FURTHER EXPLORATIONS:
A SUPPLEMENTAL GUIDE TO THE PLAY
CONTAINING A FULLER DISCUSSION OF THE PLAY AND THE ISSUES

In Romeo and Juliet, Shakespeare fashioned a great tragedy from everyday events and accidents. Two young lovers, misunderstood by their warring families, meet, fall in love and eventually die by a series of apparent coincidences and mistimed encounters. When examined closely, however, the train of misfortunes which culminate in the lovers' suicides can be traced directly to a tragic flaw in Verona's society--an ugly habit of hair-trigger brutality, clannish secrecy, flare-ups of feuds and violence. In these circumstances, the adolescents' search for love and an adult identity is almost certainly doomed.

Secrecy and stifled emotional expression are the play's central themes. Romeo and Juliet links the deeply purging function of tragedy to an atmosphere of misunderstanding about teenage passions and teenage suicide. Aristotle's famous definition of tragic catharsis--an emotional release aroused in the playgoer by the spectacle of pitiable and terrifying events--has a particularly strong bearing on the outcome of this tragedy, adolescent suicide. If catharsis is, in some sense, a tool for getting out dark feelings of identification with tragic heroes, discussion of our own cathartic feelings about Romeo and Juliet may enable us to understand the private disaster of teenage suicide. These materials are "Further Explanations"--a supplemental guide containing more detailed applications of issues outlined in the modules. We hope that the open, communicative forum of Shakespearean theater will provide an enriching and "safe" way to release feelings and curiosity about

suicide.

Adolescence is a time for discovering and creating one's own identity, separate from one's parents. Often this manifests itself as rebellion against parents and their values. Young love creates a sense of individual identity and an independence which is a normal part of adolescence. But if these feelings aren't talked about openly, they can lead to isolation from family and friends.

The prologue of the play refers to Romeo and Juliet as "A pair of star-crossed lovers." Some critics interpret this to mean that Romeo and Juliet were romantic victims of fate and circumstance. Shakespeare, however, shows how our own choices, made in the face of accidents and vicissitudes, can cause tragedy. By relying on a plot crowded with coincidences, mistakes, and "crossed stars," Shakespeare throws certain human necessities into stark relief: the necessity of learning to communicate painful feelings; of reflecting before acting; of avoiding panic--and of avoiding placing guilt or responsibility totally on either oneself or on others. It is in the way we <u>react</u> to a misfortune that determines the outcome, not the reversal itself. Again and again in the play, Shakespeare creates situations in which a minute's reflection would save the characters from tragic consequences. Friar Lawrence says, "Wisely and slow, they stumble that run fast." (II.iii.90). In a story about the impetuous behavior of adolescents, the Friar's point is one well worth making.

The time frame of the story (six days) emphasizes the rapid pace of the action, reflecting the hot-blooded temperaments of the characters. In synopsis: the action begins on a Sunday (Act I through Act II, Scene 2) on which Romeo and Juliet meet, fall in

love, and exchange vows. On Monday (Act 2, Scene 3 through Act 3, Scene 3) Romeo and Juliet are married, Mercutio and Tybalt are killed, Romeo is banished, and Romeo and Juliet spend their wedding night together. On Tuesday (Act 3, Scene 4 through Act 4, Scene 4) Romeo and Juliet part after their wedding night, and Juliet learns she must marry Paris, gets the potion from Friar Lawrence, and takes it. On Wednesday (Act 4, Scene 5) Juliet is discovered "dead." On Thursday (Act 5, Scenes 1 through 3) Paris, Romeo, and Juliet die and on Friday as dawn breaks (Act 5, Scene 3) the Capulets and Montagues learn what has happened, are reconciled, and exit to mourn their children's deaths.

Some good results from Romeo and Juliet's deaths since the feud was stopped, but we must be careful not to make the reverse judgement--that because the feud came to a halt, their deaths were justified. At the end of the play, both Capulet and Montague are left childless and unhappy. Naturally, a happier outcome would be Romeo and Juliet's long and fruitful marriage.

Shakespeare, so true to life, never creates a simple, schematic world in which "blame" can be assigned for tragic consequences. The Montague/Capulet feud contributes to the deaths of Romeo and Juliet, but their own impulsiveness ("rash", "sudden,") and their secrecy ("unadvis'd") play an important part in determining their tragedy. Circumstances can only control us if we let them. Fate and accident are not the causes of our choices, only contributing factors. Since urgency and secrecy are so characteristic of adolescence, examining Romeo and Juliet's choices and motives may help create a mirror in which students can see themselves. As we explore "other endings"

(see modules), we will learn that other things besides "their children's end" could have "remov'd their parents' rage" and that Romeo and Juliet's love was "death-mark'd" for very human reasons - reasons we can learn to avoid if we chose to cope with life. Adolescence is a "fearful passage," too, a passage that we all can learn from to journey safely into a happy adulthood.

