

Reaching the higher grades in your *Romeo and Juliet* essay

Grades above level 7 don't come easily! Use the following advice and examples to help elevate your own answers. These essay paragraphs are not perfect, but give you a flavour of how to develop your own ideas.

Explore how Romeo and Juliet are presented as a couple in love in Act 1 Scene 5.

1. Make perceptive and thoughtful points (not just obvious ones) ...

Shakespeare's use of celestial imagery in Romeo's 'vow' to the 'blessed moon' likens Romeo and Juliet's love to the gravitational force between the earth and the moon, showing that fate is pulling them together and creating the instant love between them.

2. Embed quotations effectively into your points (sounds sophisticated, and will save you time) ...

Shakespeare presents Romeo as deeply in love with Juliet, describing her as a 'holy shrine', himself a 'pilgrim' journeying to touch her 'palm'.

3. As well as exploring language, consider how Shakespeare's use of structure is significant ...

Shakespeare depicts Juliet as mirroring Romeo's use of religious imagery, continuing his extended metaphor. This proves that Juliet is interested and, despite appearing to play 'hard to get', (although this could be more to do with the expectation of women at the time to be meek and obedient) by mimicking Romeo's metaphorical language use we are shown the immediate connection between them. This is then further reinforced through the sonnet form when the two first converse. With its regular meter and rhyme scheme, this helps to portray a real sense of unity, bond and, ultimately, love.

4. And finally, try to think outside of the box and be metaphorical in your own language use ...

In order to show that Juliet reciprocates Romeo's love, Shakespeare presents her as mirroring Romeo's language use. Whilst he begins by referring to his lips as 'two blushing pilgrims, ready to stand', she quickly responds with 'Good pilgrim, you do wrong your hand too much'. In both cases, the use of the noun 'pilgrim' implies that Romeo believes he has been on a journey and has now found what he was looking for. Furthermore, the repetitive language use works alongside the regularity of the sonnet structure to show the immediate connection between the two lovers.

5. Write in a sophisticated style with a wide range of vocabulary ...

By addressing Juliet as a 'saint', Romeo is elevating Juliet to the level of a holy figure, placing her above Romeo himself. Because of the great religious devotion of many Elizabethans, Juliet is being positioned on a pedestal and presented as being almost untouchable. This could also serve to make their love appear divine, and thus pure and true, due to it being immediately presented as synonymous with religion.

6. Offer alternative interpretations and differing viewpoints ...

However, Shakespeare also shows that Romeo's love is fickle and that when he first sees Juliet, he bases his feelings purely on her appearance. He conveys this through a semantic field of beauty and wealth, for example 'a rich jewel' and 'too rich for use, for earth too dear'. Could Shakespeare be suggesting that Romeo and Juliet are a couple in lust rather than love and that their connection is purely a superficial one? And let's not forget that Romeo appeared to be deeply in love with Rosaline at the start of the play, a love that he quickly dismisses and questions on first laying eyes on Juliet: 'I never saw true beauty until this night'. Friar Lawrence's later words are perhaps true in Romeo's case: 'Young men's love then lies, not truly in their hearts but in their eyes' and could be reinforcing the naivety of young love.

7. And finally, try to think outside of the box and be metaphorical in your own language use ...

Romeo, it could be argued, is blinded by love and, therefore, fails to see the fatal flaws and dangers that his relationship with Juliet could bring. Shakespeare suggests this idea through a semantic field of light which Romeo uses to describe his attraction to Juliet. By stating that Juliet 'is the sun' and 'teaches the torches to burn bright', Romeo could be saying how much she has brightened up his life and led him to love like a torch in the night, or a guiding light for a travelling 'pilgrim'. However, it should not be ignored that these metaphors can also be interpreted negatively and present how much Romeo has been seduced by Juliet's beauty, or perhaps even merely by the promise of a reciprocated love. He could be blinded by the love he thinks he feels for Juliet and therefore fails to see the reality he is warned about by Friar Lawrence ('wisely and slow') and Mercutio ('dreamers often lie').

