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

Incandescent – strong emotion (angry)

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.

Lesson 4 – ‘Romeo and Juliet Act 1 scene 1

Starter

1. The main dramatic function of the prologue is to engage the audience’s attention
2. The prologue is a sonnet, it has 14 lines and rhyming couplets
3. Sampson and Gregory are Capulet servants
4. Prince Escales’ role in Verona is to keep the town peaceful
5. Sampson and Gregory speak in a violent and misogynistic way in Act 1 Scene 1. They do this by using violent language and multiple innuendos

Lesson 5

Prince Escales speech:

* Threatening
* Emotive
* Authoritative
* History of the feud/grudge revealed
* Views of older members of society highlights how far the grudge has dominated society and their lives
* Incandescent – reflects badly on his leadership because he can’t control the fighting

Lesson 6

Examples

In Act 1 Scene 1 of the play, the servants of the two quarrelling households (the Montagues and Capulets) share a conversation fundamentally secured by male bravado and displays of masculinity

During the 14th century, when the play was set, Shakespeare represents a patriarchal society and as a result, often represented this by fighting or making sexual puns.

Shakespeare presents nuances of misogynist views

Sampson joking how his “naked weapon is out” before engaging in a “quarrel”, illustrates the two ways that men, in the context of the play, displaced their masculinity

Furthermore, this reinforces…

Tybalt reacts at disgust at the notion of “peace”

He “holds it not a sin” to end Romeo’s life on such a small discrepancy as trespassing, which shows how his aggression far outweighs his practical judgement in the situation.

How to make a good essay

* Start paragraphs with connectives to help them flow together to compare and reinforce your ideas and interpretations.
* Include at least 1 paragraph about structure and punctuation
* Remember it is a play with an audience
* Embed quotes
* Link in context to points
* State word status e.g. noun, adjective, simile
* Have multiple layers of analysis
* When talking about the audience, use ‘might have’ not ‘would have’ because we don’t know everything about the audience
* Make sure to focus on Shakespeare of the question asks how Shakespeare does something

Prince Escales speech

Prince Escales has a disjointed structure to his speech.

Other notes

Syntax is the word order

Hyperbolic – overexaggerated

Imperative verb – command word

Starting with this conversation, explore how Shakespeare presents aggressive male behaviour in Romeo and Juliet.

In ‘Romeo and Juliet’, Shakespeare represents aggressive male behaviour in

In Act 1 Scene 1 of the play, Shakespeare reveals the servants of the 2 contending households (the Montagues and Capulets)

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