

Phone: (02) 8007 6824

Email: info@dc.edu.au

Web: dc.edu.au

2018 HIGHER SCHOOL CERTIFICATE
COURSE MATERIALS

Preliminary English Advanced

Module A: Comparative Study

Term I – Week I

Exploring Connections

William Shakespeare's

Romeo and Juliet

&

Robert Wise and Jerome

Robbins'

West Side Story

Texts in Time

Wilfred Owen's

World War 1 Poetry

&

Joseph Heller's

Catch 22

Name

Class day and time

Teacher name

Term 1 – Week 1 – Theory

EXPLANATION OF THE SYLLABUS REQUIREMENTS FOR MODULE A

The Board of Studies has set specific requirements for Module A. There are key terms that need to be understood to ensure that you know precisely what is required of you in a comparative study. Before we define these terms it is also important to consider why we would compare texts from different eras in the first place.

Why do we compare texts?

Comparison is a basic procedure and analysis. In this instance, it presents two texts and describes and analyses their similarities and differences.

Comparison usually makes us see the texts under discussion more clearly and in a new light. When writing a comparison, you will not only explain the similarities and differences between the works but also explain the significance of your comparison. This process intends to inform readers of something they haven't thought of before. Therefore, for a comparison to be illuminating, the texts compared must either appear different but have significant similarities or appear similar but have significant differences.

You must have a purpose for your comparison. A comparison is controlled by the **ground** of the comparison; i.e. the basis for comparing the texts. The basis, or ground, must be significant. Some common grounds of comparison are **plot, character, setting, theme, values, and context**.

The lessons in this module will provide you with the appropriate skills to complete a successful extended response based on a comparative analysis.

INTERPRETATION OF KEY TERMS

This module requires you to **compare** texts in order to explore them in relation to their **contexts**. It develops your understanding of the effects of context and questions of **value**.

What are you attempting to do when **comparing** texts?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

What is the meaning of **context**?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

What is the meaning of the term **value** in relation to a text?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....



You will examine ways in which **social, cultural** and **historical context** influences aspects of texts, or the ways in which **changes in context** lead to **changed values** being reflected in texts. This includes study and use of the **language** of texts, consideration of purposes and audiences, and analysis of the content, values and attitudes conveyed through a range of readings.

What might influence the composition of a text?

.....

.....

.....

.....

How are **context** and **values** linked in the composition of a text?

.....

.....

.....

.....

Give a reason why a society's **values** might change?

.....

.....

.....

.....

How do texts represent **values** in their composition?

.....

.....

.....

.....



You will develop a **range** of imaginative, interpretive and analytical compositions that relate to the comparative study of texts and context. These compositions may be realised in a variety of forms and media.

It is important to realise that the responses in the preliminary and HSC course will not always be **essays**.

The text types you may be asked to do include:

- Interview
- Feature article
- Speech
- Letter
- Journal/Diary Entry
- Report
- Conversation between academics or composers
- Panel Discussion

You would be familiar with most of these text types but it is important to respond to a number of questions in these different formats.

In composing your responses you will need to be constantly aware of the importance of **context** and **values** in relation to the texts. You will have noted that when contexts change so do the values and these will often be reflected in the composition of texts.

Understanding the context in which a text was produced often leads to a deeper understanding of the work itself and a better means of comparison; for instance, understanding the social, cultural and historical forces at play in Shakespeare's Elizabethan Period can provide a greater insight into the tragic world of the characters in *Romeo and Juliet*. It is then possible to compare the values and ideas of the texts in a far more sophisticated manner.

FOCUS FOR THE COMPARATIVE STUDY: TEXTS IN TIME & EXPLORING CONNECTIONS

There are two possible approaches to the comparative study. Your school will select **one** of these for your HSC year. We will consider both approaches in our lessons to give you a greater appreciation of the course.

Texts in Time will include a comparative study of Wilfred Owen's war poetry with extracts from Joseph Heller's novel *Catch 22*, while *Exploring Connections* will focus on Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* and the film *West Side Story*.

The approaches to be taken are very similar in nature, requiring you to compare the **context, themes, values and form** of the respective texts. The major difference between the approaches is that *Exploring Connections* will have more explicit relationships between the texts. You would notice that *West Side Story* is an appropriation of *Romeo and Juliet*, drawing on similar content and themes, despite the divergent contexts. Connections between the texts can come in many forms. They could be a direct reference to the other text or an indirect reference or allusion. You may find similarities in **plot, character, purpose** and **theme** but the **context** may provide a different opinion or perspective. The structure and techniques of the texts could also be used to establish a connection.

Texts in Time requires a similar approach but the connections between the texts are not necessarily as explicit, any similarities being more to do with thematic concerns.

