Romeo and Juliet – Core Knowledge

1. Context: (AO3)

- It is generally believed that the play is based on a real Italian love story from the 3rd Century.
- The 'real families' are the Capeletti and the Montecci families.
- Shakespeare wrote his version in 1594 which was based on Arthur Brooke's poem of 1562.
- This period was 'The Elizabethan Era' which was also known as 'The Renaissance': a time of significant change in the fields of religion, politics, science, language and the arts.

2. Key themes: (AO1 and AO3)

- Fate
- Love and hate
- Gender and masculinity
- Family
- Duality

3. Key events: (AO1)

- The Montague and Capulet families are at war and have had another fight. The Prince, who keeps the peace in Verona, says that if there are any further fights the head of the houses will be killed.
- Romeo, a Montague, and Juliet, a Capulet, meet at a party at the Capulets' house and they kiss. Romeo shouldn't be there and Juliet's cousin Tybalt sees him and decides to get revenge for the insult.
- Romeo sneaks into the Capulet orchard to see Juliet and they declare their love for each other and decide to get married and be together.
- Romeo and Juliet get married in secret with the help of Juliet's nurse and Friar Laurence.
- Another fight breaks out in Verona and Tybalt kills Romeo's friend Mercutio. Romeo had tried to prevent the fight but, after Mercutio's death, he kills Tybalt. The Prince banishes Romeo from Verona because of what he has done.
- Lord Capulet tells Juliet she must marry a man called Paris, not knowing she is already married.

- Friar Laurence gives Juliet a potion that will make her appear dead so she does not have to marry again. He sends Romeo a note to explain the plan and Juliet takes the potion. Her body is moved to the family tomb.
- Romeo does not receive the note about the potion from Friar Laurence and thinks Juliet is really dead. He buys some poison and goes back to Verona.
- Romeo goes to the tomb. He takes the poison and dies next to her.
- Juliet wakes up and sees Romeo dead. She then kills herself with Romeo's dagger.

4. Key literary features: (AO2)

Feature	Definition	Example
Blank verse	The lines don't have to rhyme. Each line has 10 or 11 syllables and 5 big beats. (Iambic pentameter)	Noble characters usually speak in blank verse to indicate their status.
Prose	Normal sentences with no set rhythm.	Lower-classes (e.g. servants) often speak in prose.
Soliloquy	A character speaking their thoughts aloud.	Juliet's most well known soliloquy is when she is on the balcony: "O Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo…"
Dramatic Irony	When the audience knows something a character doesn't.	The prologue tells the audience, at the opening of the play, that the lovers will die.
Sonnet	A 14-line poem with a variable rhyme scheme originating in Italy and usually a love poem.	The first 14 lines spoken between Romeo and Juliet are written as a sonnet. It shows they understand each other straight away.
Simile	When one thing is like another.	Romeo describes Juliet as a "bright angel…as glorious to this night…as is a winged messenger…"
Metaphor	When something is describes as if it was something else.	Romeo tells Juliet "My lips, two blushing pilgrims…"
Oxymoron	When contradictory terms appear in conjunction.	Juliet says to Romeo "Parting is such sweet sorrow…"
Pun & Double entendre (like a pun but more sexual)	A joke exploiting the different possible meanings of a word	Often used to show a character's wit. Mercutio says that "dreamers often lie" (telling lies/lying down).
Motif	A recurring idea in a text.	E.g. light and dark, nature, time

5. <u>Key vocabulary: (AO1)</u>

Word	Definition
Naive	A person who lacks experience and so expect things to be easy or people to be honest or kind.
Patriarchal	A patriarchal society, family, or system is one in which the men have all or most of the power and importance.
Mysogynistic	Attitudes or actions that involve or show a strong dislike of women.
Hamartia	The character flaw which leads to the downfall of the protagonist in a tragedy.
Hubris	Pride, vanity or conceit
Dichotomy	A very great difference or opposition between two things.
Narcissistic	A person who thinks about themselves a lot and admires themselves too much.
Antithesis	The antithesis of something is its exact opposite.

