

Romeo & Juliet Act V Enrichment Activity

Literary Analysis: Tragedy and Motive

A **tragedy** is a drama in which the central character, who is of noble stature, meets with disaster or great misfortune. The tragic hero's downfall is usually the result of one of the following:

- fate
- a serious character flaw
- some combination of both

Motive is an important element of a tragic hero's character. A character's motive is the reason behind an individual's thoughts or actions. In many tragedies, the hero's motives are basically good, but sometimes misguided. As a result, the hero suffers a tragic fate that may seem undeserved. Tragedies typically have unhappy endings, they can also be uplifting. They often show the greatness of which the human spirit is capable when faced with grave challenges.

PART I. DIRECTIONS: Use the lines provided to answer the questions about tragedy and motive in *Romeo and Juliet*.

1. In what ways does Romeo fit the characteristics of a tragic hero? How does he *not* fit these characteristics? In your answer, include a consideration of his tragic flaw. (3-4 SENTENCES)

2. The ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle, in his treatise on tragedy entitled *Poetics*, identified another element that is common to most tragedies: the hero's recognition of the whole tragic situation. This recognition always comes too late for the hero to avoid disaster or death. However, Shakespeare departs from Aristotle's idea about the hero's recognition. In *Romeo and Juliet*, it is not Romeo who experiences recognition, but other characters in the play. In the chart below identify some of these characters, and when the recognition occurs?

CHARACTER	WHEN RECOGNITION OCCURED