ACT ONE, SCENE ONE

The opening of the play introduces us to servants of the Montagues and Capulets, ready to pick a fight with one another. They are members of the "two households both alike in dignity" and they have taken up the quarrel of their masters. We see a world of violence and disorder spilling over into common brawls between servants.

After the Prince breaks up the fight, the Montague parents, left alone on stage with their nephew Benvolio, express their concern about Romeo's recent depression and isolation. They feel frustrated because he will not tell them his troubles.

Benvolio says that he saw Romeo earlier alone before daylight in the woods on the outskirts of the city. This, according to Romeo's father, has been going on for "many a morning." As soon as day breaks and there could be people and activity around--perhaps someone in whom he could confide his troubles--Romeo creeps home and shuts himself up in his room. A change in behavior, sleeplessness, distress, isolation, and withdrawal - these are all signs of depression.

Romeo's state of mind--like the murderous conflict of the feud--jars with the natural order of things (see the constrasts between Romeo's moods and nature in Montague's speech I.i.129 ff). Depression, however, is a common reaction to problems--it's not

"bad" behavior. It reflects a chaotic departure from the healthy, positive rhythm of hope and vitality symbolized by nature's cycles.

Depression turns the world upside down, turning light into dark. The light/dark imagery throughout the play suggests that Romeo and Juliet create their own beauty and values in the covert and isolated world in which they hide their love. Leaving aside the requirements of tragedy, you may wish to discuss with your students questions such as: Is it necessary that they do this? Do they have any other options?

It is common for teenagers to talk more readily to other teenagers than to parents. When Benvolio asks Romeo what is wrong with him, Romeo answers that unrequited love has upset him. Romeo's confused feelings are expressed in paradoxes. Romeo doesn't understand his feelings and where they come from. Further, he is afraid that Benvolio will laugh at him. It's easy to mock Romeo as a self-involved, self-dramatizing Petrarchan lover. But his difficulties in expressing pain straightforwardly and in choosing a suitable love- object are very human dilemmas, one shared by many distressed young people.

Romeo, as a typically depressed person, feels that the concern of another only adds to his own distress (I.i.186-187). He believes that talking about it will only make it worse. The depressed person withdraws from others and loses a sense of identity. Romeo says to his cousin, "Tut, I have lost myself, I am not here. This is not Romeo, he's some other where" (I.1.96-97). Later, when Mercutio, Benvolio and friends revel on their way to the Capulet's party, Romeo sets himself apart, bearing the light instead of being in the

light. His friends try to include him, but Romeo, immobilized by his depression, can't rise from his deeply-seated melancholy.

When Romeo tells Benvolio of his plight, Benvolio is sympathetic. But his advice--to find a beloved other than the heartless Rosaline--doesn't soothe the feelings of being rejected; or the troubling nature of love; or the problems of loving Rosaline, who is related to the Capulets. You may wish to ask your class questions such as: Could such a discussion have helped prepare Romeo for handling his relationship with Juliet better? When Romeo meets Juliet and acts exactly as Benvolio predicted he would (that he would see a prettier girl and fall in love with her), will Benvolio's possible response ("I told you so.") keep Romeo from confiding in him further?

ACT ONE, SCENE TWO

In Act I, Scene 2, we learn of Juliet's youth and her father's concern for her. Paris, a young nobleman related to the Prince of Verona, is asking again for Juliet's hand in marriage, but Capulet thinks that at fourteen she is too young.

We also learn that Juliet is an only child ("The earth has swallowed all my hopes but she," I.ii.14). It is common when other children have died, for parents to make the remaining child the focus of all their love, hopes, and expectations. In finding such a good match for Juliet, however, Capulet may be setting up unrealistic expectations and pressures on himself and his only daughter.

Students may wish to discuss ways in which their parents' choices for them are based on their expectations of what they think will be good for their children, that will make them happy and give them financial security. Parents are not villains--bridging the

generation gap requires understanding both viewpoints.

Here, Capulet indicates that he wants Juliet to approve her suitor. He says, "But woo her gentle Paris, get her heart, My will to her consent is but a part," (I.ii.16-17). We will see this willingness to consult Juliet about her wishes, change in the course of the play.

ACT ONE, SCENE THREE

This scene introduces the Nurse, Lady Capulet, and Juliet for the first time. We learn that Lady Capulet is not sure how to talk to her daughter, who has been brought up mainly by her Nurse. This was not uncommon in the Renaissance. Can your students think of modern day equivalents of this situation?

The Nurse and Lady Capulet have different views of marriage. Lady Capulet is interested in the social position and wealth Juliet will gain by marrying Paris. The Nurse thinks of marriage in terms of sex. Not until Romeo and Juliet meet do we learn to look at marriage in terms of love.

Even though it is finally up to Juliet to decide if she wants to marry Paris, she is still a girl with little experience of life and she relies on her mother's guidance. She is in all respects still a dutiful child and says of the request to consider Paris, "I'll look to like...but no more deep will I endart mine eye/Than your consent gives leave to make it fly" (I.iii.107-109).

In this scene the Nurse and Lady Capulet have done almost all of the talking. What expectations been set up for Juliet to fulfill?