Therefore, the **purpose** of the comparative study is to:

- **Compare** and contrast two texts that are separated in time and context, but are connected in terms of theme and/or content
- **To identify** the similarities and differences between the texts in order to explore the changes in context and values

The following guidelines will help achieve a thorough understanding of the module:

- Identify the respective contexts (literary, biographical, cultural, historical, etc) of the texts
- Explore the values represented in a number of key extracts from both the texts
- Identify common and disparate elements between the texts
- Identify and explain the changes in context and values between the texts

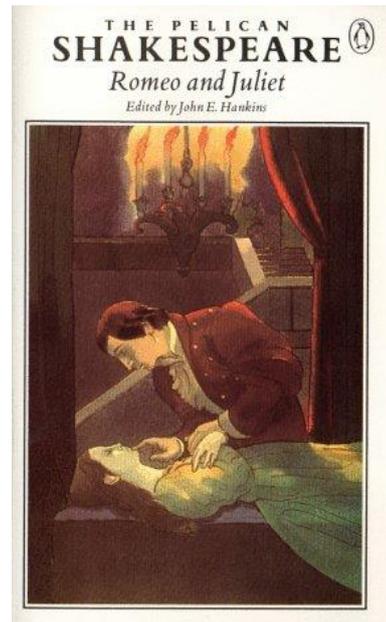
Note: The most important aspect of the study is your knowledge of the texts in terms of their **themes** and **means of production**. Your study should focus on the themes and how they are represented in the texts, which then allows you to consider the wider context that may have influenced the compositions. Markers will always look for a close analysis of the texts that illustrate your depth of understanding. In other words, avoid general statements that merely retell events or show a limited appreciation of the main ideas expressed by the composers.

LOOKING AT CONTEXT IN MORE DEPTH

We will now consider the idea of **context** in greater depth by utilising two texts from different periods. *Romeo and Juliet* was composed in the 16th century while the film *West Side Story* in the 1960s. The film is an **appropriation**¹ of the play and therefore the texts share many connections, but of course they can be enjoyed and analysed on their own. Keep in mind that a text reflects the ideological beliefs of the culture or sub-culture that produced it and helps to shape the ideology of the future. To understand the significance of context on a text's composition we will now explore a number of extracts in regard to the play and the film.

ROMEO AND JULIET

The **context** of *Romeo and Juliet* can be examined from a number of perspectives. An obvious starting point would be to research the literary background to the play as well as relevant historical, cultural and social aspects of the Elizabethan era. This will give some insight as to why Shakespeare wrote the play and what impact it may have had on his audience. By researching these contexts, particular **values** of the period become evident, some of which may be witnessed in the play. These values can then be compared to those found in the research of the other text (*West Side Story*) as well as in our own context. In this way it is possible to explore how two texts composed in different times and contexts connect but may also reflect changing values and perspectives.



LITERARY BACKGROUND

Romeo and Juliet is a tragedy written early in the career of playwright William Shakespeare about two young "star-cross'd lovers" whose deaths ultimately unite their feuding families. It was among Shakespeare's most popular plays during his lifetime and, along with *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*, is one of his most frequently performed plays. Today, the title characters are regarded as archetypal young lovers.

¹ To appropriate is to borrow. Appropriation is the practice of re-contextualizing or remaking or altering pre-existing "information". This "information" can be historical or contemporary art, media or advertising images, video footage from art or popular culture, audio work or music, to name a few. This provocative act of taking possession challenges the modernist reverence for originality.

Romeo and Juliet belongs to a tradition of tragic romances stretching back to antiquity. Its plot is based on an Italian tale, translated into verse as *The Tragical History of Romeus and Juliet* by Arthur Brooke in 1562, and retold in prose in *Palace of Pleasure* by William Painter in 1582. Shakespeare borrowed heavily from both but, to expand the plot, developed supporting characters, particularly Mercutio and Paris. Believed written between 1591 and 1595, the play was first published in a quarto version in 1597. This text was of poor quality, and later editions corrected it, bringing it more in line with Shakespeare's original.

Shakespeare's use of dramatic structure, especially effects such as switching between comedy and tragedy to heighten tension, his expansion of minor characters, and his use of sub-plots to embellish the story, has been praised as an early sign of his dramatic skill. The play ascribes different poetic forms to different characters, sometimes changing the form as the character develops. Romeo, for example, grows more adept at the sonnet² over the course of the play.

Romeo and Juliet has been adapted numerous times for stage, film, musical and opera. During the Restoration it was revived and heavily revised by William Davenant. David Garrick's 18th-century version also modified several scenes, removing material then considered indecent, and George Benda's operatic adaptation omitted much of the action and added a happy ending. Performances in the 19th century, including Charlotte Cushman's, restored the original text, and focused on greater realism. John Gielgud's 1935 version kept very close to Shakespeare's text, and used Elizabethan costumes and staging to enhance the drama. In the 20th century the play has been adapted in versions as diverse as MGM's comparatively faithful 1936 film, the 1950s stage musical *West Side Story*, and 1996's MTV-inspired *Romeo + Juliet*.

