

Romeo and Juliet –2007 JC Sample Answer– Theme of Love

Name a play you have studied and state what you think is its main idea and/or message.

Explain how this main idea and/or message is communicated in the play.
(30 marks)

Note:

Remember to confine yourself to one idea or message. Do not discuss a variety of themes, even if you are keen to show the examiner how much you know. All you will end up proving is that you do not know how to read a question properly.

Whatever message or idea you choose; it should be central to the play.

Make sure to discuss how Shakespeare communicates his message. That is an important part of this answer. A mere summary of key moments relating to the theme will not be sufficient.

Opinions differ, and others may not agree with your interpretation of the play. However, this is not important. What is important is your ability to argue convincingly. A well-thought out, well-supported argument will get you a high grade. Refer back to the section on discursive writing to find some techniques which might help.



Sample Answer:

The play I have studied for my Junior Certificate is William Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet. I believe the main message in this play is that true love triumphs over all. This may seem a strange thing to say, given that both Romeo and Juliet die at the end of the play, but I think Shakespeare intended to convey the idea that true, romantic love has the power to improve people and to make the world a better place.

There can be little doubt that Romeo is improved by true love. When we first meet him he is moody, unsociable and rather tiresome. His father says that he spends much of his time alone in his room where he closes the curtains and 'makes himself an artificial night'. He claims he is in love with a girl called Rosaline but we doubt that what he feels is genuine, sincere love. He mopes over Rosaline, calling her a woman of such incredible beauty that 'The all-seeing sun/Ne'er saw her match since first the world begun'. Romeo's overblown language and melodramatic behaviour are not convincing, and he does not come across as a particularly appealing character at this stage.

However, when Romeo meets Juliet, we see a different side of his character emerge. All his extravagant speeches end and he speaks of Juliet in simple, credible language. He realises now that up to this point he was only in love with the idea of being in love. Seeing Juliet has made him ask 'Did my heart love till now?' We may be initially inclined to wonder if this is merely Romeo switching his affections from one girl to another but he proves his love is real by remaining true to Juliet until the end. True love brings out the best in Romeo and makes him a hero worthy of our admiration.

Romeo and Juliet's romantic view of love is not shared by the other characters. Juliet's parents regard love as an unnecessary component of

marriage and are angry and bewildered when she refuses to marry the handsome, wealthy Paris. The Nurse agrees and suggests that Juliet should marry Paris, even though she is already married to Romeo. Romeo's friends are equally cynical about love. They make crude jokes about women and poke fun at love. Mercutio has little time for love and advises Romeo that 'If love be rough with you, be rough with love'. The Friar too, is suspicious of passionate love and cautions Romeo that 'These violent delights have violent ends'. He feels that Romeo would be better to 'love moderately'. It is clear that both the hero and the heroine of this play are surrounded by those who see little merit in great, romantic passions. Romeo and Juliet have quite a task ahead of them if they are to prove that love does triumph.

Some critics have suggested that Romeo and Juliet never prove that love conquers all, but that their story actually shows what happens when young people disobey their parents and rashly enter into a passionate affair. After all, they argue, both Romeo and Juliet die, so is that not the message Shakespeare intends to convey?

I do not believe it is. The playwright ensures that Romeo and Juliet are attractive, appealing people. The scenes in which they profess their love for one another are beautiful and moving. At their final meeting, Juliet has a premonition of disaster when she says, 'O, thinkest thou we shall ever meet again?' We shiver along with Juliet as she says this and when she confesses her vision of Romeo 'As one dead in the bottom of a tomb'. Clearly, Shakespeare wants us to relate to the young lovers and hope that they will succeed against the odds. His sympathetic characterisation puts us firmly on the side of Romeo and Juliet. We too want love to triumph.

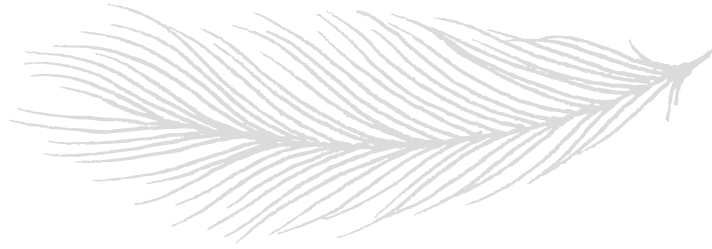
But if the hero and heroine die, how can love be said to triumph? The answer is connected to the feud between the Montagues and the Capulets. We learned about the feud in the Prologue when we heard of the two



families who 'From ancient grudge break to new mutiny'. Nothing has succeeded in ending the feud and it is the reason Romeo and Juliet have to keep their love secret. But with their deaths comes reconciliation between the families.

It is the Prince who, in the final scene, voices the main message of the play. He shows Capulet and Montague the bodies of their children and he tells them that 'heaven finds means to kill your joys with love'. The grieving families vow to fight no more and peace is restored to Verona. Romeo and Juliet's deaths were not in vain.

This is, I feel, the main idea of the play. Love is powerful and love has the ability to bring about changes for the good, even if it also causes great sorrow. The play does not end on a pessimistic note. It ends by showing us that those who learn the message – that love conquers all – will go on to live better lives.



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