6. Key characters: (AO1)

Character	Description
Romeo	• A Montague • At the beginning he is in love with Rosaline • Kills Tybalt in revenge for the death of Mercutio • Dies by drinking poison
Juliet	• A Capulet • Refuses to marry Paris and incurs her father's wrath • Let down by The Nurse • Dies by stabbing herself with Romeo's dagger
Lord Montague	• Romeo's father and in conflict with Lord Capulet • Married to Lady Montague who dies at the end from a broken heart • At the end he says he will raise a statue in pure gold for Juliet
Benvolio	• Romeo's cousin
Mercutio	• Romeo's friend, the Prince's relative • Fights, and is killed by, Tybalt
Lord Capulet	• Juliet's father and in conflict with Lord Montague • Arranges Juliet's marriage to Count Paris • At the end asks for Montague's hand (in a gesture of peace)
Tybalt	• Juliet's cousin • Fights and kills Mercutio • Fights, and is killed by Romeo
Friar Lawrence	• Kindhearted and tries to help Romeo and Juliet throughout the play • Gives Juliet the sleeping potion
The Nurse	• Nursemaid to Juliet • Delivers messages between the two young lovers

Prepared introduction for the assessment:

Shakespeare presents [key focus] to criticise **social** and **family structures** in the **Elizabethan** era. As a **humanist**, Shakespeare wanted to explore the social and individual **conflict** between **fate** and **free will**. Shakespeare crafts this through the tragic "death-marked love" of "Juliet and her Romeo".

Paired Quotations:

Pairing	Analysis
1. "A pair of star-crossed lovers take their life." (the Chorus, Prologue)	Shakespeare uses dramatic irony when, from the beginning of the play, The Chorus tells the audience that fate will ensure Romeo and Juliet's relationship is doomed.
"For never was a story of more woe / Than this of Juliet and her Romeo." (The Prince, V iii)	Similarly, the rhyming couplet, said by the Prince at the very end of the play, arouses the sympathy of the audience as it recognises their love story was destined to end in tragedy. Here Shakespeare plays to the Elizabethan audience's strong belief in fate.
2. "Here's much to do with hate, but more with love" (Romeo I i)	The juxtaposition of love and hate is introduced by Romeo as he recognises the hatred, which caused the brawl between the Capulets and Montagues, was born out of loyalty and love for each house.
"A plague on both your houses" (Mercutio III i)	Mercutio recognises that this loyalty and hatred has led to his fatal wounds and curses both families. His words foreshadow the loss that both families will soon feel.
3. "The all seeing sun / Ne'er saw her match since first the world begun." (Romeo I i)	Declaring his love for Rosaline, Romeo is playing the part of the Petrarchan lover using the elaborate language of love that was fashionable in Elizabethan times.
"But, soft, what light through yonder window breaks? It is the east, and Juliet is the sun." (Romeo II ii)	At first, it may appear that Romeo uses the same imagery with this metaphor to describe Juliet. However, Romeo is no longer using rhyming iambic pentameter, perhaps a suggestion that this love is serious.
4. Methinks I see thee now…as one dead in the bottom of a tomb. (Juliet III v)	Juliet's vision foreshadows the next time Juliet will see Romeo.
"I dreamt my lady came and found me dead…And breathed such life with kisses in my lips…" (Romeo V i)	Romeo has the same premonition, foreshadowing his death at the end of the play. Shakespeare is reinforcing to the audience what they already know from the Prologue: Romeo and Juliet are doomed to die.
5. "What dares the slave…To fleer and scorn at our solemnity?" (Tybalt I v)	Tybalt is anxious about status and maintains the family feud. He regards Romeo's presence at the masked ball as a personal affront as much as an insult to his family honour, using the word 'slave' as an insult to Romeo's status as a Montague..
"Tybalt, the reason that I have to love thee / Doth much excuse the appertaining rage" (Romeo III i)	Romeo refuses to fight Tybalt as they are now family. He contrasts Tybalts 'hate' with the word 'love', reflecting the hopes of Friar Lawrence who hoped the marriage of Romeo and Juliet would "turn your households' rancour to pure love."