ACT ONE, SCENE FOUR

We saw earlier that Benvolio was sympathetic to Romeo's depression, but that his advice did not begin to deal with the roots of Romeo's problems. In this scene, Mercutio, one of Romeo's best friends, teases Romeo and takes a cynical attitude toward love. Mercutio does not understand the pain Romeo is feeling and thinks it should be an easy thing to control it. This is because the quick-witted Mercutio believes totally in his own power and wit to control events, and like many young people, enjoys taking risks and challenging any outside authority.

In his famous Queen Mab speech (I.iv.3-95), Mercutio belittles dreams, saying that our imaginations create for us only the images that we want them to create. Romeo contends that dreams tell the truth and he takes a very fatalistic view of his future on the basis of a recent dream. Romeo is still depressed and expects amortal accident. He's right; but in a sense, the wish is father to the deed.

ACT ONE, SCENE FIVE

Looking at the way that Shakespeare structures the scene in which Romeo meets Juliet, we notice his use of contrasting viewpoints and voices. First, as Capulet talks to his cousin, we see how time passes all too quickly for older people and how parents do not always recognize that their children have grown up (see I.v.31-40). Romeo then sees Juliet and falls in love at first sight. He immediately idealizes her and makes her the center of his universe. In comparison, all other women are "crows." All other love is denied.

Next, Tybalt reacts to the sound of Romeo's voice and calls for his sword. Shakespeare thus brackets Romeo's first sight of Juliet with a reminder of the gulf between parents and children--and with an ominous flare-up of the feud in the midst of a festive scene. Capulet intercepts Tybalt before the young man can confront Romeo. Capulet's insistence that Romeo be treated courteously (and his surprisingly good opinion of Romeo) suggests that, ironically, Capulet would have had fewer objections to Romeo as a son-in-law than anyone could have guessed.

In discussing the meeting between Romeo and Juliet, it is worth noticing how Shakespeare shows us the perfect ease of communication between the two lovers by having them speak together in a perfect sonnet, the established literary form for writing about love in Elizabethan England. Each speaks a quatrain; then they share the last quatrain together and the final couplet, which ends in a kiss (I.v.109).

As Juliet leaves to speak with her mother, Romeo learns her identity from the Nurse. His reaction ("Is she a Capulet? O dear account. My life is my foe's debt." I.v.116-117), foreshadows the insurmountable conflict the lovers will feel, a conflict which Romeo expresses in life-and-death terms.

Juliet, as she asks Romeo's identity, uses similar language: "Go ask his name. If he be married, My grave is like to be my wedding bed." (I.v.133-134). She may be using the exaggerated expressions of a young person in love for the first time ("If he's married, I'll die."), but the words carry a terrible irony.

In discovering that Romeo is "the only son of [her] great enemy," Juliet gasps, "My only love sprung from my only hate."

(I.v.137). Love and loathing are united here. The confusion Juliet feels as she experiences the "birth of love" leads her into her first lie. When the Nurse asks her what she means, she says in an offhand manner, "A rhyme I learn'd even now/Of one I danced withal." (I.v.142-143). Since we know that Romeo has not danced at the ball, we realize that Juliet is trying to throw the Nurse off the scent by pretending that this is just a harmless "rhyme." Her first instinct is to keep her love a secret - a typical behavior when faced with a confusing situation or a challenge to our sense of longstanding loyalty and identity. Juliet, like many in a confusing situation, choses to hide her feelings, rather than reveal them.

ACT TWO, SCENES ONE AND TWO

From the first lines of Act 2, Scene 1, we can see that Romeo has made Juliet the center of his universe. In an action which underscores the point, Romeo shies away from his friends and their teasing and locker room jokes. They do not know that Romeo has fallen in love with Juliet and their crude humor about Rosaline prompts Romeo to mutter, "They jest at scars that never felt a wound." (II.ii.1). In this exchange, Shakespeare beautifully captures the importance of having empathy for others' feelings. Because he overhears them, rather than joining them, Romeo would now seem to be estranged from his friends.

This process of separation from peer group and family, and bonding with a lover is part of the normal process of adolescence. The balcony scene gives this psychological insight rich poetic expression. Because of their love, Romeo and Juliet begin to question their basic assumptions about their identities.

When Juliet realizes that her midnight soliloquy on her balcony has been overheard, she wishes they could have proceeded more slowly on the initiation of their relationship (see II.ii.115-122). Her foreboding is entirely justified. Shakespeare expresses their danger through the contrast in images of the brilliant, ephemeral flash of lightning (a violent response of nature) and the slow ripening of a bud to a mature flower during the seasons. Romeo and Juliet's love and death are like the lightning flash - passionate, explosive, and quickly spent.

The adolescent feels a tremendous need to make decisions independently and to create a sense of separate identity. Despite her well-expressed reservations, Juliet proposes an immediate marriage to Romeo and lays her fortunes in his hands.

