I. **Title and brief description:**

This unit will discuss *Romeo and Juliet* by William Shakespeare. Students will be introduced to the overarching theme of conflict with authority. Along with this we will be looking at issues of love, rebellion, death, and acceptance, which are prevalent concepts in the lives of students. The insecurities and obstacles of becoming and adult are similar to those which are Romeo and Juliet are faced with. We will also examine the play through different lenses and themes such as Symbiosis (which is a current topic in STEM), Feminism, Gender, Archetypes, and Duality and how these concepts are represented in the characters in the story. Symbolism and the structure and purpose of drama will be highlighted by looking and analyzing language used in the play.

In the course of the Unit, informational text, artwork, music and videos, poems, etc. will explain the historical context of Elizabethan England, structures of its society and the life of young adolescents the during this time period. The unit will explore how authorities are given the power to determine the fate of individuals, and we will relate our findings to structures found in our own society and our experiences as a human being within it.

II. **Big Idea/Essential Question:**

*Am I responsible for the events that occur in my life? Is it ok for someone else to determine my destiny?*

*Am I my family’s keeper? How much does the next generation owe their families?*

*Does revenge destroy or benefit the avenger?*

*What makes a healthy relationship? Is there such thing as true love?*

*What situation are we born into? What defines generations, identity, family?*

By using these essential questions as a framework for understanding Shakespeare’s *Romeo & Juliet*, students will reflect deeply upon the concept of conflict between authority and identity in both Shakespeare’s society and the society they live in. Through the lens of this question, students will reflect upon their own abilities and morals, and how their own social communities and environment influences and shapes their own lives.
III. **Learning Goals:**

a) **Development of content understanding (key concepts and ideas):**

At the conclusion of this unit, students will be able to express understandings of conflicts related to (parental) authority and within close relationships; which represent a strong influence on shaping the human character. Students will be able to explain, through a variety of examples, how those conflicts influence the actions of the characters in Shakespeare’s play and whether or not they can identify similarities with their own lives. To gain a better understanding of the social structures in the tragedy, we will study a plethora of themes, lenses and social constructions of the setting in *Romeo & Juliet*. This will help us to analyze character development and the various forms of authoritative conflict represented in the book. In connection to previous units, students will also look at the play through lenses of archetypes, power and gender which serve as a tool for the author to create powerful characters and relationships. Novelistic themes such as, paths of lives, development of identities and fate will also be a focus of discussion.

b) **Enabling students to experience the power of their minds and their capacities as learners and doers (powerful learning):**

This unit will combine low-stakes and high-stakes activities such as creative writing, critical writing and research. In order to understand Shakespeare’s play, we will consult academic informational texts, videos and a variety of visual and written material. Students will build small groups as investigators and researchers with a variety of roles to choose from to explore their strengths and abilities. We will be working with more challenging content in a safe environment to create room to grow and explore our own capacities as learners, therefore we will look at our own society and how it connects or is similar to Elizabethan society, make relations to the community and neighborhood we live in and speculate how this connects to our own lives. For example, the relationships we pursue in our lives and the relationships we are required to cultivate. Students will have the opportunity to bring their families experiences into the classroom during small group discussions.

We will be also working on reading strategies and activities to enhance close reading skills and make thought-processes visible.

c) **Development of intellectual and academic habits of mind, work, and discourse, including habits of independent or collaborative thinking and doing typical of readers, writers, speakers, creators, researchers and thinkers in the discipline (ways of knowing):**

In this unit we will be working on independent reading and writing skills, as well as confidence and presentational skills, as students will both start reading sections of *Romeo and Juliet* silently as well as experience the text in small group readings and performances. In a prior unit we began practicing reading out loud to the class, so the focus will shift while we are transitioning towards developing a deeper interpretation and individual reading voice as we gain familiarity with the text. To support close reading comprehension, we will also work on visualizing significant sections of the novella by examining material related to the tragedy and setting of *Romeo and Juliet*. 
In addition to this we will also work on continuing to strengthen our verbal and social skills by engaging in whole class discussions and Socratic seminars.

d) Literacy development, including capabilities of proficient readers, writers, and speakers:

Reading and analyzing the play, we will consistently use writing as a tool of learning to understand, express, and reflect our own thought processes and ideas. Through literary circles, mini lessons, close reading activities and a variety of performative activities students will further strengthen and use their inner voice by annotating, questioning and visualizing the text. This will help students to identify and summarize main ideas and themes. Supported by a variety of mediums, students will learn that reading is not limited to written text, but expands to many aspects of our lives such as images, signs, social conventions, art and film.

