dead

#### Act V scene 1

- ◆ Paraphrase lines 16-25
  
- ◆ Romeo goes to the apothecary
- ◆ Summarize lines 65-86

#### Act V scene 2

- ◆ Friar Laurence discovers Romeo didn't receive his letters

### Act V scene 3

- ◆ Romeo kills Paris
- ◆ Identify example of personification
- ◆ Romeo takes his last look at Juliet
  
- ◆ Romeo drinks poison – dies
- ◆ Friar Laurence enters tomb
  
- ◆ Friar Laurence has a plan
- ◆ Juliet stabs herself – dies
  
- ◆ Summarize lines 229-270
  
- ◆ Paraphrase lines 291-295, 305-310

### **Writing Engagement**

Students are rarely asked to write meaningfully. The result is that most of my students come to me with little interest in writing. When asking students to write I am almost immediately greeted with loud moans and complaints. The first question students then ask is how much do we have to write? I try to avoid feeding the idea that it is the amount of writing that is important and not what is written, by telling them we will write for a specific amount of time rather than specify how many pages. But even this doesn't foster truly meaningful writing.

We write for different reasons, sometimes for ourselves, sometimes for others. The reason why we write dictates the style we use. A short memo to a colleague differs in format and tone from a letter written to a loved one we haven't communicated with for a while. My students are used to having to write for the teacher or a standardized test. It is an exercise they have repeated endlessly. Often it is done with the enthusiasm of having teeth pulled. My students are used to writing down their opinions with little logical or factual evidence. Further using textual evidence to support their suppositions is alien to them. Going beyond writing three reasons to support a topic sentence is asking a lot. For most of their academic careers my students have been prepared to write basically formulaic persuasive letters for responding to standardized test writing prompts. This formula has been drilled into their heads. Thus they view writing as a terminal exercise, an exercise that will be performed once and then evaluated.

For those for whom writing is meaningful, something that serves an invaluable purpose, the act of writing rarely follows the process to which my students are accustomed. It is a process that makes us organize, articulate, and refine the expression

of our thoughts. We understand our ideas are valuable and therefore take time to in making sure we express them true to our subjective meaning. We discover words are blunt instruments when we try to capture the power, feeling, precision, and complexity of our emotions and ideas. Writing isn't like talking to someone face to face, where we can make facial expressions, raise or lower our voice, inflect our tone, use hand gestures, body language, eye contact. Instead we must make words reflect our normally unspoken communications.

My students are in the habit of jotting down their basic thoughts and leaving the details locked in their heads. They don't feel the need for articulation and elaboration for various reasons. Primarily, they don't feel their voice is valued or important. They are constantly being criticized and evaluated, told what to do, how to think, when to eat, what to wear. They do not have an impactful voice about decisions that are made which affect in their view, crucial aspects of their lives. When they are asked about what they want or voice dissent their ideas are only given token consideration. Essentially they are left with a very real decision: to obey or defy. Most choose to obey. Those who do it reluctantly comply with only the minimal amount of effort required. Most likely they would rather do something else, but the consequences of compliance are more comforting than noncompliance.

Writing becomes a dry exercise as result of such conditioning. Nancy Atwell gives advice on breaking free from teacher authorized and mandated exercises.

“Instead, I questioned, modeled, and insisted. ‘What do you care about? What do you know? What do you know that others don't?’” (p.14). Atwell urges us to create with our students. What this means is that as teachers we must be writers as well. We must model what we teach. We must show, not tell. What I hope to provide are examples of how I as a learner engage in reading through writing. I will model response journals or letters to a friend telling them about an exciting part of a story. I will use the text as evidence to justify my conclusions about various aspects of being human. Most of all I will model the process of working to organize, explain, and clarify my thoughts. The following pages contain examples of my writings I show my students. I also include various frames for writing in order to help students organize their writing.

Samples of writing to be produced by the students in these lessons and helpful guidelines and worksheets for students can be found in the appendix below.

## APPENDIX

**Table 1**

	Entire scene read	Scene read with paraphrases	Only scene summary read
Act I			
Scene 1	*		
Scene 2			•
Scene 3		•	
Scene 4		•	
Scene 5		•	
Act II			
Scene 1	*		
Scene 2		•	
		*	
Scene 3		•	
Scene 4			
Scene 5			•
Act III			
Scene 1	*		
Scene 2			•
Scene 3		•	
Scene 4			•
Scene 5		•	
Act IV			
Scene 1		•	
Scene 2		•	
Scene 3			•
Scene 4			•
Scene 5			•
Act V			
Scene 1		•	
Scene 2			•
Scene 3	*		

## Character Analysis Graphic Organizer

Name of Character \_\_\_\_\_

### Description/Quality

### Textual Evidence

#### Physical

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

#### Psychological

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

#### Social

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Explain how any of the qualities change or stay the same.

