



NAME: _____

Reading Performance as Text: *Romeo and Juliet*

Characterization on Stage

Think about how you get to know a character when you are reading a play. You might take note of what a character says or thinks. You might consider what other characters say or think about them. You might pay attention to a description of what the character looks like.

When putting on a performance, actors and directors have a whole other set of tools that help a character come to life on stage. We've listed these characterization tools below.

- **Backstory.** What motivates the character? If we were to imagine the character's life before the play, who were they?
 - Backstory = an actor's or director's idea of a character's personal journey before the play starts; the imagined story that informs how an actor performs a particular character.
- **Casting.** Which actor should play this character? How will the actor's identity influence the audience's understanding of the character?
- **Costumes.** How is the character dressed? Does their style of dress change throughout the performance?
- **Props.** What is a character holding? What items do they interact with on stage?
- **Cutting.** Which of a character's lines will the actor say during the performance? Which of the lines will be left out of the performance?
 - Cutting = the process of removing lines from a script.
- **Movement.** How does the character move on stage? How do they walk? What unusual movements or actions do they perform?



- **Blocking.** Where does the character stand in relation to other characters? How much space is between the character and others?
 - Blocking = the set of instructions that determine where actors are positioned on stage during the scene.
- **Gestures.** How does the character move their hands? How do they use gestures to express the meaning of their lines?
- **Voice and emphasis.** How does the character sound? How do they change the sound of their voice throughout the performance? Which words or lines get special emphasis?
- **Other characters' reactions.** How do other characters on stage react to this character with their faces and bodies?
- **Character's connection to audience.** What is the character's relationship to the audience? How close is the character to the audience? When and how does the character interact with the audience?

By making intentional artistic choices, actors and directors influence our understanding of who a character is.

Characterizing Mercutio

Mercutio is a character who might not jump off the page when you're reading *Romeo and Juliet*. His most famous speech—his description of Queen Mab in Act 1, scene 4—is long and complex. It's hard to know exactly how this speech ties into the rest of the play.

You're about to watch scenes from three different productions of *Romeo and Juliet*. As you're watching, notice how Mercutio comes to life on stage. All the different aspects of Mercutio's performance—his voice, his costume, his movements—help us get to know his character.

Pay attention to the specific tools that the actors and directors from Chicago Shakespeare use to characterize Mercutio. Use this graphic organizer to note your observations as you watch.

(We've shared the first one as an example.)



Video 1: *Romeo and Juliet* (directed by Barbara Gaines, 2019)

Characterization Tool...	Your Notes... How does this tool help you understand Mercutio's character?
Backstory	<i>Seems to be a war veteran. Camouflage shorts and dog tag. Maybe he has PTSD?</i>
Casting	
Costumes	
Props	
Cutting	
Movement	
Blocking	
Gestures	
Voice and emphasis	
Other characters' reactions	
Character's connection to audience	



Video 2: *Romeo and Juliet* (directed by Gale Edwards, 2010)

Characterization Tool...	Your Notes... How does this tool help you understand Mercutio's character?
Backstory	
Casting	
Costumes	
Props	
Cutting	
Movement	
Blocking	
Gestures	
Voice and emphasis	
Other characters' reactions	
Character's connection to audience	



Video 3: *Romeo and Juliet* (directed by Marti Lyons, 2017)

Characterization Tool...	Your Notes... How does this tool help you understand Mercutio's character?
Backstory	
Casting	
Costumes	
Props	
Cutting	
Movement	
Blocking	
Gestures	
Voice and emphasis	
Other characters' reactions	
Character's connection to audience	



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