ACT TWO, SCENE THREE

Friar Lawrence's belated entrance in the play signals his important but ambiguous role in the story. Friar Lawrence is a well-intentioned advisor, sympathetic to the problems of Romeo and Juliet, and confided in by both of them. His judgement and actions also reveal his limitations and the dangers of acting when out of one's depth.

Friar Lawrence tells us in soliloquy (II.iii.1-26) that the best motives ("virtue itself") can create evil results and that, conversely, bad motives ("vice") can create good results. If we apply his description of a medicinal herb to the action, the love Romeo and Juliet feel for one another can be seen as a manifestation of "grace" while their rash consummation of that love and their panicked decisions to end their lives can only be seen as manifesta-

tions of "rude will." The analogy with a poisonous and/or healing plant may oversimplify the life-and-death conflict to come, but it keeps us mindful that too strong a condemnation of Romeo and Juliet goes against all our sympathies and instincts, while a wholehearted endorsement of their actions is impossible and counters the structure and meaning of the play.

The end of this scene reinforces this double view. Friar Lawrence agrees to marry Romeo and Juliet to turn their "households' rancour to pure love" (II.iii.88). He nevertheless cautions Romeo against impulsive actions, "Wisely and slow; they stumble that run fast" (II.iii.90).

ACT TWO, SCENE FOUR

In lines 1-35, Benvolio and Mercutio discuss Romeo's love for Rosaline (old news to us at this point) and the challenge that Tybalt has sent to Romeo. Notice that they are concerned about Romeo, but they do not think very deeply, either about Romeo's love-sickness and night-long absence from home or about the danger of Tybalt's challenge.

In lines 36-100, Romeo enters and banter is exchanged among the young men. Notice how Romeo has cheered up and how Mercutio responds to his change of mood. It is worth discussing Shakespeare's acuity in realizing that we all prefer our friends to be "sociable," happy, and outgoing, but that like Mercutio, we may inadvertently send messages that keep them from sharing their feelings with us. By teasing Romeo about his love for Rosaline, Mercutio reduces the chance that Romeo will confide in him. Had Mercutio been privy to this secret, he would have understood Romeo's reluctance to fight Tybalt in Act III, Scene 1, and, as a kinsman to the Prince, he

might have been able to enlist the Prince's support for the lovers.

In lines 101-212, the Nurse's entrance occasions a great deal of horseplay and ribaldry, reminding us of Romeo's youth and immaturity.

ACT TWO, SCENE FIVE

As Juliet awaits the Nurse's return, she grows impatient (II.v.10-17). The contrast between youth and age, introduced in the scene where Capulet and Tybalt quarreled over Romeo's presence at the party, is reintroduced here. Juliet's image of the "swift motion" of "a ball," reminds us of her youth. Her description of "affections and warm youthful blood," reinforces the idea of youth as a time of passion and impulse. To Juliet, the time from nine o'clock to noon seems long,understandably, since she is awaiting news of her impending marriage. It's good to note here, that marriage is one of the most important decisions that we make in our lives and that no one in this play has really discussed its seriousness. We can feel affection for the Nurse as she teases Juliet upon her return (II.v.20-78), but we should also remember that part of the humor in this delightful scene derives from the way the impatience of a girl is played upon rather than balanced by the perspective of an older confidante.

ACT TWO, SCENE SIX

As Romeo awaits the arrival of Juliet at Friar Lawrence's cell, the Friar expresses his misgivings while Romeo crows with reckless joy. Once again the Friar advises moderation, "love moderately; long love doth so." (II.vi.14). Recalling Juliet's image of the lightning, Friar Lawrence tells Romeo that "violent delights" (ex-

plosive passions) have "violent ends," and once again Shakespeare focuses on the impulsiveness characteristic of adolescence, and warns against it: "Too swift arrives as tardy as too slow" (II. vi.15). This foreshadows the final scene of the play, when Romeo arrives "too swift," and Friar Lawrence arrives "too slow."

Young people tend to feel everything in absolutes and in excess. Older people, taking the longer view, can tend to forget the passions and absolutism of youth. Tragedies can be caused by youth's haste, while disasters may also result from an adult's complascent underestimation of the need for a critical response. Either "too quick" or "too slow" is just as "tardy."

ACT THREE, SCENE ONE

Act III, Scene 1 is the pivotal scene in the play where the love story and the feud intersect fatally. Until this scene, the play has had the revels and romance of a comedy, darkened occasionally with a grim foreshadowing of potential tragedy. Mercutio's death creates the turning point in the action, prompting Romeo's decision to avenge his death--a plunge into a quickly accelerating series of events which culminate in death.

As Act III opens, an outbreak of violence reminds us of the beginning of the play. Benvolio warns Mercutio that there is "mad blood stirring" on the streets (III.i.1-4). Benvolio recognizes that passions will take over in certain situations, and that the only prudent course of action is to avoid the conflict ahead of time. Mercutio makes a joke of Benvolio's warning, but by the time of Tybalt's entrance, it's clear that Mercutio is spoiling for a fight. Mercutio and Tybalt's verbal fencing parallels that of the servants in Act I, Scene 1. Both Mercutio and Tybalt are verbally

strutting their "machismo."