**Writing frame used to help students organize ideas and help them get started writing the formal academic paper.**

*Introductory paragraph*

Briefly talk about what you are going to write about.  
Briefly explain why it is important to write about your topic.  
Be sure to include a sentence that clearly states the main idea of the paper.

*2<sup>nd</sup> paragraph*

Give the first evidence to support your topic  
Provide at least two quotations from the text as proof.  
Explain the important context of the quotations.  
Answer the question: How does the reader know what you say is true?

*3<sup>rd</sup> paragraph*

State another reason to support your topic.  
Provide at least two quotations from the text as proof.  
Explain the important context of the quotations.  
Answer the question: How does the reader know what you say is true?

*Concluding paragraph*

Briefly summarize what you have said.  
Emphasize your main reason for writing.  
Bring the paper to a close.

## Example of a concise formal academic paper focusing on character analysis

### *The Alienation of Romeo and Juliet*

**Alienate:** 1 to transfer the ownership of (property) to another 2 to make unfriendly; estrange 3 to cause to be withdrawn or detached, as from one's society 4 to cause a transference of . –*Websters New World College Dictionary*

Alienate is an odd word that is not often used. With “alien” as its root images of extraterrestrials are conjured up in one's mind. It is a word that has disquieting connotations: sadness, anger, loneliness, despair. All of these emotions are present in the play *Romeo and Juliet*. I will briefly examine and explain how two characters, Romeo and Juliet, both feel unwanted, lonely, or forsaken by their parents or other members of society. Further, I hope to show that the emotional pain that comes from alienation is still present with us in contemporary society. While many things in our society have changed since the year the play was written in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, feeling sad about being alone or lonely has not.

At the beginning of the play Romeo is in love with a girl by the name of Rosaline. Unfortunately she does not love him back and his heart is broken. When Romeo's friend, Benvolio comes to talk to him, Romeo is forlorn. Benvolio tells Romeo to forget about Rosaline but Romeo replies: “O teach me how I should forget to think!”(Act I scene 1). Meaning that his thoughts are consumed with Rosaline and Benvolio must show him to not think at all. Romeo has been rejected by Rosaline and he cannot make sense of his emotions so he uses oxymorons to express himself: “O heavy lightness! serious vanity! / Misshapen chaos of well-seeming forms! / Feather of lead, bright smoke, cold fire, sick health!”(Act I scene1). Oxymorons are words that don't make any sense together; it is like combining two opposites. Romeo shows us that being apart or rejected from someone you love can be a painful experience.

Romeo later falls in love again this time with Juliet. For both of them it is love at first sight. Juliet makes Romeo forget he ever even knew Rosaline. It is important to note that Romeo and Juliet are from families who are at war with each other. Juliet's father has arranged that Juliet marry a man by the name of Paris. However, Juliet does not love Paris; she loves Romeo. When she tells this fact to her father she is alienated from her family. Her father tells her if she does not marry Paris, she will be thrown out of the house. He says to her, “But an you not wed, I'll pardon you. / Graze where you will, you shall not house with me.” (Act III scene 5). In keeping with *Webster's* definition of alienation as the transfer of ownership of property, Juliet's father, in his anger, calls her just that – property: “Hang thee, young baggage! Disobedient wretch!” (Act III scene 5). Even Juliet's mother is of no help she tells Juliet, “Talk not to me, for I'll not speak a word. Do as thou wilt, for I have done with thee (Act III scene 5). Now



like Romeo, Juliet feels the pain of alienation. Right after this argument Juliet goes off to see the town priest, Friar Laurence, where she tells him that she will kill herself if she cannot be with Romeo.

Both characters are emotionally upset. Juliet so much so, that she is ready to kill herself. Today, suicide rates are highest among teenagers. The new drug Prozac has made chemical companies very wealthy, as many doctors now prescribe it regularly to patients to treat depression. I don't know how teenagers felt hundreds of years ago when the play was written, but I can say that all teenagers at one time in their life do think about ending their lives or at the very least what it would be like if they were dead. Obviously some take the notion more seriously than others. Alienation seems to be a root cause of such morbid thoughts. When we do not feel we belong to a group or accepted by others, we feel the urge to die.