e) Development of trust and the classroom as a learning community:

This class is already very eager to share thoughts and engage in group discussions, but has been struggling with basic communication skills and focus. Because of this, one goal of this unit is to work on skills such as turn-taking and listening. Students will practice active listening tasks, paraphrasing, assigned speakers and roles, inquiry techniques and teaching mini lesson activities to enhance their listening skills. This will be at first applied to think-pair shares, small group work and transition to larger group discussions. This gradual release of responsibility will hopefully lead to the development of respect for the individual voices in the classroom and also encourage quieter students to participate, and ties in well with our overall theme of healthy relationships and conflict with authorities. Furthermore, we will work on developing proper academic language and thoughtful expression of thoughts and ideas. It will help students to remember that our class is a class of respect and individualism and that everyone’s voice is a valuable part of our learning and success as a collective.

IV. Personal, social, and cultural factors (yourself, your students, and learning):

a. As my students were born into authoritative relationships and are impacted by expectations of their families and their own feelings and wishes as they are growing up within their communities, I want them to think about and be able to understand how these constructs impact their lives. I want them to be able to actively analyze and impact those structures.

My students often meet authority with mixed feelings like fear, anger or helplessness or blind trust. In my unit they hopefully learn how powerful their voice can be if they can make it heard, therefore I want to support them in developing their own voice and techniques to express themselves in a powerful way. Living in a society in which they are often treated as second class or finding themselves in imbalanced relationships, my unit aims on helping them identify unhealthy relationships and finding ways to challenge and transform those.

b. Students will be asked to bring their own experiences and identities into the classroom. We will be looking at different studies that discuss themes such as the teenage brain as opposed to the adult brain and how my students thinking might differ from
their parents thought processes. Students will also look at cultural differences and similarities in customs of marriage and relationships of their families to compare to Shakespeare’s tragedy.

V. Rationale:

a. Learning goals:

For every individual, it is important to investigate the impact relationships and authorities have on society. This is especially important while students are exploring their own identities and place in their community. Shakespeare’s Romeo & Juliet offers the opportunity to look through different lenses such as feminist, family-based, culture-based and class-based at relationships to understand how lives and identities are shaped and then apply it to a larger context which involves the students’ lives to help them identify unhealthy relationships and how to avoid and transform those successfully. We will also be looking at different social and literary studies concepts, such as gender studies and ethics, which will support my students on their way to become college ready. Another important aspect of this unit will be the connection to other subjects such as art, biology and history, as we will be talking about the representation of Romeo & Juliet in art, the symbiosis of human relationships and Elizabethan England as a historic time period.

b. Curriculum standards:

W.9-10.1a | “Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence. (a) Introduce precise claim(s), distinguish the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claims, and create an organization that establishes clear relationships among claim(s), counterclaims, reasons, and evidence.” Strong paragraphs and mini-essays on the play will serve as argumentative writing.

W.9-10.2 | “Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.” Students will write a persuasive essay, explaining why their piece of art is the most appropriate modern interpretation of Romeo and Juliet.

W.9-10.3 | “Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences. “ Students will write about their experiences with authorities, revenge, love and fate in the community and society they live in.

W.9-10.5 | “Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience.” Peer-editing activities will strengthen student writing.

W.9-10.10 | “Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.” Daily reading journal entries will serve as a means of low-stakes writing and be aimed at different tasks, purposes and audiences.

RL.9-10.2 | “Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and re-
fined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.” We will read *Romeo and Juliet* in class as well as outside of class. Through a variety of in-class activities we will analyze the meaning of the text’s various themes such as authority, identity, revenge, fate and love.

**RL.9-10.3** | “Analyze how complex characters (e.g. those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme.” We will examine each of the main characters in *Romeo and Juliet* and investigate how every individual is affected by their relationships and how this shapes their character development over the course of the story.

**RL.9-10.4** | “Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language evokes a sense of time and place; how it sets a formal or informal tone).” We will examine the structure of the play and how stylistic elements of drama influence the reading and interpretation of *Romeo & Juliet*.

