

Lesson Plan - Shakespeare's rhythms

Blank verse: Exploring Shakespearean Rhythm and Rap

- Shakespeare often wrote in 'blank verse' which is sometimes called iambic pentameter. The concept is very simple. It means that each line should have ten beats. Technically, it becomes important which beat is stressed and which is unstressed – but for KS2 children it will be fun to simply explore ten beat lines. It's very easy to write ten beat lines because it mirrors the way that we talk to each other on a day to day basis. E.g.

I'd like to have another cup of tea

I wonder if my friends will play football

What time is it? I hope it's dinner time!

- All the above examples have ten syllables per line. See if children can make up their own ten beat lines. It helps to teach children that the rhythm is like a heartbeat

De- DUM, De –DUM, De- DUM, De- DUM, De-DUM

- It is also possible to canter around the room to the rhythm as it is rather like the clip-clop of a horse's footfall.
- Try it with a few Shakespeare lines
 - *If music be the food of love, play on*
 - *A horse, a horse, my kingdom for a horse*
 - *Once more unto the breach dear friends, once more*

- All the above lines are perfectly iambic and children can beat them on their chests like a heartbeat or canter around the room to them
- The prologue of *Romeo and Juliet* is written in iambic pentameter
- Hand out the **Prologue resource sheet (part 2): Prologue strips**. (Note – you will need to cut these up and divide them amongst the class before you begin. You will also need to print off enough copies so that every child has a strip)
- Ask each pupil to stand in a space with their line
- Count the syllables. Are there 10?
- Try to say your line under your breath, muttering it with the rhythm De- DUM, De –DUM, De- DUM, De- DUM, De-DUM
- Now try to gallop it around the room
- Now, on a given signal, partner with someone else in the room and read your line in your best De- DUM, De –DUM, De-DUM, De- DUM, De-DUM rhythm
- Agree with your partner whether the line is iambic
- Swap lines and canter around the room again
- On a given signal, partner up and repeat
- Note – this is beyond the scope of the scheme, but some pupils may notice that some of the lines are not strictly iambic. They fit a ten-syllable pattern, but the stress is sometimes reversed to DE – Dum rather than De – DUM. There is no need to dig deeper, but if some pupils notice this you might want to direct them to do further research on the rhythm patterns in Shakespeare’s work as an extension activity

Teaching and Learning Activity 2 – Iambic descriptions of Verona life

- Now that pupils have a sense of how iambic pentameter lines, they can now write their own iambic pentameter poetry based on the life of *Romeo and Juliet’s* Verona
- An excellent book for this is *Where’s Will: Find Shakespeare Hidden in His Plays* by Tilly and Anna Claybourne. Copyright © 2015 Quarto Publishing PLC. This is a ‘Where’s Wally’ style book focussing on several Shakespeare plays. The double page illustrations are full of incredible detail.
- A *Romeo and Juliet* illustration is included in the resource pack by kind permission of the authors and publisher.

- The detail produces some lovely writing and is well suited to creating collaborative iambic pentameter poems.
- The full book, which is an excellent and fun classroom guide to the characters and stories of several Shakespeare plays, can be purchased [here](#)

ROMEO & JULIET

Setting: Verona, Italy

Romeo and Juliet is one of the most famous love stories ever written. It's about a boy and girl who fall in love but whose families are bitter enemies. Romeo and Juliet are so in love that they ignore their families' bitter quarrels and marry in secret. It seems like the play should have a happy ending but, sadly, it doesn't. Instead, it ends with one of Shakespeare's most heartbreaking death scenes.

FIND THESE CHARACTERS OVER THE PAGE

Romeo follows Juliet and kisses her, but her nurse separates them. After the party, Romeo climbs into the Capulets' garden and sees Juliet on her balcony. Although their families are enemies, the two of them declare their love for each other and agree to marry the following day.

With the help of Juliet's nurse and the monk Friar Laurence, Romeo and Juliet secretly marry. But later that day in the town square, Tybalt confronts Romeo and his friends for meddling into the party. A fight breaks out; Tybalt kills Mercutio, and Romeo kills Tybalt. As Romeo was promised, he is now sentenced to death, but told he has to leave Verona forever.

In the city of Verona, two wealthy families, the Montagues and the Capulets, have been arguing for years. A fight breaks out between servants from the two houses, and other members of the families get involved, too. Prince Escalus, the ruler of Verona, orders that any further fighting will be punishable by death.

Romeo Montague's parents tell Benvolio, their nephew, that Romeo seems unhappy. Romeo confides to Benvolio that he loves a girl named Rosaline. Hearing that she will be at a party at the Capulets' house that night, they decide to sneak in, wearing masks as a disguise.

Friar Laurence and the nurse arrange for Romeo to spend one night with Juliet before leaving for nearby Mantua. However, Old Capulet arranges for Juliet to marry Count Paris. Juliet is horrified and begs the Friar for help. He gives her a potion that will make her seem dead for 49 hours, so the wedding will be called off and she can escape to Mantua.

Juliet takes the potion while Friar Laurence sends a message to Romeo to explain the plan. But the message goes missing, and instead Romeo learns news that Juliet has died. He buys poison and returns to Verona. In the Capulet vault, he finds Count Paris waiting Juliet's body. He kills Paris in a fight, then takes the poison and dies. When Juliet wakes up and sees what has happened, she kills herself with Romeo's dagger.

At the Capulets' house, Juliet Capulet's mother tells her that Count Paris, who hopes to marry her, will be coming to the party. Juliet is shocked, as she is only 12 years old.

As the party begins, Romeo, Benvolio and their friend Mercutio sneak in. Juliet's cousin Tybalt Capulet recognizes them but Juliet's father, Old Capulet, stops him from killing his Montague enemy. Meanwhile, Romeo sees Juliet dancing with Count Paris and mistakenly kills him over her in love with her.

The *Romeo and Juliet* plot and character summary page from *Where's Will? Find Shakespeare Hidden In His Plays* by Tilly and Anna Claybourne Copyright © 2015 Quarto Publishing PLC

The full book can be purchased [here](#)

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The *Romeo and Juliet* illustration page from *Where's Will? Find Shakespeare Hidden In His Plays* by Tilly and Anna Claybourne Copyright © 2015 Quarto Publishing PLC. A high-resolution version is included in the Resource pack

The full book can be purchased [here](#)

Pupils might generate iambic pentameter lines such as

A gondolier rowing down the stream

An angry merchant pointing at a thief

A body lying slain amongst the skulls

- These lines have iambic rhythms (10 syllables) and the detail all appears in the illustration if you look carefully!
- There is so much detail in the illustration that the iambic possibilities are almost endless
- Pupils could create poems individually or collaboratively, for a class display alongside the original resource illustration