HISTORICAL, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT

Shakespeare's work is a product of **Elizabethan England**. This was a period generally regarded as a time of stability and peace, beginning with Elizabeth 1's coronation in 1588. It followed a turbulent period with the War of the Roses and religious conflict that saw England split from the Roman Catholic Church. The period witnessed the emergence of a middle class in merchants, trade and building however; the feudal system of farming was still a prominent characteristic of the gap between the wealthy and the poor. The Renaissance Period also ushered in more liberal and secular ideas that began to challenge social and cultural values, but people still held to the belief in the Divine Right of Kings as a source of world order. Such philosophical speculation found a voice in the rising popularity in the theatre that became a legitimate commercial enterprise, tempered by its need to be socially responsible in terms of a Christian ethos and allegiance to the monarch. An Elizabethan audience would have been particularly intrigued by Shakespeare's observations in *Romeo and Juliet* on such concerns as fate, young love, marriage, friendship, feuding families, civil unrest, religious conflict and tragedy.

² A verse form containing fourteen lines, in English usually iambic pentameter, developed in Italy in the early 13th century as a form of love poetry.

In *Romeo and Juliet* Shakespeare challenges many of the social and cultural values of his period by using Verona as the major setting for the play. It is located in northern Italy near the border, somewhat east of Venice. During the fourteenth century, Verona was a thriving trade city that was extremely successful, but violence was not uncommon. The reasons for that violence are cited below:

The Roman Empire maintained control of Italy through 400 AD, when it split into two distinct halves. The governmental faction established its capital in Constantinople and regarded the emperor as its supreme authority. The spiritual faction (often called 'Christendom') centred in Rome and was ruled by the pope.

By the fourteenth century, the division between supporters of the emperor and supporters of the pope was firmly established. As in other Italian city-states, a fierce rivalry existed in Verona between the two sides.

They fought deadly battles over the most petty of differences: blood was spilled over such trivial issues as the proper method of eating garlic and the viability of wearing a feather on the left rather than the right side of the cap.

Even though Shakespeare never went to Verona, he was still able to use some of its cultural details to make it relevant to the England he knew. One major example of this is the feuding families. Elizabethan audiences were particularly interested in the notion of revenge. Private revenge acts were understood at that time to be actions taken by an individual in response to a wrong committed on themselves or their family group. This aspect is central to the conflict witnessed in *Romeo and Juliet*. Often these blood feuds would be settled by a duel or other violent retributive action. The old concept of the family blood feud harked back to a past where smaller self-governing units controlled local power. Under the Tudor monarchs, the move towards a more centralised understanding of power under a monarchy was developed. In this conception, the idea of the monarch as divinely appointed was established, and so too her earthly governing bodies. In this context, private revenge actions as linked to concepts of blood feud would be seen as deeply disruptive. Quite apart from the threats to public order presented by an individual seeking justice for themselves, such actions presented both a theoretical and a literal challenge to Elizabeth 1's legislative bodies. In this way, the play is an examination of vendetta and collective violence, and conflicting views on medieval and Renaissance thought.

An Elizabethan audience would have acknowledged the fact that Romeo and Juliet operate in a decidedly Catholic society, while they (and Shakespeare) lived in a Protestant one. Since Henry V111's decision to break with Rome and establish the English monarch as head of the Church of England (1533), England had faced external threats from the Holy Roman Empire. Mary 1 had reunited with Rome during her brief reign (1533-1558) and married the Spaniard Philip 11 (1554), which did not prove popular with the people. Elizabeth 1 on acceding to the throne faced pressure to maintain a peace, both internally and externally, and so protect the English throne. The play would have raised discussion about religion and the different perceptions of love in the East and West.

Shakespeare also displays an understanding of the Elizabethan curiosity in the supernatural with numerous references to the ideas of fate and destiny. Throughout *Romeo and Juliet*, references are made to supernatural forces at work, and suggestions are continually put forward that Fate is inextricably linked to the stars. Shakespeare was clearly aware of Italian custom in regard to astrology. The power of the stars in determining the Fate of the characters can be found numerous times in the play. An Elizabethan audience would have had a deep curiosity in anything mystical.

Another consideration is the way in which the text reflects or distorts the gender expectations of Elizabethan society. Gender roles are subverted, as Shakespeare presents an active, almost masculine Juliet against a weak, effeminate Romeo. The law is subverted by a love that brings about a destabilisation of domestic order, thus leading to a world where contraries are reconciled. Shakespeare seems to have delighted in delineating the ravages of misrule, of the hurly-burly of love and desire, in a traditional aristocratic society dominated by custom, patriarchy, and well-established wealth. The tale is not limited to orchestrating the coming of age in Verona or the various rites of passage for young men and women, but it also serves to turn the world upside down, to subvert its rigid hierarchies. United through the subversive power of love, the rebellious lovers cause a temporary suspension of social rules and political authority, one that leads to a radical questioning of traditional patriarchal order.

