

Shakespeare and Primary Source Activity
Special Collections
Dr. Tara Lyons, tlyons@ilstu.edu
<https://taralyons.weebly.com/>

Death and Burial

Use the primary sources below to explore the meaning of lines in *Romeo and Juliet*.

1. Milner Special Collections BV245 .D35

Day, Richard. *A booke of Christian prayers, collected out of the aunce[n]t writers, and best learned in our tyme, worthy to be read with an earnest mynde of all Christians, in these daungerous and troublesome dayes, that God for Christes sake will yet still be mercyfull vnto vs.* London : Printed by Iohn Daye, dwelling ouer Aldersgate, 1578. STC 6429.

Act 4, Scene 4, lines 19-43

- Read the interchange between the Nurse, Lady Capulet, and Capulet after they discover Juliet's seemingly dead body in *Romeo and Juliet*. Explore the meaning of the lines. Consider what they say about Death.
- Peruse *A booke of Christian prayers* and look through the volume. Record one interesting detail.
- Go to sig. Nn.j and study the illustration of the Dance of Death on both this page and the facing one. Study the phrases below the woodcuts and work out what they are saying. Yes, the font is difficult to read. Ask for help if you are stumped.
- How do the woodcut images in this prayer book connect to the passage from the play?
- Anything else about this primary source that is relevant to the play as a whole?

Act 5, Scene 3, lines 74-120

2. Early English Books Online (Library Database)

The Church of England. *The Booke of Common Prayer, and Administration of the Sacraments, and Other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church of England.* London: Printed by Robert Barker, 1604. STC 16327.

- Read this passage from *Romeo and Juliet*. Explore Romeo's opening of the tomb and how he addresses the dead.
- Find *The Book of Common Prayer* (1604) in *Early English Books Online*. First, locate *Early English Books Online* on the Milner Library's Database Resources page and click on the resource. To access digital facsimiles of books, you may need to login to your ISU Library account. <https://guides.library.illinoisstate.edu/az.php>
- Once in *EEBO*, look at the search boxes. The easiest way to find a specific title is by knowing the STC (Short Title Catalogue) or Wing number. So, enter "16327" for the "Bibliographical Number."
- Click on the camera to see the images of the book. Peruse it and look through the table of contents.

- E. Find the English Church's prescribed burial rites on sigs. T4r-T5v. Skim through the burial service and summarize the main ideas.
- F. How does the language of the actual Protestant burial service compare or contrast to Romeo's words in the scene?
- G. Anything else about this primary source that is relevant to the play as a whole?