

ROMEO & JULIET



About this activity

This activity makes use of a short text which describes a situation which requires an explanation.

- ▶ **Language level:** A2/B1
- ▶ **Main task:** Working with a text; lateral thinking; speaking
- ▶ **Topic:** Lateral thinking puzzles
- ▶ **Language focus:** Language of speculation; question forms

This activity makes use of a well-known lateral thinking puzzle that your students may or may not be familiar with (see below).

Note: the corresponding page in the Resources section includes a handout with ten more lateral thinking puzzles for you to use with your students.

<https://membership.lessonstream.com/resources/romeo-juliet/>



The puzzle (text)

Romeo and Juliet are dead. They are lying on the floor in a bedroom. The floor is very wet and Romeo and Juliet are surrounded by lots of pieces of broken glass. Above them there is a shelf. There is no one in the house and all of the doors and windows are closed and locked. The house is next to a railway track. Can you explain what happened?



So why are Romeo and Juliet dead?

The vibrations from a passing train caused the fishbowl to fall off the shelf.

It landed on the floor and it smashed.

Of course, fish can't survive out of water.

So, Romeo and Juliet died.

Romeo and Juliet are goldfish.

The input-output balance

Lateral thinking puzzles are great for getting students to talk. In this case, students can ask questions and share theories about why Romeo and Juliet are dead.

But before we get there, it is important to recognise that the short text is also a valuable source of language input, especially for lower level learners of English.

This lesson plan starts with ideas for encouraging students to go deeper into the text and notice language features within it (**language input ideas**). After that we move onto the text as a springboard for discussion and language production (**language output ideas**).

Note: This activity was mentioned in unit seven of the LessonStream Story Course. Post **7.1 Language input** explores the unpredictable ways in which the Romeo & Juliet text might benefit an A2 level learner of English.



Part one: language input

1. Tell students the following:

I am going to give you a puzzle.
 It is possible that you already know it.
 If you know it, please don't say anything – just smile and nod your head, OK?
 You are going to hear the puzzle twice.
 OK – listen carefully.

2. Read aloud the Romeo & Juliet text (see next page). Read it slowly and clearly. Use gesture when possible to help students visualise the scene. After you have read it, remind students not to say anything if they think they know why Romeo and Juliet are dead.

Romeo and Juliet are dead.
 They are lying on the floor in a bedroom.
 The floor is very wet and Romeo and Juliet are surrounded by lots of pieces of broken glass.
 Above them there is a shelf.
 There is no one in the house and all of the doors and windows are closed and locked.
 The house is next to a railway track.

3. Now write the following on the board:

Romeo and Juliet are dead.
 They are lying O. T. F. I. A. B.
 The floor is very _____ and Romeo and Juliet are surrounded by L. O. P. O. B. G.
 Above them there is a _____.
 There is no one in the house and all of the _____ and _____ are _____ and _____.
 The house is located N. T. A. R. T.

4. Read the text a second time and then ask students to copy the above text from the board into their notebooks. When they do so, they should try to recall the missing words and phrases which are represented by gaps and initial letters (e.g. O. T. F. I. A. B. = *on the floor in a bedroom*).

Note: Depending on the level of your students, this can be quite a difficult task. Monitor their progress and repeat the reading of the text as many times as necessary for success. You might have to slow right down when you get to the missing phrases. You can also let students pair up and help each other.

Three more ideas

Copying a text from board-to-book is an example of a word-for-word transcription task. The Romeo & Juliet text is ideal for this as it consists of just 64 words. Transcription tasks can be effective for deeper processing of the language in the text and this can create ideal conditions for noticing language features within it. Here are three similar ideas:

- **Translation:** Display the text on the board or screen and ask students to translate it into their first language (L1). They should write the L1 texts in their notebooks but not write any English. Ask students to compare their translations. Then remove the original text from view and ask students to translate their L1 versions back into English. Finally, let them compare their English versions with the original. This is called an L1-L2-L1 translation.
- **Dictation:** You can dictate the whole text to your students, one sentence at a time. Make sure that students know that you will repeat each sentence three times before moving onto the next one. Finally let students compare their answers and then show them the original text.

• **Dictogloss:** For B1 students, you could use the Romeo & Juliet text for a dictogloss – a kind of text reconstruction task that works as follows:

- i. Read aloud the text two or three times.
- ii. As students listen, they write down key words or phrases that they hear.
- iii. Students then rewrite the text as accurately as possible from memory. Of course, there will be some differences between their reconstructed texts and the original. But the important thing is that they capture the meaning of the original text.
- iv. Students compare their reconstructed texts with each other.
- v. Finally they compare their reconstructed texts with the original.

Part two: language output

Note: Now it's time for students to solve the puzzle and work out why Romeo and Juliet are dead. It is possible that there will be students in the class who already know the answer. Or there may be clever students who manage to work it out. Keep reminding students not to shout out the answer. If they think they know it, they can write it down on a piece of paper and then show it to you. Or they can whisper it in your ear.

1. Put students into pairs or small groups and ask them to speculate exactly how Romeo and Juliet died. Encourage students to use the following words and phrases:

- We think that ...
- It's possible that ...
- They might have ...
- It could be that ...
- Perhaps ... / Maybe ...



2. Listen to your students' ideas. Although you can and should give language feedback when possible (see the **Students' ideas** box on the next page), do not tell students whether or not they are right or wrong at this stage.

Note: You can ask students to collaborate and write down their answers on little pieces of paper or Post-it notes which can then be given to you. You can go through them one at a time and look for teaching opportunities as you do so.

3. If no one managed to guess the answer, invite students to ask you closed (yes or no) questions. Continue to work with students' ideas and provide language feedback when possible (see the **Students' ideas** box on the next page).

4. If/when students work out that Romeo and Juliet are goldfish, ask them to explain exactly what happened: how did they die? (See page 2)
5. Find out if anyone in the class has any similar puzzles to share.

Students' ideas

Here are some possible questions and ideas that may come from your students:

- Did Romeo and Juliet break the glass themselves?
- Is there poison on the floor?
- Did something fall off the shelf? A vase?
- Is there a broken window?
- Was there a train accident?
- Did vibrations from a train cause something to fall off the shelf?
- Did something fall on Romeo and Juliet?
- Did they commit suicide?
- Did they drown?
- Is this a crime scene? (Is this a case of foul play?)
- Did they die at the same time?
- Are they human?



Note: Rather than being the guardian of the answer, you can take a more exploratory role. Encourage students to develop their ideas by putting questions back to them. For example:

- Student: Is the floor wet because of poison?
 Teacher: That's an interesting question. Can you tell me why you have asked that?
 Student: Well, in the story, Romeo kills himself when he drinks poison.
 Teacher: Yes! Did he do that on purpose or by accident?
 Student: On purpose.
 Teacher: So, he kills himself on purpose. There is another way of saying that. Does anyone know?
 [On the board, the teacher writes, "He commits suicide."
 So you want to know if the floor is wet because of poison?
 Student: Yes
 Teacher: It's a great question. But the answer is no.

Ten more lateral thinking puzzles

Please note that the corresponding page in the Resources section includes a handout with ten more lateral thinking puzzles for you to use with your students.

