Pre-Reading *Romeo and Juliet*: Performing and Analyzing the Prologue

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**Lesson Overview**
Students will perform the prologue to *Romeo and Juliet* as a pre-reading activity. Through movement and vocal work, students will work in groups to create a brief presentation of the prologue to clarify meaning, get to know the style and language of the text, and make inferences about the play's central questions.

**Time:** Two to three 45-minute class periods

**Materials:**
- Folger edition of *Romeo and Juliet*
- Handout: 15 Minute Romeo and Juliet
- *Romeo and Juliet* prologue
- *Romeo and Juliet* prologue cards

**What To Do**

**Day One**
1. Have students break up into groups of two or three. Give each group two or three numbered lines from the fifteen minute plot narrative.

2. Allow students a few minutes to practice how they might say the line with some slight movement or gesture. Each person must say at least part of the line, if not all reciting chorally.

3. Once the groups have practiced, have students stand in a circle. The leader should read the narrative, calling out each number that corresponds to a line from the play as it appears on the page. When a group's number is called, students should enter the circle and perform their line(s) as they have practiced, stepping back into their place in the circle when finished.

4. Discuss the possible themes from the play and write them on the board.
Day Two
1. Distribute copies of the prologue to students. Read it aloud and invite student questions about vocabulary and structure. Help students use context clues to determine the meanings of unfamiliar words.

2. Have each quatrain (four line chunks) of the prologue typed on cards to distribute to the students in groups. There will be one card with only two lines for the rhyming couplet.

3. Divide the students into four groups. Have students rehearse a performance of their card's lines that includes reading chorally or individually, physically expressing the words through movement and gestures, and showing the meaning of their lines of text in at least one frozen dramatic pictures (tableau).

4. After rehearsal, students should perform their part of their prologue in front of the class in sequential order.

5. Compare and contrast the contemporary plot narrative from the warm up and the prologue from the play. One strategy for this activity is to project both passages side by side on the board. Invite students to point out differences either orally or as a “chalk talk” in which students mark up the board silently before a whole-class discussion. If your students know rhetorical and literary devices, have them identify them and compare the two texts on this basis. Almost always, students reach the conclusion on their own that Shakespeare’s original language is superior in its style and richness. If you choose to take a deep dive into this activity, it alone can take up a whole class period. Afterwards, though, students are poised to close-read and appreciate the real thing, not a paraphrase.

Assessment
Possible writing prompts:
- What is the tone of the prologue? What words and phrases make you say this?
- In your opinion, which line tells us the most about the world we are about to enter? What makes you say this?
- Write a brief paragraph of the plot of the story in your own words.
- Summarize the differences between the prologue and its plot narrative paraphrase. Use evidence from both passages to support your claim.

Exit ticket: Three things I know about the play; two things I can guess will happen; one question I have.