



# Reading Performance as Text: *Romeo and Juliet*

## Overview

Students will...

1. "Close read" representations of Mercutio in three different productions of *Romeo and Juliet*.
2. Note how actors/directors characterize Mercutio through a series of intentional artistic choices.
3. Make their own artistic choices as they interpret a passage from *Romeo and Juliet*.

## CCSS Alignment

In this activity, students will...

- Close read three productions of *Romeo and Juliet* and compare the artistic choices in each production.
  - CCSS R.7: "Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse formats and media, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words."
  - CCSS R.9: "Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take."
- Describe how specific details contribute to Mercutio's characterization and use a range of vocabulary to articulate subtle differences between performances.
  - CCSS R.6: "Acquire and use accurately a range of general and domain-specific words and phrases sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level."
- Collaborate with peers to interpret *Romeo and Juliet* and craft a scene informed by intentional artistic choices.
  - CCSS SL.1: "Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners."



## Chicago Shakespeare Theater | [Romeo and Juliet Playlist](#)

- *Romeo and Juliet*, directed by Barbara Gaines (2019): [▶ watch video](#)
- *Romeo and Juliet*, directed by Gale Edwards (2010): [▶ watch video](#)
- *Romeo and Juliet*, adapted and directed by Marti Lyons (2017): [▶ watch video](#)

### Activity Part 1: Reading Mercutio

1. Ask students to brainstorm how actors and directors help characters “come to life” on stage. You might frame the discussion as a matter of authorial choices: “Actors and directors (like authors) make artistic choices that impact their audience.”
2. Distribute the “Characterizing Mercutio” packet. Review the characterization tools listed on the first page.
3. Explain that students will take notes on their packet while watching clips from 3 different versions of *Romeo and Juliet*.
  - Tip: If you have time, watch each clip twice. The first time, watch the entire clip without pausing or taking notes. The second time, pause, rewind, and re-watch to allow for discussion and note-taking.
  - Encourage students to work together! Depending on the needs of your learners, you might invite students to fill in just a portion of the boxes for each video clip instead of the entire table.



## Discussion Questions

Here are some questions to raise as your students are watching clips from *Romeo and Juliet*:

- How did Mercutio's character in each of these productions compare to the Mercutio you imagined as you were reading? What surprised you?
- Which version of Mercutio did you find the most interesting? Why? Which moments stood out to you?
- Mercutio's "Queen Mab" monologue is long and complex. In these productions, what strategies did the actors and directors use to make this speech interesting for the audience?
- The name that Shakespeare gives Mercutio suggests his "mercurial" nature—subject to sudden changes in mind or mood. What choices did the actors and directors make in these productions to help the audience understand Mercutio's quick shifts?
- How would you describe Mercutio? Does your answer change at all depending on which production you're watching?

## Activity Part 2: Performing Mercutio

1. Divide students into groups of 3-4.
2. Review the "Performing Mercutio" instructions in the packet.
  - This activity can be scaled up or down for different learners. Some learners can practice their organizational skills by allocating their time between the 5 steps. Other learners may benefit from a provided organizational structure as they navigate between the steps. For instance, you might set a timer that gives students 5 minutes to choose their scene in Step 1 before they move on to cutting their scene in Step 2.
  - This activity can be adapted for different time frames. It can serve as the culminating project for a unit and span several class periods as students evaluate, cut, cast, and rehearse their scenes. It can also fit within a single class period if you give a pre-cut, 1-minute section to all groups.



3. Before watching their classmates' performances, review your expectations for the audience. You may wish to engage the class in a post-show Q&A—like the ones that sometimes follow live professional theater performances, including at Chicago Shakespeare—where the audience comments on and raises questions about the artistic choices that they noticed in their peers' performances.

## For Consideration

Here are some questions to consider (on your own or collaboratively with your students) as you're planning for students' performances:

- **Cutting.** How long should each scene be? How might students decide what to cut and what to keep? (For more information, please check out our helpful guide to cutting Shakespeare!)
- **Scripts.** Should students have their lines memorized? Can they carry their scripts? Can they read from cue cards?
- **Casting.** Does every student in the group need to perform, or are there other ways that they might contribute? In what capacity? How might students divide or share long speeches between group members?
- **Staging.** What will the "stage" look like in your classroom? A corner at the front? A space in the middle of a circle of desks?
- **Costumes/props.** Can students use items in the classroom? Can they bring items from home?



## Citing Theatrical Productions

*Romeo and Juliet*. By William Shakespeare, directed by Barbara Gaines, Chicago Shakespeare Theater, 2019, Chicago. Act 1, scene 4. 16:06–19:15; Act 2, scene 1. 28:46–31:11.

*Romeo and Juliet*. By William Shakespeare, directed by Gale Edwards, Chicago Shakespeare Theater, 2010, Chicago. Act 1, scene 4. 19:00–21:04, 21:33–23:14; Act 2, scene 4. 47:20–48:23.

*Romeo and Juliet*. By William Shakespeare, adapted and directed by Marti Lyons, Chicago Shakespeare Theater, 2017, Chicago. Act 1, scene 4. 23:24–25:53.



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