On seeing Romeo, Tybalt tries to part from Mercutio in a conciliatory manner, and immediately provokes Romeo with the most deadly insult known to Renaissance gentlemen: he calls him a "villain" (III.i.60). Romeo's reply is a model of cool-headedness, a sensible attempt to defuse the quarrel. Romeo tries peacefully to take his leave, but as much as he has exercised his "reason," no one knows "the reason that [he] has to love Tybalt" (III.i.61), since his marriage to Juliet is a secret. The quarrel, therefore, continues.

Once again, Romeo acts with restraint. He asks Tybalt to "be satisfied" with his protestations of love, rather than with the "satisfaction" of engaging in a duel. Romeo is trying deperately to put the feud behind him and for a short while it looks as though love might have a chance of defeating hate.

To Mercutio, however, it seems as if Romeo has forgotten his manhood and the code of honor demanded of him as a gentleman. Mercutio takes up his sword against Tybalt in Romeo's place. Through Romeo's efforts to break up the fight, Mercutio is wounded mortally.

By showing us the opportunities Mercutio has to avoid fighting (Tybalt treats him courteously, then Romeo refuses to accept Tybalt's challenge), Shakespeare highlights the senselessness of Mercutio's death and the lightning-quick manner in which life can lead to death. Mercutio's motives make sense, especially in light of the gang-like warfare which he and his friends waged continually. He believed he was defending his dearest friend's honor and protecting Romeo from a duel he was ill-equipped to fight (earlier Mercutio had

said, "And is he [Romeo] a man to encounter Tybalt?" II.vi.16). Contempt for Tybalt, pride in his own abilities as a fighter, disregard of his own mortality and unawareness of the motivation behind Romeo's actions, combine to destroy Mercutio. His acceptance of the "macho" code shared by his peers (which Romeo briefly rejects), seals his fate. The nimble-witted Mercutio is a personification of the vulnerability and verve of youth, particularly because he chooses to live--and die--blindly by a code of personal honor and daring.

Romeo cannot be faulted for his attempt at mediation, but the dying Mercutio, who cannot understand Romeo's motivation and his sudden change of heart, rejects Romeo and curses the Montagues and the Capulets (III.i.106-108). With his curse, Mercutio recognizes the destructive force unleashed by the feud and the fault that lies on both sides. But the curse also carries with it a burden of guilt from beyond the grave and Romeo feels trapped by an impossible conflict. Romeo has no way of knowing how the Prince will react to the loss of his kinsman (Mercutio). Will a Montague (himself, perhaps?) be sentenced to death? Will Tybalt? Clear thinking at this point, might lead him to realize that he bears no responsibility for Mercutio's death. However, Romeo takes on the responsibility for his friend's death. This is a noble response on his part, but it is justified by the facts and it will prove counterproductive, leading to a sense of guilt and a desire for vengeance.

Events are moving too swiftly; emotions are running too high. With these pressures weighing on Romeo, he is unable to think calmly about a course of action. He now blames himself for refusing to fight. He now feels that "sweet Juliet" has robbed him of his

masculinity and that he must prove his manhood.

We can understand Romeo's point of view without agreeing with it. The new bond to Juliet, the marriage bond, requires of Romeo a new definition of masculinity that is more complicated than machismo. It requires a cool-headed appraisal of the future. His impulsive response to the terrible tragedy of Mercutio's death throws Romeo back on the old training of the feud. Benvolio comes back with the news of Mercutio's death and Tybalt returns almost immediately after that. Romeo, swept up by passion, makes his choice and his language makes it clear that he chooses hate, not love, revenge, not forgiveness.

Yet his intent is hardly criminal. When Romeo kills Tybalt, he is stunned by what he has done. Without judging him, we can see that Romeo's senseless act fulfills Friar Lawrence's vision that man has a dual nature of "grace" and "rude will." It's possible to strike out in hatred while still feeling a pure love, like the one Romeo feels for Juliet. It's hard for each one of us to come to terms with this paradox in our identities--a paradox with tragic potential.

Events have conspired against Romeo, but it is his own lack of self control that has made him "fortune's fool" (III.i.138). Shakespeare presents here the delicate balance between responsibility for our own actions and the difficulty of exercising such control. Yet, as we feel pity and fear for Romeo and Mercutio, we can learn to understand their human dilemma and choose other endings for our own lives. In this scene, we can see that by choosing not to avenge Mercutio's death, Romeo would have avoided the Prince's sentence of banishment.

By taking the law into his own hands, Romeo has removed himself from its protection. The Prince, under pressure to act impartially and to end the feud expediently, will only reduce the death sentence to a decree of banishment. The solution to the feud lies in the revelation of Romeo and Juliet's marriage. Ironically, the banishment of Romeo only drives the lovers further into secrecy. The Prince, too, must share responsibility for the tragedy to come. His sudden severity in punishing the families and his unwillingness to listen to participants in the feud turns away people (e.g. Friar Lawrence) who might reveal the lovers' marriage. His justice is not enlightened by the truth.

