



**Romeo and Juliet (Part Two):  
Montagues vs Capulets**

**“In fair Verona where we lay our scene...”**

**Romeo and Juliet starts with a vicious brawl between the servants of the two powerful rival families, the Montagues and the Capulets.**

**Whilst out on the streets of Verona, the Montague servants, Sampson and Gregory, encounter a group from the house of Capulet led by Abram (Abra in the 1996 film).**

**Armed with swords and full of testosterone and youthful bravado, the boisterous young men are being particularly full of themselves but the banter quickly gets out of hand.**

**N.B. In the 1996 film version, this battle is fought with pistols at a gas station.**

**Sampson bites his thumb at Abram, which in those days was a really bad insult. Unfortunately for him, Abram catches him doing it.**

**SAMPSON**

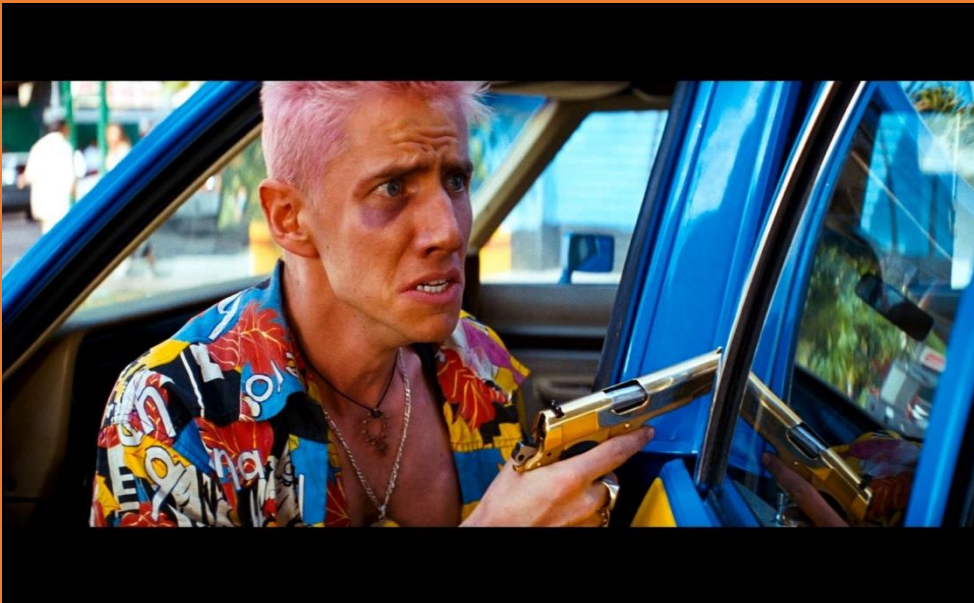
I will bite my thumb at them, which is a disgrace to them, if they bear it.  
*(bites his thumb)*



**ABRAM**

Do you bite your thumb at us, sir?

**Sampson tries to back down but Abram is ready to fight him right then and there.**



**SAMPSON**

No, sir. I do not bite my thumb at you, sir, But I bite my thumb, sir.

**ABRAM**

Do you bite your thumb at us, sir?



**Benvolio, Romeo's cousin, arrives. He desperately tries to stop the fight as he knows the Prince of Verona has forbidden any more fighting in the streets. Unfortunately, Juliet's fierce cousin, Tybalt, also arrives on the scene...**

## **BENVOLIO**

*(draws his sword)* Part, fools!  
Put up your swords. You know not  
what you do.



## **TYBALT**

What, art thou drawn among these  
heartless hinds? Turn thee,  
Benvolio. Look upon thy death.

**Benvolio tries to resolve the situation peacefully but Tybalt is having none of it. All he wants is Montague blood...**



