

The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet, Act I, by William Shakespeare Literary Analysis: Dialogue and Stage Directions

Dialogue is conversation between or among characters. In prose, dialogue is usually set off with quotation marks. In drama, the dialogue generally follows the name of the speaker, as in this example:

BENVOLIO. I aimed so near when I supposed you loved.

ROMEO. A right good markman. And she's fair I love.

Dialogue reveals the personalities and relationships of the characters and advances the action of a play.

Stage directions are notes in the text of a play that describe how the work should be performed, or staged. These instructions are usually printed in italics and sometimes set in brackets or parentheses. They describe scenes, lighting, sound effects, and the appearance and physical actions of the characters, as in this example:

Scene iii. FRIAR LAWRENCE's cell.

[Enter. FRIAR LAWRENCE alone, with a basket.]

As you read, notice how the dialogue and stage directions work together to help you “see” and “hear” the play in your mind.

DIRECTIONS: Read this passage from Act I and then use the lines below to answer the questions.

NURSE. Madam, your mother craves a word with you.

ROMEO. What is her mother?

NURSE. Marry, bachelor,

Her mother is the lady of the house,

And a good lady, and a wise and virtuous.

I nursed her daughter that you talked withal.

I tell you, he that can lay hold of her

Shall have the chinks.

ROMEO. (*aside*) Is she a Capulet?

O dear account! My life is my foe's dark debt. (Act I, Scene v, ll. 111–117)

1. In the context of the scene, what does this dialogue reveal?

2. What do the lines reveal about Nurse's and Juliet's relationship?

3. What do the lines foreshadow for the plot of the play?