In particular, Shakespeare questions the role of women who were expected to marry young, obey their husband and be loyal to him, and bear children, especially heirs. Like a young woman of her time, Juliet has a father who arranges the marriage to a young man of family and wealth. While other girls do not marry young because they must work for their families, fourteen is the normal age at which wealthy women are married. And, the father, like Lord Capulet, makes arrangements with a suitable young man, one who has a reputable name, position, and property. A dowry is paid to the new husband when the young couple are married. Juliet reflects the renaissance person in her character. She won't accept the status quo of her life's situation. Renaissance people are dramatic and impulsive, and Juliet is prepared to rebel against a patriarchal world that deems her inferior. To explore this idea more you should look at whether the theme of suppressing powerful or dominant women was a pre-occupation of literature when ROMEO AND JULIET was being written and acted. In fact Shakespeare's plays often explored this theme, and in more than one play he presented his audiences with strong willed women who are ultimately subdued by force or circumstance. One can only imagine that these plays polarised the audience with some feeling sympathy for the strong women and some feeling sympathy for the men struggling for dominance - ROMEO AND JULIET suggests that both positions were ideologically available.

QUESTIONS ON CONTEXT

1. What sources did Shakespeare use to create Romeo and Juliet?

.....

.....

.....

.....

2. What particular features of the play illustrated Shakespeare's dramatic skill?

.....

.....

.....

.....

3. What were the major characteristics of the Renaissance Period?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

4. What values of Elizabethan culture and society does Shakespeare observe or challenge in Romeo and Juliet?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

5. List some of the theatrical elements of the play that would have engaged an Elizabethan audience.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....



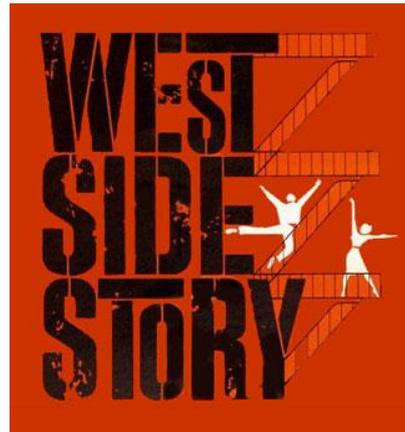
WEST SIDE STORY

In many respects the **context** of *West Side Story* is very different to *Romeo and Juliet*, but the composers of both texts represent similar ideas on various aspects of the human condition. Each text is a product of its context and the observations they make on human behaviour clearly reflect the world of the text and the composer. The following contextual discussion will provide you with a background to *West Side Story*, particularly the creation of the musical that inspired the film.

HISTORICAL, CULTURAL AND SOCIAL BACKGROUND

Puerto Rico is a large island in the Caribbean approximately 3,435 square miles in size. Columbus discovered it in 1493 and its people are of mixed Spanish and African descent, with the Spanish influence predominating. It was acquired by the United States after the Spanish American War. In 1952 Puerto Rico became a self-governing Commonwealth associated with the United States. Puerto Ricans are U.S. citizens but pay no federal taxes and may not vote in federal elections. Puerto Rico is not wealthy and unemployment is an endemic problem. After the Second World War, many Puerto Ricans emigrated to the U.S., especially to New York, looking for better opportunities. One of the rival gangs featured in the film (the Sharks) are a group of Puerto Ricans.

Between 1941 and 1956, more than 500,000 Puerto Ricans moved to major cities in the U.S. such as New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, and Cleveland. The majority of them lived in destitute regions of their city. Puerto Rican gangs formed so that they could protect themselves from prejudiced Americans. Many people took advantage of the immigrants' poor social status, as shown in *West Side Story*. For instance, Bernardo says, "Chino makes half what the Polack makes - the Polack is American!" (*West Side Story*) This illustrates how playwright Jerome Robbins integrated the then current tribulations of society into *West Side Story*.



This play also shows examples of Shakespeare's writing élan; using universal truths in the equivalent manner that Shakespeare used them in *Romeo and Juliet*. Shakespeare's play and *West Side Story* have countless similarities and differences, but one factor remains unremitting in both of them, each use universal truths to relate to their audiences. These universal truths and brilliant incorporation of contemporary events are what made these two narratives so successful.

West Side Story is a 1961 American musical film directed by Robert Wise and Jerome Robbins. It is an adaptation of the Broadway musical of the same name, which itself was adapted from Shakespeare's play *Romeo and Juliet*. It stars Natalie Wood, Richard Beymer, Russ Tamblyn, Rita Moreno, George Chakiris, and it was photographed by Daniel L. Fapp A.S.C., in Super Panavision 70.