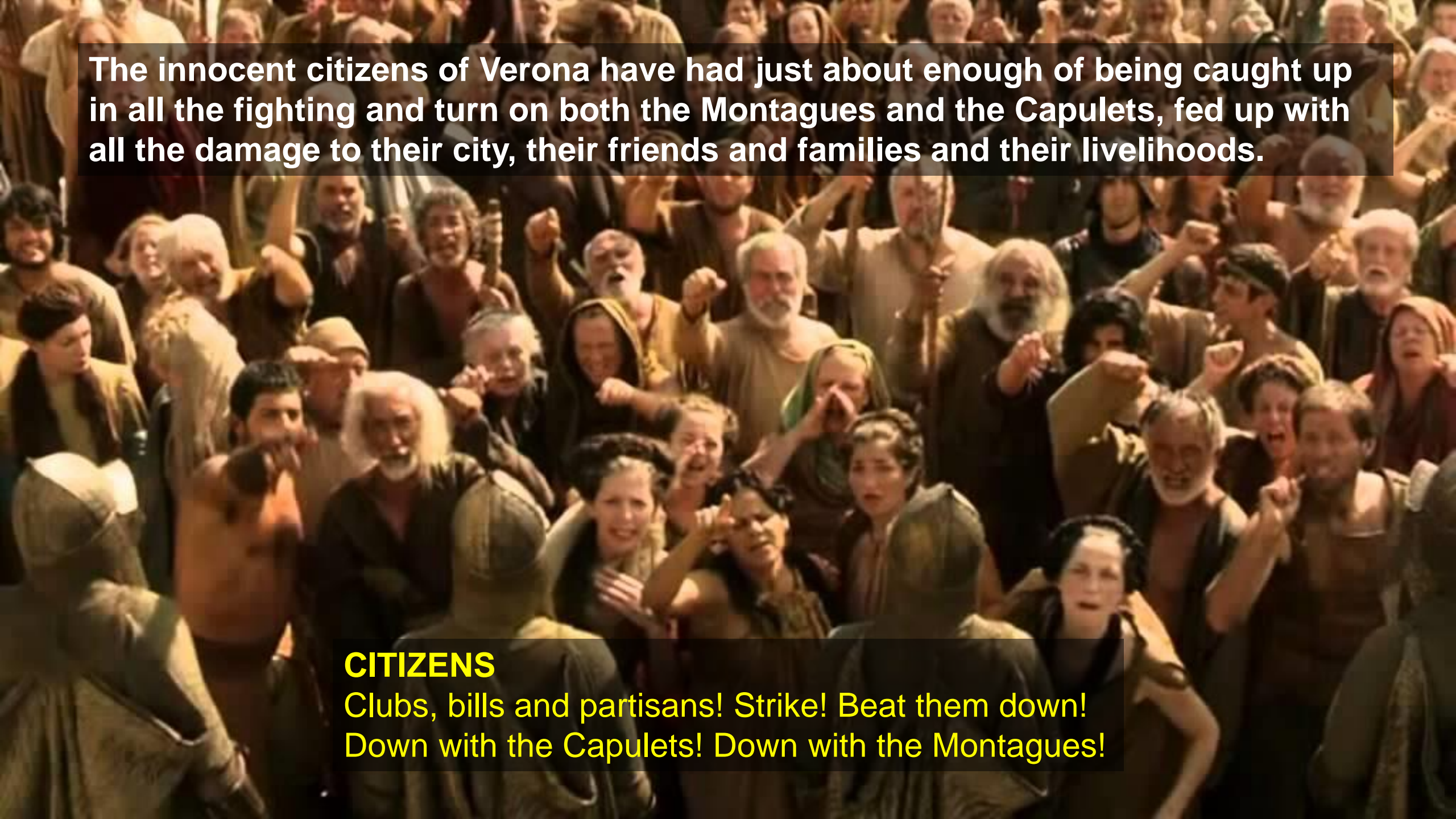
### **BENVOLIO**

I do but keep the peace. Put up thy sword, Or manage it to part these men with me.

### **TYBALT**

What, drawn, and talk of peace? I hate the word. As I hate hell, all Montagues, and thee. Have at thee, coward!





The innocent citizens of Verona have had just about enough of being caught up in all the fighting and turn on both the Montagues and the Capulets, fed up with all the damage to their city, their friends and families and their livelihoods.

**CITIZENS**

Clubs, bills and partisans! Strike! Beat them down!  
Down with the Capulets! Down with the Montagues!

**THINK:** Watch the following clips.

Decide which version of the street brawl you think is the most effective and why.

Think about the staging (setting or scene), the acting and the action as well as the use of dialogue (speaking).

[https://youtube.com/watch?v=D9D\\_4A7yYzc](https://youtube.com/watch?v=D9D_4A7yYzc) Romeo and Juliet Production Comparison: Analyzing Staging in Act 1 – “Do you bit your thumb at us?”