ACT THREE, SCENE TWO

Juliet's beautiful and impassioned opening soliloquy, spoken in joyous anticipation of her wedding night has added poignancy for an audience aware of Tybalt's death and Romeo's banishment. The urgency of "Gallop apace" (III.ii.1-31) captures Juliet's own pressing desires, But she also makes an ominous reference to the over-eager Phaeton, the son of the Greek god Phoebus Apollo, who attempted to drive his father's chariot of the sun skyward, but whose unsteady flight nearly scorched and destroyed the earth. Romeo and Juliet, like Phaeton, are young and impatient, eager to take on adult identities. Like Phaeton, they may not be ready to handle responsibilities, to rein in the passions they feel.

The Nurse arrives with the news of Tybalt's death and Romeo's banishment, putting an end forever to the world Juliet has known and loved, both within her family circle and within her new marriage. It is a natural reaction in grief to feel as though the world has no more joy or meaning, but Juliet has the added burden of determining

her feelings about conflicting loyalties. As soon as the Nurse begins to blame Romeo, Juliet takes up his part with a new maturity and dignity (III.ii.90-117). She will not "speak ill of him that is [her] husband."

A new wave of grief and panic overwhelms her when she thinks of Romeo's banishment (III.ii.112-127). To feel that separation from a loved one brings a loss with "no end, no limit, measure, bound," is a natural first reaction. Now it seems to her that everything which she had depended on--particularly her new identity as a wife--has been denied her.

When the Nurse tells Juliet that her parents are weeping for Tybalt, she knows she can find no comfort in retreating to the childhood world she has left. She must weep for Romeo.

The Nurse has only one thought--to comfort Juliet and to stop her pain. She promises to bring Romeo to her. The Nurse has never displayed the ability to think logically and here, in a crisis, she reacts with simple love. But as the problems facing the young lovers become more complex, we will find that as an advisor, she is out of her depth.

ACT THREE, SCENE THREE

Just as Juliet relies on the Nurse as a "foster mother," so Romeo relies on Friar Lawrence as his "foster father." Hiding in the Friar's cell, he awaits news of the Prince's sentence. He expects to be sentenced to death, but learns instead that he has been banished. The Friar counsels patience, but banishment terrifies Romeo. Throughout the play he has been isolated and depressed, a depression only lifted by his love for Juliet. To banish him

means to isolate him from everything that is giving meaning to his life.

Friar Lawrence attempts to reason with him, but Romeo has no resources beyond his love for Juliet. His tunnel vision is complete and his sense of self relies on his relationship to Juliet. By seeing this relationship in such absolute terms, he loses the power to adjust to circumstance and to plan for the future.

We cannot blame Romeo for refusing to listen any more than we can blame Friar Lawrence for trying to help. But the result of their exchange is for Romeo to become more angry, to shut off the dialogue and to attempt to kill himself. Self-hatred and shame spur Romeo's action. He fears that now Juliet will hate him because he killed her cousin, and, feeling he has betrayed her trust, he seeks to punish himself. Friar Lawrence grows angry, frustrated by Romeo's rejection of his advice and anxious that he has exceeded his authority.

The Friar sends Romeo to "comfort" Juliet. By doing this he has ostensibly put Romeo back onto the path of action. The Friar promises to "find a time" for reconciliation and forgiveness, but he moves too slowly. The secrecy that has surrounded the lovers from the beginning has already taken its toll as events to accelerate.

ACT THREE, SCENE FOUR

Once again, impetuousness comes into play when Capulet suddenly pledges his daughter to Paris in marriage. Capulet knows he is being hasty, but his pride in his daughter and in the obedience she has always shown him makes him give his word. Lady Capulet has led Juliet to believe that she can decide for herself whether she will wed Paris, and Capulet had indicated as much to Paris (I.ii.18). In

this instance an adult's impulsiveness will lead directly to disaster.

ACT THREE, SCENE FIVE

The theme of time is also central to this scene, but here time's fleet passage has a lyric and poignant quality. The hours are all too short for the young lovers. The farewell at dawn is their last scene together and its echoes of the balcony scene reinforce a feeling of brevity.

When Lady Capulet enters to find Juliet wildly weeping over Romeo's departure, she can only interpret her tears as grief for Tybalt's death. The riddling conversation that ensues between them highlights the isolation and pressure that secrecy is forcing on Juliet. Lady Capulet's vengefulness removes any possibility of honest communication (III.v.78-102). We wish for a healing honesty to halt the progress of the tragedy. Instead, Lady Capulet, believing she is acting in her daughter's best interest, breaks the news of Juliet's impending marriage with Paris (III.v. 107-115).

