

AP English Literature and Composition
2019 Summer Assignments

During the summer weeks, please **read and annotate** William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. I suggest you read the Shakespeare Folger Library version of the text and stay away from any "Shakespeare made easy" books and SparkNotes. The idea is for you to **wrestle with the language** and attempt to understand it and interpret it using your existing knowledge and intuition. You've got this!

Oppositions and contrasts abound in *Romeo and Juliet*. The action begins with a violent clash between the feuding families and throughout the play, divisions and conflicts beset the doomed lovers, ultimately leading to their deaths, but there are many speculations as to why the lovers die.

So, who is to blame? What is to blame?

For hundreds of years, people have argued over the reason for the death of the lovers. Conduct your own inquiry into the causes of the tragedy—there are many to choose from. Don't simply try to pin blame on particular individuals. Seek other reasons for the tragedy. Below are suggestions you can use to investigate what caused the deaths of Romeo and Juliet. Choose one and read the play using that particular lens or perspective. Collect as many quotes and/or accounts to help you defend your point of view.

Create a set of 20 4x6 index cards reflecting your ideas, quotes, and reasoning. Feel free to use both sides of the card and include pictures to help ideas stick. How do these contribute to the meaning of the text as whole—theme? Be prepared to discuss your ideas the first week of school.

1. *Was it fate?* Were the deaths foretold in the stars? There are many suggestions in the play hinting the deaths were determined by fate. Collect references to the inevitability of the tragedy. Use the text to help you make your case.
2. *Was it chance?* Was it just bad luck? Fortune is fickle, so maybe no one is responsible. It was only a series of accidents. Collect examples of chance and accident, for example, the accidental meeting of the servant by Romeo and Benvolio.
3. *Was it adolescent passion?* Some critics have laid the blame on the folly of Romeo and Juliet in their youthful haste and passion, but how much of the blame falls on the lovers? Is adolescent love at first sight the cause of the tragedy? Collect examples of haste and passion in the play to use as evidence.
4. *Was it a male dominated society?* Verona is a patriarchal city. Fathers virtually hold absolute sway over their daughters. They may give them to whom ever they choose and feel a deeply insulted if their daughters choose otherwise. Together with patriarchy goes all of the machismo of men in general—the sexual innuendos, lack of sensitivity, and unmitigated wrath. Collect examples that help you prove that the male dominated society in Verona is responsible for the death of the lovers.

In addition to *Romeo and Juliet*, I'd like for you all to read *How to Read Literature Like a College Professor*. Yes, I know, you've "read" or heard about this book this already, but the truth is it helps with analysis, and **analysis is what you need** to concentrate on for this course. Don't feel as if you should read it in order. You can bounce around from chapter to chapter. Pay attention to the chapter(s) dealing with allusions—biblical, mythological, and Shakespearean. Here are some the chapters you should focus on and annotate extensively: *Every Trip is a Quest (Except When it's Not)*, *When in Doubt It's from Shakespeare, ...Or the Bible, It's Greek to Me, Geography Matters...*, *Is He Serious? and Other Ironies*.

Bring both books to class for the first two weeks of class.
See you soon.