[https://youtube.com/watch?v=8ovVjj\\_zpQs](https://youtube.com/watch?v=8ovVjj_zpQs) Montagues and Capulets first brawl (1968)

<https://youtube.com/watch?v=SEzskNtFnIY&t=13s> Romeo and Juliet Petrol Station scene (Part One) (1996)

<https://youtube.com/watch?v=vzTI-ugNEt0&t=2s> The Capulet boys vs the Montague boys (Part Two) (1996)



**TASK 1:** Imagine you are a horrified citizen of Verona. You recently witnessed the shocking brawl between the servants of the Montagues and the Capulets and you are thoroughly fed up with the feud for a number of reasons that include:

- Disturbance of the peace
- Damage to public and personal property
- Shops/markets having to close
- Taxes rising to deal with cost of civil disorder and to pay for extra militia (police)
- Merchants and tourists staying away which is damaging the local economy
- The threat to the safety of your family and friends
- Innocent people getting hurt/caught up in the fighting
- A terrible example being set by these “noble” families to the children/young people of Verona

Write a letter of complaint to the Prince of Verona (Escalus) explaining why you are concerned and what measures you would like to see implemented to resolve the situation. You should plan your letter first before writing it.

You could write from Shakespeare’s time or take a more modern perspective like the 1996 Baz Luhrmann version where Prince Escalus becomes Captain Prince (the chief of police) and the brawl takes place at a gas station in a stylized American city next to a busy freeway. There is an example of how you could start your letter on the next slide.

Dear Prince Escalus,

I am writing to you because I am most concerned about what is happening to our once fair city of Verona and I simply cannot stand by any longer and watch as we descend into total chaos and financial ruin. The constant brawling between these two so-called “noble” families, the Montagues and the Capulets, continues to outrage and disgust all decent, law abiding citizens and we demand that it ceases immediately before any more innocent bloodshed makes civil hands even more unclean.

I anxiously await your intervention.

Citizen X

You could try to include some Shakespearean words and phrases taken from the Prologue.

Remember – you can make your letter old fashioned or more modern. It’s up to you.

You might want to remain anonymous – the Montagues and Capulets probably have many friends in high places!

**Shakespeare was a master at creating and using inventive put-downs and insults like Sampson's thumb bite towards Abram.**

**Here are some of the best - and no I'm not going to explain the meaning of every word!**

**Thou art a boil, a plague sore!  
From King Lear**

**Thou elvish-mark'd, abortive, rooting hog!  
From Richard III**

**I scorn you, scurvy companion.  
From Henry IV Part II**

**Poisonous bunch-backed toad!  
From Richard III**

**I am sick when I do look at thee.  
From A Midsummer Night's Dream**

**Thine face is not worth  
sunburning!  
From Henry V**

**Thou cream faced loon.  
From Macbeth**

**Would thou wert clean enough to spit upon!  
From Timon of Athens**

**Thou lump of foul deformity.  
From Richard III**

**More of your conversation would infect my brain.  
From Coriolanus**

**Away, you starveling, you elf-skin, you dried neat's tongue, bull's-pizzle, you stock-fish!  
From Henry IV, Part I**

### **Glossary**

Thou = you  
Art = are  
Wert = were

**TASK 2: Can you match the Shakespearean insult to its meaning?**

**Shrew**

A coward

**Cuckold**

A nagging woman

**Coxcomb**

A foolish person or an idiot

**Lily-livered**

A man who is vain and pretentious.

**Moon calf**

A man whose wife has been unfaithful to him.

**ANSWERS ON THE NEXT SLIDE.**

**ANSWERS TO SLIDE 12: Match the Shakespearean insult to its meaning.**

**Shrew**

A nagging woman.

**Cuckold**

A man whose wife has been unfaithful to him.

**Coxcomb**

A man who is vain and pretentious.


**Lily-livered**

A coward

**Moon calf**

A foolish person or an idiot.





**Oi, Fury! Thou art a puny  
clay-brained Hugger Mugger!**

**Yeah, Wilder? Well mate, thou art  
a reeky onion-eyed hedge-pig!**

**TASK 3:** Use the **Ye Olde Shakespearean Insult Kit!** to create your own Shakespearean taunts, insults and put-downs.

**WARNING:** If tried out at home, you do so at your own peril!

### Ye Olde Shakespearean Insult Kit!

How it works:

- Start each sentence with **thou** (which means 'you')
- Then take an insult from column **A**, then add on an insult from **B**, then from **C**.
- **Mix** the insults about and be as funny as possible!

A	B	C
bawdy	hunch-backed	canker-blossom
brazen	clay-brained	codpiece
bootless	dog-hearted	crutch
distempered	empty-hearted	cutpurse
fitful	evil-eyed	dogfish

See the attached document **Ye Olde Shakespearean Insult Kit!** in the Year 8 English Learning Pack Week 5 for additional options.