

AQA English Literature GCSE

Romeo and Juliet

Glossary of Key Terms



Shakespeare - Glossary of Key Terms

Techniques - Language

Allegory - A story, character, place, or event is used to convey a hidden meaning, typically moral or political, about real-world events or issues (e.g. Duncan's death is an allegory for the risks of killing your king).

Allusion - An indirect reference to another event, person or work which the writer assumes the reader is familiar with.

Archetype - The first real example or prototype of something; an ideal model or the perfect image of something.

Bathos - An anti-climax which is abrupt; usually humour that comes from an odd and sudden change in tone.

Biblical - Language that relates to the bible and thus has religious connotations.

Blazon - A poem in which the speaker describes a woman's physique by focusing on and listing various individual parts of a woman's body.

Caricature - An imitation where particular notable characteristics are exaggerated to a comic or grotesque effect.

Colloquialism - An informal word or phrase used in normal or familiar conversation.

Comic relief - Relief from tension caused by the introduction of a comedic element.

Connotation - An impression, idea, or feeling associated with a word or phrase beyond its literal meaning.

Dichotomy - A division or contrast between two opposed things.

Double entendre - Words or phrases that have a double meaning and is deliberately ambiguous, especially when one of the meanings is risqué. (For example: In Elizabethan England, the use of the word "die" referred to both death and orgasm).

Dysphemism - The substitution of a more offensive term for one considered less so.

Epithet - A word or phrase applied to a person to describe an actual or credited quality. (For example: "star crossed lovers" = Romeo and Juliet).

Epitome - A perfect example of a specific quality.

Epizeuxis - The repetition of words in succession within the same sentence.

Euphemism - The substitution of a harmless term for one that is considered as offensively risqué or explicit.



Extended metaphor - A metaphor that continues over many sentences and could even extend throughout the entire play.

Foreshadowing - A device in which an author suggests certain plot developments that might come later in the play.

Grotesque - Ugly and distorted, physically or figuratively, in a way that is comic or repulsive.

Hyperbole - An extravagant exaggeration of fact, used either for serious or comic effect.

Ideology - A system of beliefs and ideals, typically forming a framework for a political policy or a religion.

Imagery - Use of language which is visually descriptive or symbolic.

Irony - The use of words where the meaning is contrary to what is expected to actually occur.

Juxtaposition - A literary technique that places two opposing words, phrases or events side by side, often for the main purpose of comparing or contrasting them. (For example - "Here is much to do with hate, but more to do with love.").

Manifestation - A physical expression or realisation of an abstract idea through a character, object, place, or event.

Motif - An element that reoccurs, such as a word, phrase, idea, image, action, character or symbol that appears throughout the play for emphasis.

Oxymoron - A form of paradox that combines a pair of contrasting terms into a single, sometimes unique expression. (For example - When Juliet says "O happy dagger").

Parable - A story used to teach a moral or spiritual lesson, typically told in the Bible by Jesus.

Pathetic Fallacy - When human emotions or characteristics are given to objects, nature or the weather.

Personification - Giving something non-human a human trait, capability, or personality.

Pun - A play on words which suggests multiple meanings.

Satire - The use of humour, irony or exaggeration to ridicule and criticize an individual's stupidity.

Semantic Field - When a writer employs multiple words which are similar and thus group together under one sub-heading.

Sibilance - The repetition of 's' sounds close together.

Simile - Comparing something to something else in a nonliteral way, in order to convey a particular idea or quality of the original thing.



Symbolism - Using one object or character to expose a broader idea running throughout the play.

Trope - A particular type of character, event, or setting that is used frequently in stories (e.g. 'The Damsel In Distress' is a trope).

Zoomorphism - Imagery representing animal forms.

Techniques - Structure

Anaphora - Repeating a sequence of words at the beginning of adjacent clauses.

Antithesis - Parallel structure that uses opposites to create emphasis. (For example: "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times").

Aside - A part of an actor's lines that are not meant to be heard by other characters on stage and intended only for the audience; a short digression.

Blank verse - Unrhymed poetry written in iambic pentameter.

Couplet - A rhymed pair of lines.

Cyclical - When the same sequence of events repeats throughout a story.

Dramatic Irony - When a character shows that they are oblivious of the reality of which the audience is aware. (In Romeo and Juliet the audience can infer that Romeo and Juliet's romance is doomed from the start as Shakespeare mentions in the prologue that "a pair of star-crossed lovers take their life", thus the audience are aware from the beginning that the pair will commit suicide. Yet, throughout the play, Romeo and Juliet are unaware that they are going to commit suicide until the last act).

Dramatic monologue - A passage of speech in which one person is speaking to an audience or "thinking out loud".

