

MODULE III: DEALING WITH HOPELESS SITUATIONS

"Be not so long to speak. I long to die,
If what thou speak'st speak not of remedy."
(IV.i.66-67)

The most difficult, painful and devastating experiences that we encounter along life's journey is the loss--or perceived loss--beyond any hope, of that which is most important to us. The ability to endure, to cope and, eventually, to heal, appears to be a learned ability, and, in most instances, experience is the teacher. Hurting and hopeless adolescents, however, may not wait to learn that the intense feelings of pain will not last forever.

From the prologue through the final act of the play, we watch as Romeo and Juliet struggle with increasingly overwhelming problems. We see these young lovers try to deal with adversity, drawing only on the limited experience of their young lives. When faced with separation, they panic. As each of their efforts fails, as each new blow falls, their hopes fade. Viewing the world only from the private perspective of their love, their vision narrows. Their perception of the future is limited by their overwhelming need for each other. It is clouded by the despair they feel. When, finally, they do lose each other, they perceive their entire world as lost. Believing that the pain they feel will never fade, they decide that, without the future they long for, there is no hope for any future.

Those who cared about Romeo and Juliet wanted to help "solve" their problems. When their efforts failed to resolve the problems, they did not know what else to do.

In this module we explore ways in which Romeo and Juliet, as well as those around them, perceive, experience and deal with "hopeless" situations. We explore what the characters in the play did and didn't do, and what lessons we can learn from their experiences.

HELPLESSNESS LOSS OF PERSPECTIVE TUNNEL VISION PANIC

The following related exercises deals with the issues of hopelessness summarized above by examining how the characters in the play deal with "hopeless" situations.

NOTES to the Teacher

INSTRUCTIONS to the Class

Select two students to read or enact the passages cited below. These reflect Romeo and Juliet's feelings of helplessness, loss of perspective, tunnel vision and panic reactions and reveal how those who care for them respond. Then ask the class to discuss Romeo or Juliet's emotions and how the advice given to them helped or failed to help them and why. In light of the discussion, ask two other students to reenact the scene using their own words to create a more helpful outcome.

1. Just as Juliet relies on the Nurse for advice as her "foster mother," Romeo relies on Friar Laurence 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.

Suggestions (a)

- o Banishment terrifies Romeo. Throughout the play, he has been isolated and depressed, a depression only lifted by his lightning-quick exchange of love with Juliet. For Romeo, banishment means a new isolation, from everything that now gives meaning to his life. His happiness depends entirely on Juliet's love and their private world.
 - o Friar Laurence attempts to reason with Romeo, pointing out the Prince's mercy is
- a. Read or enact the passage between Romeo and Friar Laurence, III.iii. 17-29, beginning with Friar Laurence's line, "Hence from Verona art thou banished./Be patient, for the world is broad and wide." through Romeo's line, "'Tis torture and not mercy."

commuting the death sentence to banishment. Romeo does not have any resources beyond his love for Juliet. His loss of perspective, part and parcel of the absolutism and idealization of his love, makes him unable to hear Friar Laurence's advice. Then the Friar tries to remind Romeo that the Prince has shown mercy. However, telling Romeo that things could have been worse when he is so desolate, only seems insensitive. Romeo rejects Friar Laurence's attempt to console him. For Romeo, banishment is so devastating that no consolation seems possible.

- b. Was this advice helpful? If not, why?
- c. Other Endings: What advice or or approach could Friar Laurence have taken here that would have been more helpful?

- 2. As this scene continues Romeo and Friar Laurence both begin to get angry. Romeo believes that the the Friar does not understand his feelings. The Friar feels that Romeo is failing to listen to good advice.

Suggestions (a)

Romeo feels that Friar Laurence is not acting as a friend since a friend would not remind him of his banishment or consider it merciful. Romeo wants the Friar to tell him something that will

- a. Continue reading/enacting III.iii. 48-64 from Romeo's line, "How hast thou the heart,/Being a divine, a ghostly confessor..." through Romeo's line, "Thou canst not speak of that thou dost not feel."

change the situation. Friar Laurence wants Romeo to take a philosophic view of his troubles. Romeo needs to feel that the Friar empathizes with his problems.

- o Romeo refuses to listen because he feels it is useless--Friar Laurence does not understand. The exchange ends in anger. Romeo seeks to shut off the dialogue, to "talk no more." With this Friar Laurence begins to become angry himself and Romeo rejects the Friar's advice saying, "Thou canst not speak of what thou canst not feel."

- b. Repeat question b. from exercise 1.

- c. Repeat question c. from exercise 1.

- 3. The Nurse enters, looking for Romeo to bring him to Juliet. Flustered, concerned and warm-hearted, she describes how Juliet feels and tells Romeo that he must not panic, for Juliet's sake.

Suggestions (a)

The Nurse's sympathy for the two lovers and her reminder that Romeo should think of Juliet, help Romeo move beyond his shock and panic for a moment.

- a. (For this section, you will need three students to read or enact III.iii. 81-90, beginning with the Nurse's line, "O holy Friar, O tell me, holy Friar,/Where is my lady's lord," through her line which ends, "Why should you fall into so deep an O?")

- b. Repeat question b. from exercise 1.

- c. Repeat question c. from exercise 1.

4. The Nurse is not always able to give good advice. Juliet, having fought bitterly with her parents over their decision for her to marry Paris, turns to the Nurse for comfort and advice.

Suggestions (a)

- o Feeling her situation is hopeless, Juliet is desperate, shocked, grief-stricken and panicked. Taking her marriage vows as a holy and sacred promise made before God, she believes she cannot obey her parents' command to marry Paris, but she sees no way of refusing them.
 - o The Nurse who brought Juliet up, loves her and wants to help. A woman of limited education and perspective, she can only think pragmatically. She reasons that if the marriage to Paris cannot be prevented, then Juliet had best obey her parents. She tries to cheer Juliet by praising Paris and telling her that no one will find out about Romeo. Juliet, young and absolutely faithful to her love, is shocked and angered by the Nurse's response. Feeling betrayed by her only confidante, Juliet feels now that only the Friar can help her, and, if he cannot, only death is the answer. Neither she nor the Nurse have sufficient perspective to see that revealing the truth would be a better remedy.
- a. Have two students read or enact III.iv.204-242 beginning with Juliet's line, "O God, Nurse, how shall this be prevented?" through her line which ends, "If all else fail, myself have power to die."