Theatre to Film:

*Romeo and Juliet*

GCSE English

This booklet intends to build on your prior knowledge of adaptation and film techniques, specifically within the context of Baz Luhrmann’s *William Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet*.

Doing so, it intends to bring light to the process of adapting theatre to film.

[](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hampstead_School)

Name: ……………………………………………….

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Introduction: Comparing Play and Film

Play: *Romeo and Juliet* by William Shakespeare (circa 1595)

Film: *William Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet* directed by Baz Luhrmann (1996)

Why do you think Baz Luhrman has kept ‘William Shakespeare’ in the title?

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‘Shakespeare’s plays touched everyone, from the street sweeper to the Queen of England. He was a rambunctious, sexy, violent, entertaining storyteller. We’re trying to make the movie rambunctious, sexy, violent, and entertaining the way Shakespeare might have if he had been a filmmaker. We have not shied away from clashing low comedy with high tragedy, which is the style of the play, for it’s the low comedy that allows you to embrace the very high emotions of the tragedy. […] Juliet is written as a very smart, active character. She decided to get married, she resolves to take the sleeping potion, she really drives the piece. […] Everything that’s in the movie is drawn from Shakespeare’s play. Violence, murder, lust, love, poison drugs that mimic death, its all there.’

* A note from Baz Luhrmann (from the published screenplay)

*Romeo and Juliet* (1595)

*Romeo and Juliet* was probably first performed in 1595. It was first published in quarto in 1597. A second quarto was published in 1599. A first Folio was published in 1623.

What is a quarto?

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What is a folio?

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What is *Romeo and Juliet* based on?

Arguably, Arthur Brooke’s long poem, ‘Tragicall Historye of Romeus and Juliet’ (1562), which was based on a French prose version by Pierre Boaistuau (1559), who was adapting an Italian version by Bandello (1554), which is based on Luigi De Porto’s version (1525) of a tale by Masuccio Salernitano (1476). – Greenblatt p.897

Do you think it is important for a play to be ‘original’ or is it sometimes good to ‘borrow’ ideas from others?

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Verbal Performance

As a play words are usually styled to:

* Insult others
* Confess
* Vow
* Invite
* Curse
* Banish

As such, Shakespeare’s most poetic language appears in scenes of this kind.

Poetry is really important to Shakespeare (remember he goes on to write a prolific amount of sonnets).

For Shakespeare, poetry is language, which makes things happen.

Types of language

* Sonnets
* Rhyming Couplets

If you do not know what some of these mean, look them up in a dictionary and add them to the next page

* Flyting
* Puns, annotation, wordplay
* Double engenders
* Aphorisms
* Oxymoron
* Conversational monologues
* Ritual Lamenting

Once Juliet has died, the Nurse is said to use language which shows ritual lamenting. Find two lines from this scene that demonstrate this.

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Glossary of terms

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Setting

Where is the Shakespeare’s play set?

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Where is Shakespeare’s play performed?

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Where is Baz Luhrmann’s film set?

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Key concepts to think about with setting:

* Temperature – is it ‘hot’? Are the people ‘hot blooded’?
* Religion – is there a certain religion in this setting?
* Social Class – is a certain social class shown?

Writing for the Stage

Here is a list of some of the stage conditions of the Elizabethan playhouse:

* Bare thrust stage
* Elaborate costumes
* Women’s roles played by boys or young men
* Presentation to the audience: chorus, soliloquies, and comedians.
* Audience in daylight.

As a result, in need to be explained where they are because the stage would be lacking in props.

Arguably, it would not work to have a bare set for a film in the same way that it would in theatre. As a result, it becomes very difficult to transpose Shakespeare onto screen.

Do you think the presence of daylight changes the experience for the spectator and why?

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Theatre and Film: Translation and Adaptation

* Theatre gives a shared communal experience between actors and audience, the send of a live occasion. There may be accidents… Actors in the theatre may interact with the audience. The plays are often written with a presentational style in mind: prologues, and choruses, comedians, asides and soliloquies.
* In theatre the bare stage can be anywhere, a space of metaphor, but in cinema this is more difficult. In theatre the characters come on and go off. In cinema they are discovered.
* The Elizabethan audience was in daylight, making in more of a communal experience than the cinema audience in darkness making it more personal and psychological.
* In the theatre the audience can choose where to look, which characters to observe and follow. In cinema the director directs the audience’s gaze through the camerawork and editing.
* The Elizabethan theatre with its bare thrust stage inevitably emphasises language, and the audience had to listen to this complex, image filled, metaphorical language, which is used so many style in such a bravura way.

‘The greatest single difference between the communication methods of stage and cinema is that the theatre is essentially a verbal medium foregrounds the spoken word, while film communicates using predominantly visual techniques.’ (Hindle, p12)

Do you agree or disagree with Hindle’s statement?

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Theatre to Film: Key Differences

* Loss of shared communal experience of actors and audience. Actors in the theatre may interact with the audience.
* In the theatre the audience choses where to look. In the cinema the director directs the look.
* The conventions of films filling the screen with realistic detail opposes to a bare stage. ‘In cinema we believe that there is a world of continuing beyond the edge of the screen which gives meaning and function to the character which we see inside the frame’ (Anthony Davies)

How has your understanding of *Romeo and Juliet* changed from completing this booklet – what will you take away?

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