

Lesson 3

Before the Party

Objectives

- To understand characters and events in scenes 3 and 4
- To focus on the roles of three supporting characters: Paris, the nurse, and Mercutio
- To consider imagery in the Queen Mab speech

Notes to the Teacher

In scene 3, we meet Juliet, who hears of Paris's proposal and seems willing to comply with her parents' wishes. We also meet Lady Capulet and the earthy, loquacious nurse. Scene 4 presents Romeo and friends on the way to the Capulet party. A verbal highlight is Mercutio's lengthy Queen Mab speech. Because of the length of some of the passages in the two scenes, you may want to supplement oral reading with listening to a recording or with silent individual reading.

Shakespeare presents three supporting characters who are important catalysts in the tragic action of *Romeo and Juliet*. Minor characters often provide parallels to the chief characters in plays. Paris, Romeo's rival for the affection of Juliet, is portrayed as a young, handsome, well-to-do gentleman, related to the prince and, generally speaking, an excellent match. Later in the play, the Capulets, unaware of Juliet's marriage to Romeo, force Juliet to choose either to marry Paris or to go begging in the streets. Thus, Paris becomes the catalyst to Juliet's risky plan to drink the Friar's potion.

Mercutio's role also provides a parallel and a foil for Romeo. While Romeo is an idealist, a melancholy lover who seeks isolation and pines for his unattainable beloved, Mercutio is witty, earthy, highly sociable, and definitely practical. His role as catalyst comes at the beginning of act 3, when he dies in the fight with Tybalt. Romeo, angry and guilt-ridden, feels forced to avenge his friend's death; the result is banishment and the ensuing tragedy.

The nurse, like Mercutio, is garrulous, bawdy, practical, and realistic. Juliet, closer to the nurse than to her own mother, has often turned to her for advice. However, in Juliet's moment of greatest need and support, the nurse will advise something so repulsive that Juliet can only say, "O most wicked fiend." The nurse's proposal is thus the catalyst for Juliet's acceptance of the friar's last resort.

Dreams play a significant role in this play. When Romeo questions the wisdom of entering the Capulet house, he says, "I dreamt a dream tonight." We never hear what his dream was because Mercutio proceeds to tell

his story of Queen Mab; however, Romeo's words after the Queen Mab speech ("my mind misgives / Some consequence yet hanging in the stars") provide tragic foreshadowing.

In this lesson, students read scenes 3 and 4. They then analyze the introduction of Juliet, focus on the initial presentations of the three minor characters, and examine the imagery in the Queen Mab speech. You will find it useful to display one or more sketches or paintings of Queen Mab; many by both professional and amateur artists are available on the Internet. If students seem frustrated by the length of the speech, you may want to make very short work of it by providing a simple summary.

Procedure

1. Have students read the roles of Lady Capulet, the nurse, and Juliet in act 1, scene 3. Then ask students to complete **Handout 7**.
2. Have students pool responses to the handout. (Juliet is almost fourteen; she seems docile and childlike. Her manner with her mother is somewhat formal; with the nurse, she is more comfortable.) Explain that in this culture upper-class children were often raised by nurses and only met with their parents on formal occasions. Juliet expresses no displeasure about having a husband chosen for her. She allows her mother and the nurse to dominate the scene. Is this the real Juliet, or is it a façade she presents to her parents?
3. Ask students where Juliet is going at the end of the scene (to her father's dinner party).
4. Have students read act 1, scene 4. Roles include Romeo, Benvolio, and Mercutio. Point out the contrast between Mercutio's joking and teasing and Romeo's gloominess. Emphasize that Romeo starts to tell Mercutio about a dream, but Mercutio interrupts and goes on at length about his own dream. Why? (Perhaps Mercutio senses that Romeo's dream is probably serious, even depressing; Mercutio wants to keep things cheerful.)
5. Point out that Romeo and Juliet, the two main characters, have not yet met each other. Shakespeare has introduced three significant supporting characters: Paris, the nurse, and Mercutio. Distribute **Handout 8**, and have students complete the exercise.

Suggested Responses

Paris

1. *Relationships*—related to prince
2. *Social status*—well-to-do gentleman
3. *Personality*—respectful, polite
4. *Goal*—to marry Juliet

