



A Closer Look at

"The clock struck nine..."

This speech is spoken by Juliet in Act 2, Scene 5 of *Romeo & Juliet*.

Who's Juliet?

Juliet is the only child of the Capulet family, which is in a terrible feud with the Montague family. At the beginning of the play, Juliet's age is about 13 years, eleven months, and two weeks. It's the only time in any play that Shakespeare is so specific about a character's age.

Juliet is supposed to marry Paris, a relative of the Prince of Verona. Lord Capulet invites Paris to a party to meet Juliet. At the party, though, Juliet instead meets Romeo Montague, who has snuck in to join in the festivities. Romeo and Juliet fall in love and decide to get married, despite their families' mutual hatred. With the help of Juliet's Nurse and Romeo's friend Friar Laurence, Juliet and Romeo marry in secret.

What's happening when this speech is spoken?

It's the day after Juliet has met Romeo at her family's masked ball. The previous evening, when everyone else had gone home, Romeo stayed behind and hid among the trees of an orchard. With Juliet at an upper window and Romeo below, the two young people declared their love for one another. Together they made a plan: Juliet would send someone to find Romeo, who would send back a plan for how they would marry in secret. Juliet has sent the Nurse to find Romeo and has been waiting a long time to hear what will happen next.

JULIET:

The clock struck nine when I did send the nurse;
In half an hour she promised to return.
Perchance she cannot meet him: that's not so.
O, she is lame! love's heralds should be thoughts,
Which ten times faster glide than the sun's beams,
Driving back shadows over louring hills:
Therefore do nimble-pinion'd doves draw love,
And therefore hath the wind-swift Cupid wings.
Now is the sun upon the highmost hill
Of this day's journey, and from nine till twelve
Is three long hours, yet she is not come.
Had she affections and warm youthful blood,
She would be as swift in motion as a ball;
My words would bandy her to my sweet love,
And his to me:
But old folks, many feign as they were dead;
Unwieldy, slow, heavy and pale as lead.
O God, she comes!

The speech: thought by thought

Shakespeare's language can be overwhelming, so it helps to break it down, thought by thought. Look at the speech again below, taking your time to make sense of each thought. This is a subjective process, so this example is just one way to break the speech down into thoughts. Would you do it differently?

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Words and phrases that might be new or have an unexpected meaning

- **perchance** – maybe or perhaps
- **lame** – an outdated term for disabled, now considered hurtful and offensive
- **heralds** – officers whose special duty was to make proclamations or deliver messages
- **louring** – gloomy or threatening
- **therefore** – for this reason
- **nimble-pinion'd** – swift-winged ('nimble' means light and agile and 'pinioned' means winged)
- **doves** – small birds with symbolic meaning in different world mythologies and faiths
- **draw love** – in some European artwork, Cupid (who represents love in Roman mythology) sits in a chariot drawn, or pulled, by doves
- **hath** – has
- **wind-swift** – as fast-moving as the wind
- **highmost** – highest
- **had she** – if she had
- **swift** – moving with great speed
- **bandy** – to throw or hit a ball back and forth
- **feign** – pretend, or put on an act
- **unwieldy** – awkward or clumsy

Explore the language

- Are the words short and simple, or long and complex?
- If you're a hearing person, what do the words sound like? Are there any sounds that repeat?
- What's the effect of this language?
- The first five thoughts in the speech are very short. What might that tell you about Juliet's state? Why do you think the next few thoughts are longer? What may have changed for Juliet?
- Some of the thoughts are immediate, about the here and now. Other thoughts are more fanciful, using figures of speech and references to mythology. When do you notice the changes? What do you think is happening in those moments?



Explore the ideas

Waiting...

Juliet has waited for three hours for big, life-changing news (namely, a commitment from Romeo that they will get married and the details for when, where, and how that will happen).

- Can you remember a time when you had to wait for big, life-changing news? If not, can you imagine what that would be like for you? How did (or would) you feel? How did (or would) you pass the time? How did (or would) you treat the person bringing you the news?

Who is Juliet talking to?

Juliet is alone on stage for this speech. Many people assume that when Shakespeare's characters are alone on stage, they're speaking to themselves. However, this is a relatively new idea that came about hundreds of years after Shakespeare was writing. In Shakespeare's time, when characters were alone on stage, they were still speaking to someone, even if it's the audience.

- How does the speech change for you if you imagine you're expressing these thoughts to a room full of people?



Explore the character

- Why do you think Juliet is so impatient?
- What do you think of the way Juliet talks about the Nurse? Do you admire her for this, or do you excuse this? Why?
- How do you imagine the Nurse would feel, overhearing the last few lines?

Challenge the language

William Shakespeare wrote his plays and poems more than 400 years ago, and his experience of the world was different from ours today. The meaning of words changes over time, as does their resonance. We encourage you to explore and interpret Shakespeare's language in your own ways, to discover how it resonates for you.

What do you do when specific words or phrases in Shakespeare's text feel hurtful or offensive? What about language that doesn't include you, or everyone you would like to include? Among theatremakers, there is a tradition of cutting or adapting text to change it for new contexts. This tradition goes right back to Shakespeare himself, and offers us an excellent strategy when we encounter language that no longer serves our modern context.

- For example, nowadays, the word 'lame' is considered disrespectful and hurtful to people with disabilities. Do you read it that way? What possible alternatives can you imagine?
- Is there any language in this speech that you find discriminatory or problematic? What solutions do you propose?

Make it your own

Performance

Learn some or all of the speech by heart and perform it. Discover what it all means, and what it means to you, so you can truly make it your own. If you like, think about staging, costuming, props, lighting, etc. Share your work with an audience of family and/or friends.

Ask someone to film your performance so you have a record of it. They can either film your live performance, or you can create a special opportunity for filming. Collaborate to find the best location, lighting, camera angles, sound, titles, etc. for what you'd like to create.

Art

Create a drawing, painting, sculpture, still life, photograph, or film that expresses what the speech means to you. Decide how you would like to share your creation.

Music

Express what the speech means to you through music. Choose a song or piece of music, build a playlist, or even compose an original piece that conveys your feelings about the speech. Decide how you'd like to share what you've created.

Creative Writing

Compose your own poem, speech, or story inspired by the speech. Imagine a similar situation of having to wait for what you most wanted. How would you describe that situation and convey the feelings it would inspire?

How would you respond to Juliet? Imagine one of the other characters (perhaps the Nurse, Romeo, or one of Juliet's parents) could hear this speech. How do you imagine they would respond? How would you respond as yourself? Write a response in the form of a poem, speech or story.