Epistrophe - When the same word (or group of words) is employed at the end of successive sentences with the aim of emphasising it.

Exposition - Information provided through stage directions, narration, dialogue, or description, used to introduce the audience to crucial background information.

Heroic couplet - The last two lines of a Shakespearean Sonnet - a couplet of rhyming iambic pentameter.

Iambic pentameter - A sentence (10 syllables in total) which is composed of two syllables: the first unstressed; the second stressed.

In Media Res - Starting in the middle of the action.



Microcosm - Using a place, group of people, or event in the small-scale to represent something much larger (e.g. the battle at the start of Macbeth is a microcosm for the whole play).

Paradox - A statement that seems to contradict itself but is still true.

Parallelism - Using components that are similar in grammar, structure, or meaning within a sentence or multiple sentences, or throughout the text as a whole (e.g. "He came, he saw, he conquered").

Refrain - A word, phrase, or sentence that is repeated throughout a text.

Soliloquy - A dramatic device whereby a character stands alone on stage and addresses the audience, giving voice to their deepest thoughts and feelings.

Sonnet form - A highly stylized form of poetry, with 14 lines written in iambic pentameter. (For example - Romeo and Juliet's first real encounter in the balcony scene).

Stichomythia - A dialogue between two characters who speak one after the other. *For example:*

ROMEO: _____

JULIET: _____

ROMEO: _____

JULIET: _____

Describing character development/change

Anagnorisis - A moment in a play when a character makes a critical discovery, such as the tragic hero's sudden awareness of a real situation usually as a result of their downfall.

Antagonist - A character who actively opposes or is hostile to another character, particularly the protagonist.

Catharsis - The process of letting go of or providing liberation from, strong or suppressed emotions.

Conscience - A moral sense of right and wrong that guides a character's behaviour.

Foil - A character with qualities that are in contrast with another character. (For example, Rosaline and Juliet, or Macbeth and Banquo).

Hamartia - A character's tragic flaw.

Hubris - An exaggerated self-pride or self-confidence which often leads to a fatal retaliation.



Peripeteia - A sudden turn of events or an unexpected reversal.

Protagonist - The leading character in the play.

Tragic hero - A character who is usually depicted as perfect and honourable yet has one 'fatal flaw' or hamartia.

Context & Concepts

Autonomy - The right and ability to be able to govern yourself, including your actions and decisions.

Convention - The traditional way of doing things.

Courtly love - An idealised form of love written about in medieval literature, where a knight devotes himself to a noblewoman. However, this type of love is polite and not expected to be passionate.

Dehumanise - Denying someone their humanity, including their emotions and independent thought.

Divine Order/Great Chain of Being - The belief in Medieval Christianity that all life and matter on Earth was organised into a hierarchy by God.

Facade - A front or mask that is put up to disguise something or someone's true character.

Fate - The development of events outside an individuals' control, it is sometimes said to be determined by a supernatural power.

Globe Theatre - A theatre in London associated with William Shakespeare where all of Shakespeare's plays were performed. It was built in 1599 by Shakespeare's playing company and has been rebuilt and reconstructed since.

Heathen - Someone who isn't a Christian, particularly someone who is pagan or lacks moral principles.

Infallible - Never failing, incapable of making mistakes.

Melodrama - A dramatic piece that includes exaggerated characters and exciting events.

Misogyny - Hatred, contempt, or prejudice towards women for no reason other than their gender.

Morality - Principles, either personal or social, concerning the difference between right and wrong, going beyond legality and often religion.

Mythology - A collection of stories, especially belonging to a particular religion or culture such as the Ancient Greeks, that teach moral lessons or explain aspects of our world.



Nihilism - Believing life is pointless and meaningless.

Patriarchy - A system of society whereby men have ultimate authority which they use to oppress women who are largely excluded from the male dominated society.

Prejudice - Having a negative view or opinion of someone that is not based on experience or logic.

Remorse - The feeling of intense regret and guilt for doing a bad deed.

Repent - To feel or/and express great regret for sinning or committing a crime, particularly in a religious context.

Stereotype - A view or preconception of a person or thing that is fixed and oversimplified, held by most of a population.

The Renaissance - A period of time from the 14th to 17th century where artists, writers, and philosophers revisited the works of the Ancient Greeks and Romans.

Toxic Masculinity - The concept that traditional male gender roles restrict emotion in men while encouraging negative, often violent traits.

Tragedy - A branch of drama that usually depicts the downfall and the reversal of fortune of a good person; suffering usually awaits many of the characters, especially the tragic hero.

Vice - A behaviour or trait that is immoral.

Virtue - A behaviour or trait that is moral.