Mercutio

1. *Relationships*—friend of Romeo

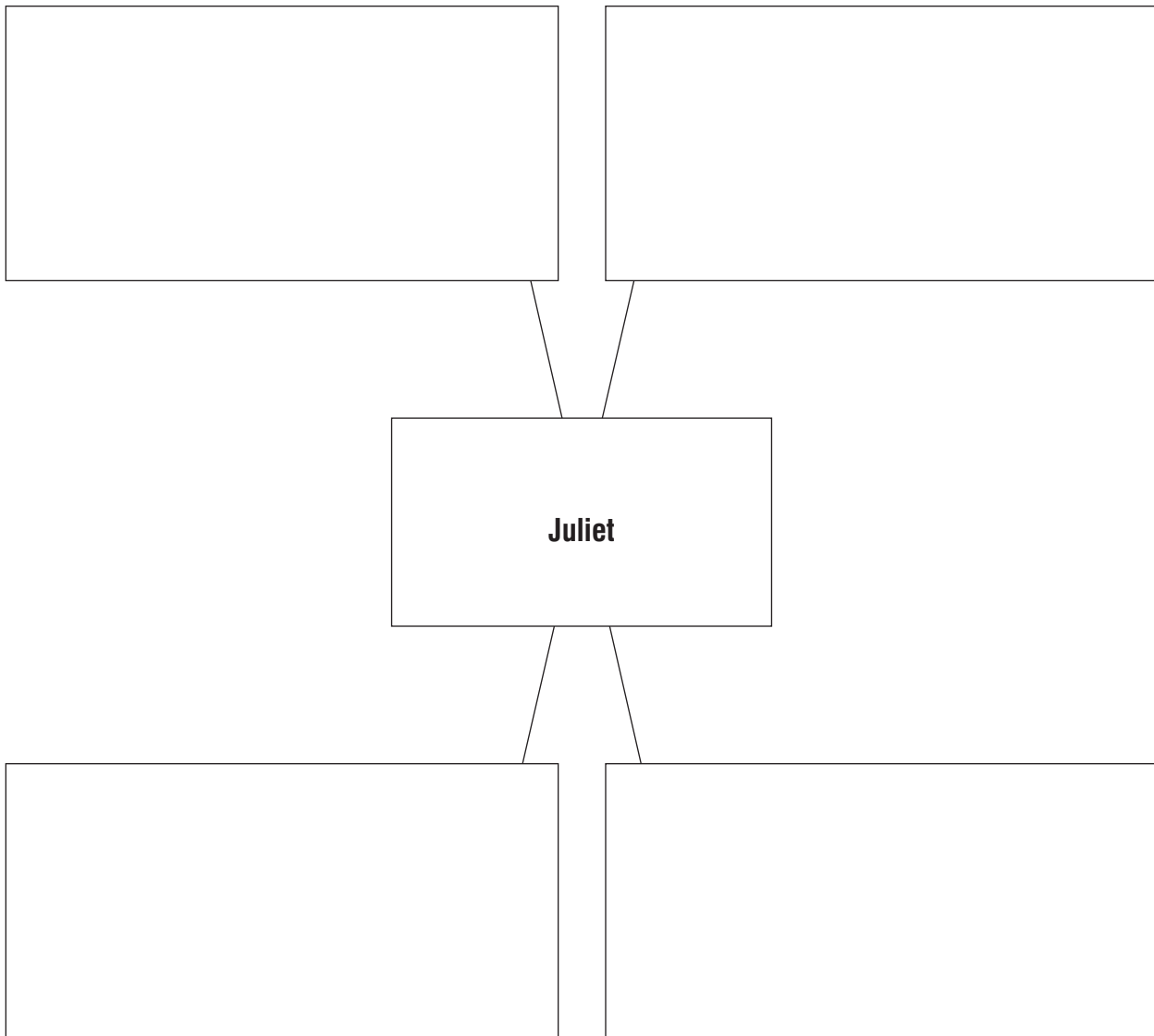
2. *Social status*—related to the prince
3. *Personality*—witty, earthy, sociable, practical
4. *Goals*—fun with friends

Nurse

1. *Relationships*—like a mother to Juliet
 2. *Social status*—employee to upper-class Capulet family
 3. *Personality*—bawdy, practical, realistic
 4. *Goals*—domestic harmony, Juliet’s happiness
6. Refer to Mercutio’s long dream speech. If possible, show students sketches or drawings of Queen Mab. Ask students to summarize Mercutio’s description of Queen Mab. (She is a tiny fairy queen who is very busy at night, as she travels above sleeping people and sends them dreams.) Emphasize that Mercutio’s dream is a huge flight of fancy.
 7. Point out that it sometimes helps to summarize a play by giving each scene a headline or title. Ask students to create catchy titles for the first four scenes. If necessary, share the following examples:
 - Scene 1: Street Fighting in Verona; Romeo Rejected, Dejected
 - Scene 2: Sleek Paris Seeks Juliet
 - Scene 3: Juliet Ponders Paris
 - Scene 4: Mercutio and Queen MabEncourage students to think of similar phrases for additional scenes as they read on in the play.

A First Look at Juliet

Directions: In act 1, scene 3, Shakespeare first presents Juliet Capulet. Use the graphic to show what you learn about her. Include specific lines and incidents to support your ideas.



Three Minor Characters

Directions: You have been introduced to three comparatively minor characters who play significant roles in the disaster that befalls Romeo and Juliet by the end of the play. Use the graphic organizer to record observations.

Topic	Paris	Mercutio	Nurse
1. Relationships			
2. Social status			
3. Personality			
4. Goals			