

Grade level: 9th-10th Grade

Subject: Language Arts

Rationale:

Students will examine the use of theme in the Manga Classics adaptation of William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. Students will be asked to focus on specific illustrations in the novel and consider how the artist creates meaning within the visual medium of a graphic novel.

Instructional Duration: 3-4 hours

Objectives:

Students will:

- ✓ Read the Manga Classics graphic novel *Romeo and Juliet* and consider it as a visual adaptation of a classic piece of literature.
- ✓ Use images from the novel to answer specific essential questions.
- ✓ Understand the concept of tragedy as it pertains to a graphic novel adaptation of a classic play

Front-loaded information / understanding:

Theme - Students should be able to define and identify one or more themes from the original text. This lesson will translate that concept for the graphic novel medium.

Imagery - Students should be able to define and identify imagery in the original text. This lesson will translate that concept for the graphic novel medium.

Symbolism – Students should be able to define and identify one or more symbol from the original text. This lesson will translate that concept for the graphic novel medium.

Tragedy – Students should understand the concept of tragedy as it pertains to classic literature and, in particular, Shakespearean text. Consider the nature of the “tragic hero” and the individual components that leads to a character’s fall from a position of status, health, or power.

Manga – Many students have not been exposed to this type of reading. Prior to assigning any reading in the Manga Classic Text, instructors should cover the “How to read manga” section at the beginning of the book with their students to ensure understanding.

Instructional Strategies:

NOTE: The lessons contained below assume that students are reading the Manga Classic adaptation after having already been exposed to some or all of the original text. If you are using the graphic novel adaptation as an alternative to reading the original novel, the lessons can still be utilized with modifications.

Students should have read the original play *Romeo and Juliet* by William Shakespeare. Have them share with the class what they know about the text itself. Specific attention should be paid to how students visualize some of the more crucial moments of the play including, but not limited to, character appearance and actions, conflict, thematic elements, dialogue, and tragedy.

Activity #1 – Answering Essential Questions (Pre-Reading)

Students should be asked to recall their experiences reading Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. Instruct them to think about what parts of the novel stood out to them and why. Students should then be broken into groups of 3-4 and asked to consider how they themselves would adapt the text to a visual medium. In doing so, they will answer the following essential questions:

- ✓ *What is one major theme of the play?*
- ✓ *Which acts and scenes are the most memorable and impactful based on how the plot moves forward as a result? Choose three to consider and explain why you chose them.*
- ✓ *How would you stage the scenes that you chose from above if you were the director? How would you draw them if you were an artist tasked with adapting the play?*
- ✓ *What are your impressions of Romeo and Juliet as individuals and as a couple?*

Students will then be asked to provide three sketches (one for each scene selected). These sketches do not need to be elaborate but should stage the scene in some way (position of characters, background, and objects). Sketches should include some sort of caption that contains specific guiding information that explains how the images shape understanding of the text (2-3 sentences).

Activity #2 – The Tragic Hero

Explore the concept of the “tragic hero” with the students. Explain the characteristics that a tragic hero will often have:

- Pride/Hubris – a hero's arrogance and overconfident attitude
- Tragic flaw – the characteristic that accelerates the downfall
- The reversal of fortune – the moment where things turn bad for the hero
- The great realization – the all-too-late moment when the hero sees his/her mistakes

- The fall from grace – the suffering and loss that the hero endures
- Sympathy from others/the audience – pity from the other players in the work and/or the audience

Have students reach into the text and figure out which character or characters are considered the “tragic heroes” of the work. Have them create a list of characters (or refer to the “Cast” page at the beginning of the Manga Classics text and see how many of the above elements apply. Alternately, you could assign characters to individual groups and ask them to give them a “tragic hero” test to see if they meet the criteria.

Activity #3 – So Much Drama!

Break the class into groups and direct students to identify images in the Manga Classic text where characters are represented in a grandiose manner or engage in overly dramatic actions or histrionic encounters with others in the play. Some examples are:

Page 17 – Benvolio charging into the fray

Page 121 – Juliet’s soliloquy to Romeo presented as her floating through the flowers

Page 196-197 – Tybalt and Mercutio’s battle

Have students address the following question in regards to their chosen image:

In the image(s) your team analyzed, explain how the artwork impacts your understanding of and attitude towards the theatrical nature of drama within the Manga Classics adaptation. How does it enhance your appreciation of the story in some way seeing it represented visually? If it does not, and your group feels that the images are not effective or too over the top in some way, explain specifically why and what you might suggest to make it stronger.

Students can share their thoughts to the class as a presentation or a simple discussion.

Activity #4 – Theme Identification

There are a lot of moments where the text explores the nature of tragedy and the concept of star-crossed lovers. Select specific points in the novel where the artwork illustrates one of these themes in a particularly compelling manner. For example:

Page 5 – The introduction to the events of the play and the inevitable tragedy

Pages 12-14 – The “bite my thumb” scene which sets up the rivalry between the houses

Pages 33-38 – Romeo’s obsession with love and how devastated he is to have lost Rosaline

Page 55-57 – Juliet’s introduction

Page 70-71 – Romeo’s lovesickness and how it manifests visually

Page 87-89 – Romeo sees Juliet for the first time and immediately falls in love

Page 100 – First kiss

Pages 115-139 – Act II, Scene I, the balcony scene – this is where the two resign to defy their houses for the sake of their love

Page 167 – A love triangle

Page 186-188 – The secret marriage

Page 200-204 – Mercutio’s death at the hands of Tybalt

Page 208-209 – Romeo kills Tybalt

Page 217 – Romeo is literally outlined in the stars

Page 260-261 – Juliet’s distress

Page 285 – Foreshadowing death

Page 323 – The discovery of Juliet’s “body”

Page 329 – Juliet as an angel

Pages 318-320 – Romeo defies the stars at the news of Juliet’s “death”

Page 367-369 – Romeo dies to be with Juliet

Page 380-381 – Juliet kills herself for Romeo

Page 394 – The lovers forever young

Or any others where you feel the artwork creates a visual representation of the idea of tragedy or ill-fated love within the novel that you find particularly compelling. Have students answer the following question about the image with a short essay:

What elements of the artwork bring a strong understanding of the concept of the star-crossed lovers within the Manga Classics adaptation on the page that play’s dialogue and stage direction alone could not?

Final Assessment:

So many other works of popular culture have been inspired by the concept of the star-crossed lovers explored in *Romeo and Juliet*. Have students choose a recent example (how recently is up to the teacher to decide) and compare the elements of tragedy in the play to the outside work. Students will then present their findings to the class via the preferred method of the teacher (analogue/digital/video). This presentation should include specific plot beats as well as direct character connections and thematic similarities. Some examples of modern texts could be *West Side Story*, *High School Musical*, *Romeo x Juliet* (anime), *Disney’s Aladdin*, *Gnomeo and Juliet*, or any other story where young lovers are kept apart by powerful outside forces.

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