The film had its genesis in 1949 when Jerome Robbins approached Leonard Bernstein and Arthur Laurents about collaborating on a contemporary musical adaptation of Romeo and Juliet. He proposed that the plot focus on the conflict between an Italian American Roman Catholic family and a Jewish family living on the Lower East Side of Manhattan, during the Easter–Passover season. The girl has survived the Holocaust and immigrated from Israel; the conflict was to be centred around anti-Semitism of the Catholic "Jets" towards the Jewish "Emeralds" (a name that made its way into the script as a reference). Eager to write his first musical, Laurents immediately agreed. Bernstein wanted to present the material in operatic form, but Robbins and Laurents resisted the suggestion. They described the project as "lyric theatre," and Laurents wrote a first draft he called East Side Story. Only after he completed it did the group realise it was little more than a musicalisation of themes that had already been covered in plays like Abie's Irish Rose. When he opted to drop out, the three men went their separate ways, and the piece was shelved for almost five years.

In 1955, theatrical producer Martin Gabel was working on a stage adaptation of the James M. Cain novel *Serenade*, about an opera singer who comes to the realisation he is homosexual, and he invited Laurents to write the book. Laurents accepted and suggested Bernstein and Robbins join the creative team. Robbins felt if the three were going to join forces, they should return to East Side Story, and Bernstein agreed. Laurents, however, was committed to Gabel, who introduced him to the young composer/lyricist Stephen Sondheim. Sondheim auditioned by playing the score for *Saturday Night*, his musical that was scheduled to open soon. Laurents liked the lyrics but wasn't impressed with the music. Sondheim didn't care for Laurents' opinion. *Serenade* ultimately was shelved.

Laurents was soon hired to write the screenplay for a remake of the 1934 Greta Garbo film *The Painted Veil* for Ava Gardner. While in Hollywood, he contacted Bernstein, who was in town conducting at the Hollywood Bowl. The two met at the Beverly Hills Hotel, and the conversation turned to juvenile delinquent gangs, a fairly recent social phenomenon that had received major coverage on the front pages of the morning newspapers due to a Chicano turf war. Bernstein suggested they rework East Side Story and set it in Los Angeles, but Laurents felt he was more familiar with Puerto Ricans and Harlem than he was with Mexican Americans and Olvera Street. The two contacted Robbins, who was enthusiastic about a musical with a Latin beat. He arrived in Hollywood to choreograph the dance sequences for *The King and I*, and he and Laurents began developing the musical while working on their respective projects, keeping in touch with Bernstein, who had returned to New York. When the producer of *The Painted Veil* replaced Gardner with Eleanor Parker and asked Laurents to revise his script with her in mind, he backed out of the film, freeing him to devote all his time to the stage musical.

Of all the contributions of American culture to the arts, the Broadway musical is one of the most significant. Its predecessor, the European operetta (a play with spoken dialogue but abundant singing in operatic style), typically featured exotic settings, aristocratic characters, and wildly improbable plots. Although the musical's roots were in England, it quickly evolved in the hands of such geniuses as Irving Berlin, Jerome Kern, Richard Rogers and Lorenz Hart and the incomparable George and Ira Gershwin into a distinctively American form featuring popular songs, many of which were to become "standards," still widely performed and loved today.

Leonard Bernstein took the musical to new heights of seriousness in his 1957 production, *West Side Story*, based loosely on Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. Its true subject was the growing menace of gang warfare (or "juvenile delinquency" as it was known then) in the context of racial tensions created by clashes between whites and Puerto Rican immigrants. Consciousness of racism was very much on the rise in the U.S. of the late fifties; and Bernstein, a life-long liberal, wanted to portray the issue in an uncompromising fashion. The subject is treated in a fairly complex fashion. "I Want to Live in America," a song from the musical, expresses the ambiguous feelings of the immigrants about their homeland while forthrightly condemning American white racism. Some people feel this number reinforces stereotypes about Latinos, and the musical has been the target of protests in some areas on those grounds. The 1950s marked a new phenomenon: a youth culture largely independent of adult influence. In Shakespeare's day the Prince could stand for the sanctioned authority of the state (in his case, Queen Elizabeth, who detested duelling). The end of the play resolves the conflict by reimposing traditional authority. But Sondheim, Bernstein, and the rest identified more with the developing youth culture in its rebellion against adult society. You will notice how parents are kept offstage, with only one good but powerless adult, Doc, anywhere to be seen. The recreation centre leader is a clueless idiot and the cops are corrupt racist thugs. In the world of *West Side Story* hope for the future can reside only in the next generation. It can't end like Shakespeare's play because its creators don't share his values. The conclusion is meant to place responsibility for ending the conflict squarely in the laps of its young viewers.