**RL.9-10.5** | “Analyze how an author’s choices concerning how to structure a text, order events within it (e.g., parallel plots), and manipulate time (e.g., pacing, flashbacks) create such effects as mystery, tension, or surprise.” We will analyze the literary concepts such as

**RL.9-10.7** | “Analyze the representation of a subject or a key scene in two different artistic mediums, including what is emphasized or absent in each treatment.” Short excerpts from different videos, as well as scenes displayed in paintings will serve as different artistic mediums.

**RL.9-10.5** | “Analyze in detail how an author’s ideas or claims are developed and refined by particular sentences, paragraphs, or larger portions of a text (e.g., a section or chapter).” We will spend an extended amount of time on the analysis of Shakespearean English and dramatic style.

**SL.9-10.1** | “Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on *grades 9–10 topics, texts, and issues*, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.” Small-group work, partner activities, as well as Socratic seminars and whole class discussions will be a constant part of the classroom.

**SL.9-10.4** | “Present information, findings, and supporting evidence clearly, concisely, and logically such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and task.” Students will be given the opportunity to share their ideas and demonstrate their knowledge in the form of group and partner presentations.

**SL.9-10.6** | “Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and tasks, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated or appropriate.” A major part of this unit will be the enacting of scenes and acts taken from *Romeo and Juliet*.

**L.9-10.1** | “Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.” Students will demonstrate their knowledge and command in the form of several low-, medium- and high-stakes writing assignments.

**L.9-10.3** | “Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.” A variety of exercises will help students gain more comfort in using and discussing Shakespearean language as represented in his tragedy of *Romeo and Juliet*. 
c. **Students’ backgrounds and readiness:**

To activate my students’ background knowledge of Shakespeare and enhance their understanding of Elizabethan England and its societal structures, we will be continually working with informational mediums to explore this particular historical time period. This will also help us understand the setting and authorities displayed in the play.

d. **Student needs:**

In this unit the foci lie on improving reading, listening, turn-taking skills, and confident, appropriate public speaking, therefore we will be working on strategies such as double-entry journals, inquiring, paraphrasing and enacting parts of the play. Another focus will be expressing thoughts by using specific vocabulary and phrases. I will provide graphic organizers and visual cues to support English language learners and students with low reading comprehension.

e. **Research- and evidence-based best practice ideas:**

Focusing on student-centeredness, my unit will combine group activities and independent work connecting to my students lives. Those activities will support them in their growth in developing and understanding their own identities and critically analyzing their placement in society with the help of Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*.

VI. **Assessment:**

a) Three major assignments will function as student assessment. A culminating, formative and progressive assessment, the daily journal, will serve as a low-stakes writing assessment to help students develop their voices and delve into the play to analyze aspects deeply but without the pressure of high-stakes writing. The second assignment will be the research of two song lyrics, that relate to *Romeo and Juliet*. Students will choose two songs to explain and write about in a medium-stakes writing assignment which will include their own draft of song lyrics to accompany the play. The final assessment will be a two-part assignment, one of which will be in collaboration with art class. For this assignment, students can choose between three creative options to craft a modern interpretation of the play. Those options are a comic, a cover or a photo collage which are accompanied by a mandatory persuasive essay to explain their rationale and modern elements. Students will create their art in Mr. Shepherd’s class and their writing in Ms. Döpke’s class. Both of or your finished products are to be presented at the end of the unit.

b) Teacher modeling and structuring will help students identify criteria for good work and what to expect. I will show examples, create rubrics and make the writing process transparent for my students. They will be provided with a check list and we will be setting expectations for artwork and a persuasive essay together to create a frame for their final assessment. I will be available for questions and writing conferences.

c) -to be added
d) Oral and/or written feedback will be provided for all assignments of the unit. The daily journal will provide students with a medium to view their own daily progress by comparing it to prior entries. The song lyric assignment will help students to make the play more relatable and comparable to situations and artifacts of their own lives. The final assignment will be a means to gain a deep understanding supported by a graphic representation and persuasive writing, which required broad knowledge of the play and the world surrounding the individual.
### VII. Unit Calendar

