

## ***Romeo and Juliet: Act I, Scene 5 Essay Assignment***

Did you notice that Romeo and Juliet's first words to each other are written in the form of a sonnet? The sonnet ("little song") was one of the highest and most popular poetic forms of Shakespeare's time. **Compose a multi-paragraph academic essay that contains the required elements (listed below) and answers this question: What is the effect of the imagery and the poetry of Romeo and Juliet's first meeting?**

**Introduction:** Quick attention getter; basic background information (brief summary of the passage, mention the pilgrim/shrine metaphor); statement (thesis) about the topic that the rest of your essay will address.

**Section 1:** Analyze the imagery of the passage. What is the significance of the images and what do they *imply*\* about the characters? (*You know what imagery is, right? If not, check your literary elements handout before you continue.*) (By answering this question with a complete sentence, you are making a **claim** of your own! That's Claim #1!) Be sure to include **textual evidence** (quotations from the passage that make you believe your claim is correct) and **reasoning** (explanations for why the textual evidence supports your claim). Address potential **counterclaims** by noting other possible ways the passage could be viewed and why your view is better. Conclusion/Transition >>>

**Section 2:** What is the effect of having their relationship begin with a sonnet? What does it *imply*\*? (By answering this question with a complete sentence, you are making a **claim** of your own! That's Claim #2!) Be sure to include **textual evidence** (quotations from the passage that make you believe your claim is correct) and **reasoning** (explanations for why the textual evidence supports your claim). Address potential **counterclaims** by noting other possible ways the passage could be viewed and why your view is better. Conclusion statement for Section 2

**Conclusion:** Restatement of thesis & claims; brief summary of argument; conclusion statement (so the reader knows you have made your point and your essay is complete)

\**imply* (verb): to suggest or hint at something without actually saying it; to state implicitly  
*implicit* (adjective): understood but not stated

Example: When Thompson said, "All the other English classes you take after this one will seem easy," he was *implying* that this is a very challenging class. (See, he didn't actually SAY this is a very challenging class, but you are left to draw that conclusion for yourself.)

*See the [annotated] model essay on the following pages.*

## **Romeo and Juliet's First Meeting: Imagery & Effect**

**[Attention-Getter/Hook]** Have you ever been at a party and that special someone that you have been crushing on for weeks is there? You have to find a way to approach and speak to the object of your desire, but the fear of rejection makes your knees knock and your hands quiver. It is at times like this that you might wish you had the verbal brilliance of characters like Romeo and Juliet. **[Background Information]** Of course, it doesn't hurt to have William Shakespeare putting the words in your mouth. In this well-known tragedy by Shakespeare, which most ninth graders will study at some point during the school year, the title characters are never at a loss for words, even when they are experiencing emotions so new that most of us wouldn't be able to come up with anything comprehensible, let alone poetic. In Act I, Scene 5 of *Romeo and Juliet*, they meet for the first time, and even their first spoken words to one another are in the form of a sonnet. A sonnet, for the sake of humanity! **[Thesis]** By having the characters "break the ice" with formal poetry that is rich in religious imagery, Shakespeare seems to be suggesting that Romeo and Juliet's professed love is more than just teenage infatuation. Maybe the young lovers really are perfect for each other.

**[Transition to New Paragraph]** Let's begin with imagery. **[Summary: Background Info]** Romeo compares himself to a pilgrim that has traveled to a religious shrine, wherein Juliet is the saint who grants prayers. **[Claim #1]** The fact that much of the imagery in their first meeting is overtly religious seems to indicate the serious nature of their feelings for one another. **[Textual Evidence #1]** These characters are not giggling with puppy love, as one might expect from characters this age. They are expressing deep and powerful feelings far beyond their years or understanding. Touching Juliet's hand at the end of a dance, Romeo introduces himself with these words: "If I profane with my unworthy hand this holy shrine..." **[Reasoning #1]** The words *profane*, *unworthy*, *holy*, and *shrine* all have religious overtones, and religion is not traditionally something people take lightly or joke about. The serious nature of the images indicates that Shakespeare intended his audience to treat Romeo and Juliet's love as real, not just infatuation. **[Transition]** This opening not only sets the tone for the rest of the meeting but also establishes the metaphor around which the rest of the short conversation revolves: Romeo is the pilgrim; Juliet is the saint he has traveled to see. **[Textual Evidence #2]** "My lips, two blushing pilgrims ready stand to smooth that rough touch with a tender kiss," Romeo says at the end of his first spoken sentence to Juliet. **[Counterclaim/Rebuttal]** While it could be argued that here Romeo is really just boldly requesting a kiss from a girl he is in "lust" with based only on her looks, you have to admit that he has established a serious tone with the religious implication of those "blushing pilgrims." **[Reasoning #2]** It is as if he is not only admitting his embarrassment ("blushing"), but also further establishing the religious and formal tone for the rest of what would usually be an awkward first meeting of teenagers.

