

Lesson Title: Bad Romance: Genji vs. Romeo and Juliet

Country: Japan

Class: Literature

Grade level(s): 9-12

Goals and Objectives:

The student will be able to:

- identify commonalities and differences between the ill-fated lovers in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* and a portion of Murasaki Shikibu's *The Tale of Genji*
- recognize the literary significance of *Genji* in the Eastern canon
- understand social interactions of men and women (aristocracy) in Heian period Japan

Time required/class periods needed: Three 40-minute class periods

Primary source bibliography:

The Tale of Genji by Murasaki Shikibu Chapter 4 "Evening Faces (*Yugao*)"

<https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/m/murasaki-shikibu/tale-of-genji/complete.html> (click on "complete to read")

Romeo & Juliet by William Shakespeare text or film version

Other resources used:

Background and summary: <http://www.taleofgenji.org/summary.html>

monogatari: <http://www.dartmouth.edu/~arth17/Genji.html>

Genji Anime: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CYwJaO88mm4>

Required materials/supplies:

YouTube capability

Copies of "Evening Faces" and *Romeo & Juliet* for each student

Genji character list and breakdown: Below and at the following website:

http://www.man-pai.com/Genji/Table_of_Characters.htm

Venn Diagram

Vocabulary:

monogatari - tales

emakimono - picture handscrolls

mono no aware - "sensitivity to things:" a Japanese aesthetic linking beauty to nature and impermanence.

Procedure:

Note: This lesson assumes student familiarity with Shakespeare's play either through previous instruction.

Period 1

Show students the YouTube anime version of *The Tale of Genji* as a teaser (first 5 minutes).

Discuss with them predictions and questions raised by the scene.

Provide students with relevant cultural background and list of characters in the *Yugao* chapter (Chapter 4).

Students will read and annotate *Yugao* chapter for homework (the character breakdown website given above allows students to click on the chapter number to get details about each character.)

Period 2

Full class discussion to ensure comprehension of major plot points Group work to complete Venn diagram illustrating the similarities and differences between Romeo and Juliet (Act V, scene iii—end) and the *Yugao* chapter of *The Tale of Genji*. Provide Shakespeare text for student reference.

Period 3

Final discussion and evaluation questions via think-pair-share activity.

Assessment/evaluation:

Students will complete a Venn diagram

Students will respond in group/small group discussion or writing to the following questions:

- What role does youth play in the events of both stories?
- What role does secrecy play in the events of both stories?
- What roles do expectations and social contexts play in the events?
 - ...in the the roles of females?
 - ...in the roles of males?
- How is the ideal of *mono no aware* expressed in the excerpt from *Genji*?
- Do you think that aspects of *mono no aware* are present in *Romeo & Juliet*? If yes, how are they manifested?

The Tale of Genji by Murasaki Shikibu

Character Sheet for Chapter 4: Yugao (Evening Faces)

Genji—son of an Emperor but demoted to a lower clan; a bit of a playboy; handsome, magnetic, sensitive and intelligent

Koremitsu—Genji's manservant; his mother was Genji's nurse; she is ailing and Genji is paying her a visit at her home, which is next door to the house of Evening Face

Yugao— "Evening Face;" Genji's mysterious new love interest

Ukon—Yugao's lady-in-waiting, a young orphaned girl; she brings a fan to Genji bearing a message and a flower from Yugao at the beginning of the story

The Rokujo Lady—one of Genji's lovers, she embodies Heian ideals for women; beautiful, intelligent, artistic, elegant, refined, and sophisticated; Genji jilts her and she is humiliated and jealous afterward

Tono Chujo—Genji's friend and brother-in-law, (yes, Genji is married to an older woman before he is even 17 – Remember: Politics plays a role)

The narrator—primarily a lady-in-waiting in Genji's household

The story thus far:

Genji is the son of an Emperor and his favorite concubine. However, many are jealous of Genji's mother, which means that Genji does not have the support he might need to succeed to the throne. Thus, his father demotes him to a lesser clan and promotes another of his sons.

Despite this, Genji is still politically important to his father and so he is married very young to Tono Chujo's sister, Aoi. He does not spend much time with his wife, but does befriend her brother who is rather a womanizer, as is Genji himself. Early in the novel, on a rainy evening, Tono Chujo and Genji compare notes on their conquests, and Tono Chujo tells Genji that he fathered a daughter with a meek girl of the lower class.

Before he meets Yugao in the section we will read, Genji pursues affairs with several women with varying degrees of success. These women include The Lady of the Locust Shell (she plays hard to get) and The Rokujo Lady (she is Genji's equal, but he loses interest).

Keep in mind as you read:

1. **Watch for subtle clues and foreshadowing.** This is a very mysterious affair. Genji and Yugao each have suspicions about who the other is, but neither reveals their identity.
2. **The supernatural plays a role.** At this time in Japan, it was believed that spirits or energies (such as jealousy) could kill.
3. **Pay attention to perspective.** Although the narrator of the novel overall is a lady-in-waiting in Genji's household, the point-of-view is somewhat fluid and readers are taken inside the minds of many characters.

4. **Consider the role of women.** Earlier in the book, Tono Chujo and Genji have agreed that the ideal woman is cultured, loyal, passive and willing to act ignorant if the situation demands it.