a. Provide a Calendar of key learning activities, learning strategies, and assessments for your anticipated timeframe for the unit.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lesson 1</th>
<th>Lesson 2</th>
<th>Lesson 3</th>
<th>Lesson 4</th>
<th>Lesson 5</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction theme/discussion parent-student survey/Freitag Pyramid – Anticipation Activity</td>
<td>Reading prologue, planning presentation of prologue</td>
<td>Diving into the textbringing the prologue to life/closing questionnaire</td>
<td>Introduction SOAPSTone method/Students analyze prologue</td>
<td>Beginning reading act 1/readers theatre/discussing vocabulary</td>
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<td>Lesson 6</td>
<td>Lesson 7</td>
<td>Lesson 8</td>
<td>Lesson 9</td>
<td>Lesson 10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chain of Events Graphic Organizer on Act I Scene I</td>
<td>Shakespearean Dictionary Project</td>
<td>Possibly Francis Bacon “On Revenge” Begin Reading Act 2/The Globe</td>
<td>Finish Act 2/Low-Stakes Writing Assignment</td>
<td>Act 3 / Small Group Memory Game with Shakespeare Literary Terms</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lesson 11</td>
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<td>Lesson 18</td>
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<td>Lesson 20</td>
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<tr>
<td>Act 4 / Small Group</td>
<td>Teenage Brains – Talk of the Nation/National Geographic</td>
<td>Act 5 / Watch others play</td>
<td>Act 5</td>
<td>Act 5/The Soundtrack of Tragedy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lesson 21</td>
<td>Lesson 22</td>
<td>Lesson 23</td>
<td>Lesson 24</td>
<td>Lesson 25</td>
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<tr>
<td>William Blake “A Poison Tree”</td>
<td>Symbiotic Relationships</td>
<td>Character Chart</td>
<td>Hot Seat</td>
<td>Hot Seat</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lesson 26</td>
<td>Lesson 27</td>
<td>Lesson 28</td>
<td>Lesson 29</td>
<td>Lesson 30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparation Final Project/How to write a thesis statement</td>
<td>Final Project first draft</td>
<td>Final Project Editing</td>
<td>Final Project</td>
<td>Final Project Gallery</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

b. Explain your sequence of activities – why does this particular order make sense in light of your learning goals and rationale for unit?

In the beginning of this unit I want to help students in developing and strengthening a feeling for the text. Students will be given the opportunity to build confidence in working with dramatic texts and speaking/acting in front of others. This will slowly increase when my students gradually get more responsibility for their own reading and work with the text. We will read and perform together as a class in the beginning and talk about the essential theme of
the unit. This strategy will be used throughout the unit, to ensure appropriate pacing and check comprehension. In addition to that, students will be working with a variety of activities and partners to support independent learning and development of individual learning strategies and voices. Song lyrics will help students to delve deep into the text and connect the play to their own lives. Daily journal entries will provide valuable information for the critical essay as a final assessment.

VIII. Family and Community Involvement:

a) Although students will be provided with time to work on their assignments in the classroom, they will be required to take some work home and introduce the project to their parents. Together with their families, the will do research and brainstorming connected to the essential theme of the unit to explore relationships, love, fate, conflicts with authorities and how their lives are shaped in society and the community surrounding them.

b) An essential part of this unit will be for students to bring their experiences and histories into the classroom. To do so they will be asked to interview their families about their wishes and ideas about ideal partners for their children. They will also be exploring how these ideas can change in different cultures and different contexts, as we share our knowledge with the whole group.

IX. Post-Teaching Reflection:

a) Based on your cumulating and other assessments of learning goals, analyze the extent to which students achieved your learning goals.

This unit was very challenging for my students and me. As we began reading Shakespeare in a round setting with many different teachers and other people, who supported my students in understanding the difficult language of the play, I underestimated the difficulty the reading and decoding of this play would pose for my students. Very quickly, I discovered that we had to do more close-reading and vocabulary practice than I anticipated originally. To accommodate my student’s needs, I changed my planning completely to make room for practice and elaborate discussion and translation of Shakespearean English. It was just not sufficient for my students to try to understand the gist of the scenes and act it out to support each other’s reading of the play. As they approached the play, my students worked hard on understanding and translating the words very thoroughly. This led me to cut many of my additional lessons as well as some scenes that were not necessary for understanding the plot.

i. To what extent did different students achieve the learning goals?