**[Transition to New Paragraph but Still In Support of Claim #1]** When Juliet replies to Romeo's bold opening, **[Textual Evidence #3]** she continues his religious metaphor, addressing him as "Good pilgrim." **[Reasoning #3A]** This indicates that she is equally interested in Romeo, and she wants her feelings taken as seriously. By going along with him in this way, she seems to say that she feels as he does. **[Counterclaim/Rebuttal]** Our tendency may be to discount or not take seriously this kind of "love at first sight," because we get the impression that there is a sense of play and fun about this opening exchange, but because of the serious, religious terms in which it is presented, **[Reasoning #3B]** it is natural for us to believe that maybe it is something more than just puppy love. **[Transition to Next**

**Section]** It is not only the religious elements of the meeting that lend to the formality and (maybe) credibility of young love, but also the formal poetry.

**[Background Info/Transition to Section #2]** A sonnet is a very restrictive poetic form, having exactly 14 lines with a very particular rhyme scheme. All of the lines are written in Shakespeare's iambic pentameter, which limits not only the number of syllables in each line but also the way those syllables are stressed or emphasized. **[Claim #2]** By presenting Romeo and Juliet's first meeting in the form of a sonnet, Shakespeare seems to imply that their love is more mature than the characters' ages would indicate. **[Textual Evidence #1]** Many viewers (or readers) do not even notice that Romeo and Juliet's first meeting is full of what would usually be obvious end rhyme: "...hand/...stand (lines 1 and 3), ...this/...kiss (lines 2 and 4; lines 6 and 8) ...much/...touch (lines 5 and 7), ...too/...do (lines 9 and 11), ...prayer/...despair (lines 10 and 12), ...sake/...take (lines 13 and 14)." **[Reasoning #1]** Making such obvious rhymes flow almost unnoticed as a conversation between characters is not something most of us could easily accomplish. This would indicate that, like the words themselves, there is more to Romeo and Juliet's love than at first meets the eye. There is more going on under the surface than is at first apparent. **[Transition]** Much like the almost-hidden rhyme of their first meeting, Romeo and Juliet's first words are also spoken in a very restrictive poetic form.

**[Background Info/Transition to New Paragraph Supporting Claim #2]** Iambic pentameter refers to the syllable count and stress pattern of each line, specifically there are five pairs, each having an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed one: **[Textual Evidence #2]** "Good PIL-grim YOU do WRONG your HAND too MUCH, which MAN-ner-LY de-VO-tion SHOWS in THIS," says Juliet at one point (though without playing up the emphasis as it has been indicated here). The natural stress of these words, and of all the other words in the sonnet, follows this pattern. **[Reasoning #2]** Imagine having to write lines of dialogue that not only express the depth of young love in a complicated metaphor but that also have a particular rhyme and rhythm, which the audience will barely be conscious of. That subtle awareness of the rhythm of iambic pentameter indicates Romeo and Juliet are genuinely in love. They too understand the rigid structure of the sonnet, and while their youth may encourage them to break from such boundaries, the maturity of their love allows them to remain comfortably within that poetic form. **[Counterclaim/Rebuttal]** Some would argue that this view gives far too much weight and seriousness to a young love that cannot possibly be for real; after all, Romeo and Juliet are teenagers, and they have literally just met! They are still in the middle of their first conversation! This, however, is likely the reason Shakespeare chose such a restrictive poetic form: He wanted to indicate that although the situation may be hard to believe, the audience *should* believe it because such pains were taken to make it meaningful and poetic on so many levels. Why would he bother to write all this into a sonnet if he did not mean us to take the content seriously?

**[Conclusion]** Everything about Romeo and Juliet's first meeting illustrates that their love is real. The solemn religious imagery lends a serious tone to what might otherwise be thought a silly infatuation, and the strict poetic form of the sonnet shows that there is more to this relationship than we might at first believe. The play would be less tragic if Romeo and Juliet were portrayed just as careless children on a whim. Because their new love is treated seriously in both content and form, it is clearly intended to be seen as "the real thing." So, the next time you find yourself searching for just the right words to speak to that person you've been crushing on, remember these tragic lovers. Then just go up and make a fool of yourself because you don't want to end up like they did!