

ROMEO & JULIET AND WEST SIDE STORY

GUIDELINES FOR A COMPARATIVE STUDY

WHERE? WHEN?

1. Compare the two scenes (similitude and difference)
2. In the play, the scene takes place in the Capulets' orchard which is surrounded by high walls. What makes this setting particularly appropriate? What does Shakespeare suggest by speaking of an orchard rather than a garden?
3. In the film, what stands for the balcony and the orchard? Why do you think the authors of the lyrics of *West Side Story* chose to change the name of Juliet for Maria? What in each text suggests that there is a sacred quality in this love?
4. At what time of day does the scene take place, in both play and film? Why is this?
5. In *West Side Story* Tony and Maria can see each other. Is that the case in *Romeo and Juliet*? Why did Shakespeare set Romeo and Juliet's meeting at night? What part of the stage is in darkness? What part is lit up?

THE DRAMATIS PERSONAE

6. What in Tony's words echoes the following lines in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*?
 - a) *"It is the east, and Juliet is the sun."* (Act II, sc.2, 1.3)
 - b) *"It is too rash, too unadvised, too sudden. Too like the lightning."* (Act II, sc. 2, 1.117-118)
7. What in the song suggests that Tony and Maria's meeting is a case of love at first sight?
8. How is the notion of miracle rendered in the Song?
9. What in Shakespeare's play indicates that the world is *"wild, bright, and going mad"*?
10. Pick out the words that are common to Tony's and Maria's parts. What conclusion do you draw?
11. Who sings which lines? How is the idea of an immediate fusion between two beings conveyed?
12. On the contrary, show that Juliet and Romeo stand for two worlds that are apart and cannot meet. How did Shakespeare dramatise the fact that Romeo's love for Juliet is impossible? Consider the position of the characters on stage.
13. What words in the song rhyme with "tonight"? What conclusion do you come to when comparing film and play?

THE SCENE IN CONTEXT

14. What fundamental question does Juliet ask in the first part? What values does she challenge?
15. How do you react as a reader? Do you feel that she is right or that she is too daring? Analyse what leads you to judge her as you do.
16. How many times are the words *"love"* and *"death"* used? Which of the two characters uses them? Show that they are central to the myth of *Romeo and Juliet*.
17. Romeo and Juliet's love upsets the world order. How is this idea expressed?
18. Go through the whole scene once more and note down all the single-line sentences. Why do they have such an impact on the audience?
19. In which text is the notion of impending danger better rendered?
20. What ideals and beliefs are conveyed by the story of *Romeo and Juliet* and of *West side Story*? What makes these ideals universal and timeless?
21. Although the balcony scene in the film does not appear as tragic as in the play, show how, in both film and play, Death, though tragic, acquires a cathartic dimension.