While students still found the language challenging, they did not seem scared to approach it in many different ways anymore. When asked to write strong paragraphs using evidence of the play, my students showed me that they were able to decode and understand the language by analyzing and modernizing different scenes based on their own experiences as world citizens. This became even clearer once we started working on our summative assessment, an interdisciplinary project between art and English. In collaboration with Mr. Shepherd, the art teacher of UPCS, I designed a project which asked students to create their own modernized comic version of a scene of their choosing and explain their rationale in a
persuasive essay. As the art piece posed a concrete element, the writing activity was more abstract and challenged my students to go beyond superficial understanding of the play. This element remained of my original plan and overall kept its structure. However, I noticed that my students struggled with the assignment, and as I realized they needed clearer instructions, I used my own model and different writing steps to walk them through the process. As we practiced introduction, body, and conclusion of an essay, we also talked about which kind of evidence should be used and how this can be incorporated as a supportive element to strengthen their arguments. In the end, every student seemed to understand the concept, and the cooperation with art provided a safe space to explore their vision for students. I noticed that many students who felt not confident in writing or art, were able to connect with this assignment and grow as they could use their strength to improve where they felt challenged.

The Broadway theatrical production of *Romeo and Juliet* directed by Don Roy Kind, posed a modernized audio-visual support for my students. This additional source inspired critical thinking and motivated students to perform a variety of different interpretations of the play. Every individual seemed to gain more confidence in their understanding and acting of the play, so that even the shyest student took on a role in a performative activity which served to show each other different scenes of one act.

**ii: What do you learn from differences in performance, or puzzling student performances (hard for you to explain), about the particular challenges of learning in this unit?**

At first, my students seemed to struggle with focus and motivation. It was hard for me to engage them in this unit and I became aware that it was the difficulty of the language in the play that create a barrier and lowered accessibility of the important themes and concepts which could be found in our reading. It was too challenging to connect the reading of Shakespeare to additional sources, which lead me to change my course and support my students’ comprehension instead of using additional readings. I learned that their behavior was a result of lack of comprehension and that they were not engaged because of the poor planning on my end. I realized that I needed to change my plans to offer better access to learning for my students. This led me to change my unit completely.

**iii: What do you learn from differences in performance about the effectiveness of your planning for the needs of different students?**

I was definitely not aware that my students would struggle so much with Shakespearean English. I experienced that as an educator I will have to be flexible enough to change my plans on the fly and think on my feet to adjust my practice to my students’ needs. When I learned that my students struggled more with the play than I expected, I purchased the Broadway theatrical production of *Romeo and Juliet* directed by Don Roy Kind, which posed a modernized audio-visual support for my students. This additional source inspired critical thinking and motivated students to perform a variety of different interpretations of the play. Every individual seemed to gain more confidence in their understanding and acting of the play, so that even the shyest student took on a role in a performative activity which served to show each other different scenes of one act.

We then worked much closer with the text and connected it to the world we live in nowadays, instead of tying works such as Francis Bacon’s *On Revenge*, William Hatherell’s *Where’s Romeo?*, and *Teenage Brains* by the National Geographic. I realized that my students were able to make those connections without the help of outside sources, once they
understood the words of the play. So, I introduced my students to many different close reading and translation strategies, since they expressed interest in dissecting the play and wanted to make sense of every word, instead of just understanding the gist of it. On this basis, we explored many acts thoroughly by using dictionaries, text-connections, annotations, and tie-dye highlighting activities in which students marked which sections they understood and where they needed more help. Once students had a good grasp of the language and were able to decode the play by themselves, we moved on to more creative assignments, which asked the students to modernize the play in preparation for their final project.

b) What would you change to improve this plan and why?

If I was to do this unit again, I would incorporate more close reading strategies and vocabulary activities at the beginning of my unit. I came to realize that the language of a Shakespearean play can be quite challenging and intimidating when students are first introduced to it. The knowledge that these students already performed *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* misled me to think that they must be confident in engaging with this kind of language. My takeaway for future lessons is that students benefit tremendously from modelling and showing how challenging language can be translated and understood.

When asked for feedback, many of my students told me that they enjoyed the play overall, but felt that this unit took much longer than necessary. Looking back at the time we spent with this text, I agree with their criticism but also believe that the time was well spent, although I had to change my plans and adjust my teaching to my students’ needs. The deep engagement with *Romeo and Juliet* will support students when they are confronted with another Shakespearean piece in the future and also remain in my students’ memory for future assignments and tests which might ask them to elaborate on a classic piece of literature.

Overall, I think that this unit taught my students and me a lot and not only did we grow as a team, we also saw a variety of different aspects and ways to interpret a text. What I also learned, was that collaborating with coworkers of different subjects is highly beneficial for young individuals as the realize how strongly the connections of learning can be which adds another layer of understanding and strengthens the importance of overcoming challenges and finding similarities and connections between the different aspects of life.