Juliet refuses the marriage bluntly, in effect "slamming the door" on her mother. Shakespeare resists assigning blame in this exchange by the way he presents the characters' reactions. We understand the shock and desperation Juliet feels at the news, but we can equally recognize how shocking her response must seem to her parents. Capulet, who is now honor-bound to Paris, feels betrayed and humiliated by his only child. This does not excuse the vehemence of his response; however, it is important to recognize that he is a distraught human being, not a tyrant who causes his daughter's death. It is natural that when we feel that those we

love have failed us, we think we have a right to be angry and to withdraw our love.

For Juliet, such withdrawal of parental love and support is devastating. After all appeals to her father have failed and her mother turns a deaf ear to her pleas, she turns to her nurse for comfort and counsel. The Nurse is a not very bright pragmatist. She advises Juliet to marry Paris and by doing so, she betrays everything in which Juliet believes most. Respect for the sanctity of marriage and love for Romeo lie at the core of her soul. Bereft of all support at home, Juliet clings to the slim hope that Friar Lawrence could help. Juliet has grown up suddenly. She recognizes that she must act independently, but the only independent course she can see is to exercise the "power to die." She feels that this power alone can help her escape the constraints and compromises of the adult world (III.v.242). She does not see that she <u>also</u> has the power to live and to enrich the adult world with her beauty, truthfulness, and loyalty to her love.

ACT FOUR, SCENE ONE

Now Juliet begins to feel that her situation is so desperate, that she'll consider suicide (IV.i.50-67). She would rather chose death than perjure herself before God or be untrue to Romeo. She asks the Friar for his approval of her suicide (IV.i. 52-54). Of course, he won't give it.

Having embarked on a course of secrecy, neither she nor the Friar can think of a solution that does not involve keeping the marriage concealed. To Juliet, who feels trapped and helpless, suicide seems a way of taking control and exercising her free will. However, this is reactive thinking--a panic reaction or tunnel

vision--which contributes to the seeming "hopelessness" of her situation. Friar Lawrence's potion scheme, which depends on elaborate timing, is a poor "remedy" which only delays the inevitable discovery of the marriage and postpones the young couple's reunion. You may wish to ask your class questions such as: Why could Juliet not be sent to Mantua now? The Friar plans to break the news of the marriage to the Prince and both families. Why does he not do so now? Once again, events seem to be moving too fast for the characters to stop and think clearly.

ACT FOUR, SCENE TWO

When Juliet returns, feigning repentence at her disobedience to her father, he is overjoyed by her change of heart and swiftly arranges for the marriage to take place the next morning. He fails to notice a new, subdued resolve and self-contained quality in his daughter's word and demeanor. Too often, we hear only what we want to hear, and do not look for a hidden message. If someone has been depressed or unhappy, a change in this behavior may not be a positive sign. Juliet is telling her father what he wants to hear, but she is cutting herself off from his possible help or sympathy.

ACT FOUR, SCENE THREE

As Juliet prepares to take the Friar's potion, she is frightened and her first impulse is to call for her mother and her nurse, but she soon resolves to act alone and bravely too (IV.iii.15-18). We are moved by the realization that her courage isolates her completely and throws her on her own slender resources. After she contemplates taking her life in case the Friar's potion should not work, she expresses her mistrust of him, a paradoxical fear that the

Friar's potion is actually a poison designed to kill her as a witness to his role in the secret marriage. The illogical to-and-fro feelings in her speech capture the tragic fact that Juliet, like most people who attempt suicide, does not want to die. The sleeping potion metaphorically represents the most common motivation of suicide: to "solve" what seems to be a hopeless problem by escaping into a dreamless sleep. The person who attempts suicide, like Juliet, is usually alone, frightened, and in terrible pain. But suicide is not like the Friar's magic potion: it is a sleep from which there is no waking, a tragic waste of life as precious as Shakespeare's Juliet.

ACT FOUR, SCENE FIVE

Juliet's false "death" provides a scene in which we see the genuine mourning of her family. Ironically, suicide attempts are sometimes motivated by the unconscious desire to re-establish love that the suicidal person feels has been lost and to grieve those whom the suicide feels have caused hurt or pain. Rather than dying, the suicidal person wishes not to be dead, but to awaken without pain into a world of better understanding, empathy and help.

ACT FIVE, SCENE ONE

Romeo's dream (V.i.6-9) suggests that he has unconsiously romanticized death. In his conscious mind Romeo realizes that a dead man cannot think and that there is no "reviving" from death. Yet on another level, he may subconsciously be working through his fears of death in preparation for the taking of his own life. Robbing death of its finality, endowing it with romantic associations (being reunited with Juliet) is a dangerous line of reasoning. Romeo's volatile moodiness may be part of this state of mind. Romeo be-

lieves that this dream is the "presage" of "some joyful news at hand" (1.2), but in Scene 3, he identifies the feelings correctly, as a modern psychologist might, as "a lightning before death" (V.iii.90).