The film's action is largely in Los Angeles on sets designed by Boris Leven, although its opening sequence was shot on the streets of New York City, mainly in the area where the Lincoln Centre for the Performing Arts campus of Fordham University now stands. Veteran director Robert Wise was chosen as the director and producer because of his familiarity with urban New York dramas, such as *Odds Against Tomorrow*. Wise had never directed a musical before and when it was suggested that Jerome Robbins, who had directed the stage version, be brought in to handle all the music and dance sequences in the film, Wise agreed. However, the gentlemanly Wise and the abrasive Robbins repeatedly clashed and by the first day of shooting, they weren't speaking. After the New York location scenes were shot, the Mirisch Company became concerned that the production was over-budget and Robbins was fired. His final contribution before leaving the film was to write the staging for the rumble. The remaining dance numbers were handled by Robbins' assistants. But because of his creative input in the planning stages, Wise insisted Robbins be given co-directing credit, even though Wise directed the majority of the film himself.

The film was released on October 18, 1961, through United Artists. It received praise from critics and the public, and became the second highest-grossing film of the year in the United States. The film won ten Academy Awards in its eleven nominated categories, including Best Picture, as well as a special award for Robbins. The film holds the distinction of being the musical film with the most Academy Award wins (10 wins), including Best Picture. The soundtrack album made more money than any other album before it.

QUESTIONS ON CONTEXT

1. What cultural and social aspects of 1950s America inspired the Broadway musical?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

2. What was proposed as the original conflict for the musical? Why did this change?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

3. What social and cultural values does the film (and musical) challenge or represent at the time of its creation?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

4. What elements of the film would have engaged a contemporary audience?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....



Term 1 – Week 1 – Homework

Read the following plot summaries of *Romeo and Juliet* and *West Side Story*. It is most important to have a sound understanding of the major events in the texts so that you can draw appropriate connections. After reading the outlines you should be able to complete the comparative chart that illustrates some of the significant parallels (in terms of plot) between the texts. Some have been done for you.

PLOT SUMMARY – ROMEO AND JULIET

The play opens with the servants of the Montague and Capulet families quarrelling and fighting in the streets of Verona, Italy. Prince Escalus warns the feuding families under penalty of death. The two families have been enemies for as long as anyone can remember. Romeo, son of Lord Montague, accidentally finds out about a ball given by Lord Capulet and plans to attend uninvited. Romeo and his friends Mercutio and Benvolio put on masks and attend the ball, where Romeo meets the beautiful Juliet and falls instantly in love. Later that night Romeo goes to Juliet's balcony, and they exchange vows of love. Romeo enlists the help of Friar Lawrence, who agrees to marry the young lovers in hope of ending the long-standing feud between the two families.

Romeo returns from his wedding and finds that his friend Mercutio is engaged in combat with Tybalt, a member of the Capulet family. Tybalt kills Mercutio. Romeo, enraged over his friend's death, then slays Tybalt. Romeo immediately realises that he has murdered his wife's cousin and flees to Friar Lawrence for help. He also learns that the Prince has banned him from the city under penalty of death if he is found within its borders. Friar Lawrence arranges for Romeo to spend one last night with Juliet before he flees to Mantua.

In the meantime, Lord Capulet, unaware that Juliet is married to Romeo, has promised her hand in marriage to Paris. When Juliet is told of the arranged marriage, she is desperate and seeks the help of Friar Lawrence, who gives her a vial of sleeping potion. The potion will have a death-like but temporary effect. The plan is for Juliet to take the potion, appear to be dead, and be laid out in the family vault. Romeo will come to the vault the next night and be there waiting when she awakens. The couple will then flee to Mantua to live. Friar Lawrence sends the important message to Romeo telling him of his plan to help Juliet, but the message never reaches Romeo. Juliet, assured by Friar Lawrence that Romeo will be waiting for her when she awakens in the tomb, goes home and drinks the potion.

Hearing that Juliet is dead, Romeo purchases poison from a poor apothecary and rushes to her tomb. Upon his arrival, he finds Paris, also in mourning. Thinking that Romeo has come to rob the tomb, Paris fights with Romeo. Romeo kills Paris, enters into the tomb, and buries Paris there. He then bids farewell to Juliet and takes the poison. Awakening from her death-like sleep, Juliet discovers her dead lover and kills herself with Romeo's dagger. Friar Lawrence arrives too late to save the lovers and tells the Prince the entire story. The Montagues and Capulets promise to end their hostilities, which have caused the deaths of their only children.

