Why are the prologue and expositional scenes of Romeo and Juliet important?

Key questions

* Why should we watch the play if the prologue tells us what is going to happen
* How does the humour and conflict between the servants signpost the triviality of the feud?
* What key themes are revealed in the exposition of the play
* What does the Prince’s speech reveal about law and order

Ethnocentrism – prioritising one’s own culture or group by devaluing or disrespecting another

Metatheatrical – acknowledging that the play is a play (and not the real world)

Honorifics – terms used to signal respect

Stichomythia – a rapid exchange of dialogue

Hereditary – From birth, genetic, inherited

Trivialise – to be made to seem unimportant

Tragedy – A literary genre in which death and waste dominate, ending with the downfall of the main character

Antithesis – opposition (e.g. life and death)

Soliloquy – A character alone on stage

Shakespeare examines the human mind and what it means to exist

The dramatic function of the prologue

* Outlines significant themes of the play (Fate, love, conflict, families feuding)
* Foreshadows future plot turns in the play
* Makes a connection with the audience. Commenting on the main events of tragedy.
* Acts as an exposition for the play

There are many reasons as to why there is a prologue at the beginning of Romeo and Juliet. One of these is to outline the significant themes in the play, for example love and conflict. This gives the audience an idea of what to expect during the performance. The prologue also foreshadows future events in the play, like the death of the 2 protagonists. This is not a spoiler because it doesn’t state how they die, and leaves the audience intrigued. The audience will also be engaged at the beginning of the performance as it is important to gain their attention from the start.

Lesson 2

In the prologue, Shakespeare introduces **antithetical themes** such as love and hate, duty and impulsiveness.

The prologue is a sonnet. It has 14 lines and irregular rhyming couplets.

The language used in the prologue is figurative/poetic, not literal

Shakespeare’s presentation of Act 1 scene 1

Sampson and Gregory are servants from the house of Capulet.

They are talking about the Montagues in a violent way

There is a comedic tone created by innuendos, although they are talking about fighting.

The way they discuss women shows a patriarchal society.

The feud between the 2 households permeates through social class

The scene portrays a strong sense of masculinity and misogyny

Lesson 3 – ‘Romeo and Juliet’ Act 1 Scene 1

What themes does Shakespeare present in the prologue and the beginning of Act 1 Scene 1?

In the exposition of Romeo and Juliet, Shakespeare introduces a spectrum of antithetical themes such as love and hate. ‘Star-cross’d lovers’ and ‘death-mark’d love’ are two contrasting ideas presented in similar ways. This reveals the two protagonists are bound by fate but doomed from the outset. Act 1 Scene 1 begins with stichomythia between two servants from the house of Capulet. They discuss fighting the Montagues and this amplifies the scale of the feud as it permeates through social classes. The servants are portrayed as misogynistic as calling women ‘the weaker vessels’ and using multiple innuendos, exposing a patriarchal society.

What is the function of the prologue in Romeo and Juliet?