

Literary Foils Paragraph Mentor Text

Prompt: Write a paragraph in which you analyze the behavior of literary foils in Shakespeare's play *Romeo and Juliet*. How does Shakespeare's use of juxtaposition highlight the character traits of the literary foils?

Choose 1 of the following:

- Act 1, Scene 1: Benvolio and Tybalt
- Act 1, Scene 1: Benvolio and Romeo
- Act 1, Scene 3: Nurse and Lady Capulet
- Act 1, Scene 5: Lord Capulet and Tybalt

In the play *Romeo and Juliet* by William Shakespeare, the juxtaposition between Benvolio's careful advice and Mercutio's impractical advice emphasizes that Benvolio is rational while Mercutio is impulsive. In Act 1, Scene 1, Romeo is heart-sick over Rosaline not loving him back, so Benvolio suggests to his cousin, "[Give] liberty unto thine eyes. / Examine other beauties" (1.1.235–236). Benvolio personifies Romeo's eyes to suggest that his cousin should freely look at "other beauties" in Verona. He does not yell at Romeo to stop being miserable or demand that he forget about Rosaline. Instead, Benvolio gently makes the suggestion to simply take a look at others and see what happens. This is gentle, rational advice requiring little effort on Romeo's part, which is fitting given Romeo's melancholic state. Mercutio, Romeo's friend, is a foil to Benvolio, who, on the other hand, takes an aggressive approach to curing Romeo's depressing attitude towards love. As they walk to the Capulets' party, Mercutio remarks, "If love be rough with you, be rough with love" (1.4.27). Mercutio knows that Romeo does not want to go to the party because he is heartsick. Yet, his friend says that since love has been "rough," in the sense that Romeo is in love with someone who does not love him back, Romeo should be rough back with love. The word "rough" implies an aggressive, swiftly done action in which Mercutio pushes Romeo to go to the Capulets' party and find a new girl immediately. Although Benvolio and Mercutio both want to see Romeo enjoy himself at the party by getting over Rosaline, they take

different approaches. While Benvolio gently gives advice to look around at other girls, Mercutio roughly demands that Romeo fight back against love, highlighting that Benvolio is rational, while Mercutio is impulsive.