PLOT SUMMARY – WEST SIDE STORY

The film opens in the streets of Manhattan in the late summer of 1957. There is a mounting tension set to music ("Prologue") between a white American gang, the Jets, led by Riff (Russ Tamblyn), and a rival gang of Puerto Rican immigrants, the Sharks, led by Bernardo (George Chakiris). The Jets harass the Sharks and vice versa, culminating in a free-for-all on the playground. Soon, Lieutenant Schrank (Simon Oakland) and Officer Krupke (William Bramley) arrive and break up the melee. Schrank orders the Sharks off the playground and the Jets "to make nice with them Puerto Ricans" or there'll be a price to pay. Once Schrank and Krupke are gone, the Jets discuss challenging the Sharks to an all out rumble that will decide who gets control of the streets. They will deliver the challenge to the Sharks at a dance later that night. Riff decides that his best friend Tony (Richard Beymer), a co-founder of the Jets who has left the gang to work at a local candy/drug store, would be the best member to present the challenge to the Sharks because he always came through for the Jets ("Jet Song").

Riff visits Tony at the store and asks him to come to the dance, but Tony is not interested. He tells Riff that he senses something very important is about to happen to him. After a little cajoling from Riff, Tony changes his mind and agrees to meet him and the Jets at the dance. Perhaps it will be there that Tony will discover that "something" ("Something's Coming").

Bernardo arrives to take Maria (Natalie Wood) and Anita (Rita Moreno) to the dance. At the dance which is held at the gym, the Jets, Sharks and girls are greatly enjoying themselves ("Dance At The Gym"). The host of the dance, Glad Hand (John Astin), tries to get the members of the rival gangs to dance together. Even so, the rival gang members and their girlfriends remain apart. During a mambo, Tony and Maria see each other, become infatuated, almost going into a trance-like state and begin to dance, oblivious of the rivalry between their ethnic groups. They eventually kiss, but Bernardo angrily interrupts them. He orders Maria home and tells Tony to stay away from his sister. It's at this point where Riff proposes a "war council" with Bernardo, who agrees to meet at Doc's drug store after the dance. Tony leaves in a happy daze, singing of his newfound love. ("Maria").

Maria is sent home, and Anita argues with Bernardo that they are in America, not Puerto Rico. At the Sharks' apartment building, Anita along with other girls from Puerto Rico engage in a spirited argument with Bernardo in defense of Maria's right to dance with whomever she pleases. They debate the advantages and disadvantages of their country in the lively number "America". Eventually the girls and the men disperse as Bernardo and his gang go to the war council.

Tony discreetly visits Maria outside the fire escape at her home and they confirm their love ("Tonight"). They arrange to meet the next day at the bridal shop where Maria works. Meanwhile, the Jets gather outside of Doc's store to wait for the Sharks. They are visited by Officer Krupke, who warns them not to cause trouble on his beat. After he leaves, they lampoon him and the various theories of how to deal with juvenile delinquency ("Gee, Officer Krupke"). Doc (Ned Glass) is about to close the store, but the Jets convince him to stay open. The Sharks finally arrive and the "war council" begins. In the middle of this, Tony arrives and calls them chickens for having to fight with weapons. He demands that they have a fair one-on-one fist fight instead of an all-out rumble. The gang leaders agree, with Bernardo representing the Sharks and Ice (Tucker Smith) representing the Jets (much to Bernardo's disappointment, as he was hoping to face Tony). They are soon alerted of Lieutenant Schrank's arrival, thus the gangs quickly intermix together and feign happiness and fun. Schrank pretends that it is a good thing that they are getting along and he might even get a promotion, but he knows what they are up to. Schrank orders the Puerto Ricans out (while they whistle "My Country, 'Tis of Thee") then asks the Jets where the rumble is taking place, angering several members (especially Action) while doing so. Soon, the Jets disperse and Schrank leaves as well, leaving Tony and Doc alone in the store to clean up. Tony, who is in a good mood, surprises Doc and tells him about his love Maria. The day comes to an end as a distressed Doc closes the store and Tony leaves.

The next day at Madam Lucia's bridal shop, Maria sings to her coworkers about how happy and excited she is ("I Feel Pretty"). After everyone except Maria and Anita leaves, Anita accidentally tells Maria about the impending rumble. Anita tells Maria to go home, but Maria insists that she wants to close the store by herself because she "had work to do". Suddenly Tony arrives to see Maria, leaving Anita in shock. Tony tells Anita of his and Maria's love, and Anita mocks Maria. Although Anita is initially shocked to see that Maria and Tony are having a romance, she shows some tolerance but worries about the consequences if Bernardo were to find out. Anita, who is also Maria's roommate, leaves to prepare for a planned date with Bernardo after the rumble. Maria pleads with Tony to prevent the rumble altogether, even if it is only a fist fight, and Tony promises to do so. Then Tony and Maria, using clothes in the bridal shop, fantasise about their wedding ("One Hand, One Heart"). They use the headless mannequins as their parents, best man (Riff) and Maid of Honor (Anita). They exchange wedding vows and kiss.

A musical montage ("Quintet") intertwines the feelings of the Jets and Sharks in anticipation of the rumble, Tony and Maria's anticipation of meeting each other, and Anita preparing for her date with Bernardo.