Romeo has already found the apothecary's shop where he can purchase poison. He has already made up his mind to attempt suicide and has fantasized an ideal death which will quiet the conflicts in his soul. Thus, when Balthazar enters with the dismal news of Juliet's "death," Romeo is only too ready to commit himself to action. He fails to take the steps that could have preserved his own life, and Juliet's as well. Balthazar begs him to "have patience." He fears for Romeo's well-being, but is afraid to act against his master's wishes. Romeo has one more opportunity to check the accuracy of Bathazar's story when he askes whether there has been any news from Friar Lawrence. When Bathazar tells him no letters have arrived, Romeo merely says, "No matter." But the situation matters a great deal--bleak and final events may seem, a different, more creative ending can be found. One must not answer with Romeo's "no matter."

ACT FIVE, SCENE TWO

Here we learn why Friar Lawrence's letters have failed to arrive. By a habit of secrecy, he has not told Friar John why these letters are so important. Friar John's delay was un- avoidable, but Romeo's headlong rush to death is now unchecked. Once again, he is "too quick" and Friar Lawrence is "too slow."

ACT FIVE, SCENE THREE

Parting from Balthazar, Romeo exhibits many of the signals that may warn of a potential suicide. These signals are not hard-and-fast predictions and there is much debate about them, since many would-be suicides do not exhibit these behaviors, yet we see that Balthazar, uneasy as he is at Romeo's actions, choses to hide and watch rather than to get help. Perhaps realizing that Romeo's instructions signalled real danger, Balthazar would have stayed with Romeo or gone immediately to find help from the Watch, the Prince, or Montague--all of whom enter, tragically, just minutes too late.

Romeo has given Balthazar a letter for his father. Some people leave notes, some do not--commonly, such a note is a harbinger of suicide.

Romeo firmly instructs Balthazar to leave him alone, saying that his obedience proves his friendship (V.iii.43-44). Romeo gives Balthazar a gift and wishes him a happy life. He then takes his leave. Such gifts, coupled with what sounds like a final good-bye, is an omen. Balthazar, who has already feared that Romeo's wild mood swings boded ill, now is seriously worried--and too anxious to ask Romeo directly about his feelings or to betray Romeo's secrets. Instead, he "hides," watching rather than acting, when immediate action is so vital. He cannot be blamed for his choice, but if one is unsure how to proceed, it is always better to seek advice immediately. A life is too important to risk. Showing friendship means learning how to be a friend for life.

When Paris meets Romeo at the tomb, he is unable to understand why Romeo is there. Sure that he is an "enemy," he does not listen to Romeo's message. Romeo tells Paris that "I come hither armed

against myself" (line 65). Juliet's two young mourners fight and Paris dies. Only upon hearing his death-wish does Romeo recognize and sympathize with Paris. Once again, under the pressure of concealed sorrow (revealed too late to prevent Romeo from killing Paris), a rash choice yields death.

Romeo begs forgiveness of the lifeless Paris and then, movingly, of his "cousin" Tybalt. Seeing Juliet, he marvels at her fresh beauty. Death, he feels, has no power over her. He sees death as a rival and vows to stay with Juliet (V.iii.101-112). Romeo's feelings that he is too tired to live, that he would prefer to "shake the yoke of inauspicious stars/From this world-wearied flesh," precisely describes the unmeasurable feeling of weariness experienced by a suicidal person. "Everlasting rest" beckons to him. Death seems merely "unsubstantial." Yet at this moment we know that Romeo has everything to live for, since Juliet is alive.

By presenting the dreadful irony of Romeo's death in the arms of the still-living Juliet, Shakespeare suggests to us that the beauty, hope, and value of life is there for us to embrace, but that, like Romeo, we cannot always recognize it. For Romeo, Friar Lawrence arrives a minute too late and Juliet awakes to find that Romeo's lips are still warm (line 167). The split-second mistimings that lead to the pair's death point up the urgency of saving young lives which, like Romeo's and Juliet's, need not be lost.

As Friar Lawrence panics and leaves Juliet in the tomb, we watch this brave, precious and fragile girl, resolutely takes her own life, a life she never really wished to lose. Romeo may have sought death, but Juliet sought every means she could find to avoid it.

As Friar Lawrence and the servants of Paris and Balthazar tell the shocked Prince and parents what has happened, we realize afresh how little the Montagues and Capulets knew of the children's choices and desperate actions. This retelling of the story, too often cut in modern productions, gives the parents the opportunity to learn the secrets their children have been keeping from them. Montague and Capulet are reconciled and in a gesture of remembrance to their children, the "poor sacrifices of our enmity," they vow to erect their statues in "pure gold." Such memorials cannot assuage the parents' sorrow, cannot replace the children that they have lost, but they are a first sad step in the process of reconciliation.

Shakespeare's play is more than a golden monument, it's an ever-fresh portrayal of adolescence. Never once does the author condescend to the vulnerability and passion of the hero and heroine. Nor does the play underestimate the challenge and complexity of new-found feelings of independence. In each stage performance, Romeo and Juliet inspires young people to endure. Further, it cautions them to come to terms with their potent feelings of longing, fear and danger as they begin the ultimate adventure, the discovery of themselves. And it instructs us as adults to remember our own youth and to reach out with love and understanding to the young people in our lives.