**Sample letter to a friend telling them about the play. The only requirement is that students include at least two quotations with contextual explanation.**

September 24, 2000

Dear Monica,

I am teaching my students the play *Romeo and Juliet*. For me, it is one of my favorite plays, however, I sometimes I think my students have different ideas. It is a very romantic play that shows us what love at first sight is like. Upon seeing Juliet for the first time, Romeo says to himself, “Did my heart love till now? Forswear it, sight! / For I never saw true beauty until tonight” (Act I scene 5). Sometimes the language Shakespeare uses can be hard to understand. All his plays were written over three hundred years ago and people spoke a little differently back then.

I really like it when he rhymes the lines that different characters speak. In addition to rhyming them he often includes puns. Puns are when we use a word that has many different meanings. The lines spoken between Mercutio and Romeo before entering a huge party are an example. Mercutio and Romeo are friends and they like to tease each other a lot. In this conversation Romeo does not want to go to the party because he has had a bad dream about it. Mercutio basically tells him that dreams are not true, they are like lies. When you read the following lines notice the pun on the word “lie.”

**Romeo:** And we mean well in going to this masque; But 'tis no wit to go

**Mercutio:** Why, may one ask?

**Romeo:** I dreamt a dream tonight.

**Mercutio:** And so did I.

**Romeo:** Well what was yours?

**Mercutio:** That dreamers often lie.

**Romeo:** In bed asleep, while they do dream things true.

**Mercutio:** O, then I see Queen Mab hath been with you.

Pretty cool huh? Well, the play is full of stuff like this. It is hard to understand sometimes and that is what bothers me with my students. After a while they don't want to be patient and stay focused on a few lines to really understand what they mean. The result is that they say it is boring. But when we have finished the play all the students say they were glad that we read it and they will say things like, “That was pretty tight Mister.”

I know you have read the play. I would be interested in hearing what you think of it and any suggestions you have to make my class less boring. Take care!

Love always,  
Mike

## Sample response journal entries

9/21/00

**Romeo:** . . . Famine is in thy cheeks,  
Need and oppression starveth in thine eyes,  
Contempt and beggary hangs upon thy back:  
The world is not thy friend, nor the world's law;  
The world affords no law to make thee rich;  
Then be not poor, but break it and take this.

Romeo is saying this to a drugstore owner in Mantua. At this point in the story, Romeo has been banished from Verona for killing Tybalt. He has heard that Juliet has died and now his plan is to go back to Verona to see for himself if it is true. If indeed Juliet is dead, he plans to kill himself by drinking the poison he just bought from the drugstore owner. However the apothecary does not want to sell Romeo the drugs because it is illegal. Romeo is telling him that, he (the apothecary) is poor and he should take the money because he needs it. He goes on to tell him that the laws of the society are made to keep him poor and therefore he should not feel bad breaking them.

This quote makes me think about in our modern day society about class differences. It seems many politicians argue about changing the tax laws in order to benefit different groups of people. When Ronald Reagan was president he came up with this idea that if we give the people with lots of money more advantages and not tax them as much their wealth will spread to people without much money. For the lower and middle classes this was a disaster because they saw their taxes increase and the wealthy didn't infuse their money into the general population, they kept it to themselves.

## WORKS CITED

- Atwell, Nancy. *In the Middle*. 2nd Ed. Boynton: Cook Publishing, 1998
- Monroe, William. *Power to Hurt: The Virtues of Alienation*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998.
- Paley, Vivian. *You Can't Say You Can't Play*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992.
- Shakespeare, William. "Romeo and Juliet." *The Language of Literature*. Boston: McDougal Littell. 2000.

## ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Leonard, Peter; McLaren, Peter (Eds). *Paulo Freire: A Critical Encounter*. London: Routledge, 1993.  
A series of essays by international scholars and educators describing their experiences in applying and extending Freire's concept of critical consciousness to their own experiences and classrooms.
- Schor, Ira. *When Students Have Power*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996  
A description of the authors experiments in critical pedagogy at City College in New York while teaching a class called *Utopia*.
- Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Continuum, 1993  
A revolutionary Brazillian educator criticizes the state educational system as a means to keep the society divided between rich and poor. The author explains the notion of critical consciousness.
- Paley, Vivian. *You Can't Say You Can't Play*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992.  
Urban Chicago Kindergarten teacher institutes a new rule into her classroom and it provides an exploration into the social relations of children.
- Wolk, Steven. *A Democratic Classroom*. Heineman: New Hampshire, 1998  
A classroom room teacher's experiences with creating a community in the classroom. The author reveals his techniques for involving students in decision making, constructing learning experiences that students are keenly interested, and basically practicing democracy in the classroom.