The Jets and Sharks arrive at their agreed destination for the rumble, a fenced dead-end under a stretch of New York highway. As the "fair fight" begins between Bernardo and Ice, Tony arrives and tries to stop it, but is met with ridicule and mockery from Bernardo and the Sharks. Unable to stand by and watch his best friend be humiliated, Riff angrily lashes out and punches Bernardo ("The Rumble"). Drawing their knives, Riff and Bernardo fight each other. Once Riff gets the upper hand, Tony stops him. However, Riff breaks away and runs straight in Bernardo's knife. Riff collapses while handing the knife to Tony and Bernardo looks shocked at what he has done. Enraged, Tony kills Bernardo with Riff's knife, resulting in a full-fledged melee. Suddenly, police sirens blare out and the gang members flee, leaving behind the bodies of Riff and Bernardo.

Blissfully unaware of what has happened, Maria is waiting for Tony on the roof of her apartment building. One of the Sharks, Chino (Jose DeVega), who is aware of Tony's love for Maria, arrives and angrily tells her that Tony killed her brother. Tony arrives, and initially Maria lashes out at him in anger, but Tony explains what happened and asks for her forgiveness before turning himself in to the police. Maria decides that she still loves Tony and begs him to stay with her. They reaffirm their love ("Somewhere") and kiss.

Meanwhile, the Jets (with Ice now in command and joined by the Jet girls) have reassembled outside a garage. Action demands revenge for Riff's death, but Baby John opposes it. Action yells at Baby John for being scared, then tensions flare amongst several Jets. Ice pulls them all into the garage and tells them they will have their revenge on the Sharks, but must do it carefully ("Cool"). Anybodys (Susan Oakes), a tomboy who is desperate to join the Jets, arrives after infiltrating the Sharks' turf and warns them that Chino is now after Tony with a gun. Ice sends the Jets to various locations to find Tony and warn him. Anybodys' persistence finally pays off as Ice asks her to search in and out of the shadows and commends her for her deed.

In Maria's bedroom, she and Tony have a romantic encounter. The couple hear Anita arriving home, and Maria and Tony make quick, whispered arrangements to meet at Doc's drug store and run away together to marry. Anita hears through the door and knows that something is going on. Tony escapes through the bedroom window and flees, but Anita sees him running away. Anita chides Maria for the relationship ("A Boy Like That"). Anita says that a man who kills is bad, but she soon softens as Maria sings back. Maria's heartfelt love ("I Have A Love") wins over Anita, and despite her grief over Bernardo's death, she agrees to cooperate with a plan to help Maria and Tony run away and marry, because she is her friend. Anita quickly tells Maria that Chino is searching for Tony with a gun.

Lieutenant Schrank arrives and questions Maria about the events leading up to the rumble, but Maria is protective of Tony and lies to cover for him. To deceive the policeman, Maria sends Anita to Doc's drugstore on the pretense that she is fetching medicine for her headache—she asks Anita to say she has been detained, explaining she would have gone herself otherwise. Anita's real purpose is to tell Tony (who is found by Anybods outside Maria's apartment and takes refuge in the cellar of Doc's drugstore) that Maria is detained from meeting him. But when Anita enters the drugstore and asks for Tony, the Jets mock and harass her until Doc stops them. Infuriated by the attack, Anita gives the Jets a different message for Tony: Maria is dead, shot by Chino for loving Tony. Doc reproaches the Jets, then delivers the message to Tony. In shock and despair, Tony runs to find Chino, shouting for Chino to kill him too.

Now on the playground next to Doc's store, Tony suddenly sees Maria and they begin to run toward each other with joy. Suddenly, Chino appears and shoots Tony. As the Jets and Sharks arrive, Maria and a severely wounded Tony reaffirm their love ("Somewhere"), but Tony dies in her arms. Maria takes the gun from Chino and blames the rival gang members for the deaths of Tony, Bernardo and Riff with their hate. Three of the Jets start lifting his body and two Sharks join them to help carry him off. Maria and several Jets and Sharks walk behind them in a funeral procession.

COMPARATIVE THOUGHTS AND PARALLELS BASED ON PLOT

Based on the plot summaries, record some of the parallels between the play and the film. Examples have been provided.

Romeo and Juliet	West Side Story
The play begins with a street fight between the Montagues and Capulets	The film begins with the Jets and the Sharks having a similar fight
Prince Escalus breaks up the fight warning the feuding families under the penalty of death	Lieutenant Schrank and Officer Krupke break up the melee. Schrank orders the Sharks off the playground and the Jets "to make nice with them Puerto Ricans" or there'll be a price to pay





Need help?

Visit the student forums and ask our tutors.

dc.edu.au/forums

T: (02) 8007 6824

E: info@dc.edu.au

W: dc.edu.au



End of homework



Need help?

Visit the student forums and ask our tutors.

dc.edu.au/forums

T: (02) 8007 6824

E: info@dc.edu.au

W: dc.edu.au