

Shakespeare and Primary Source Activity
Special Collections
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Herbals and Physic

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

1. Milner Special Collections QK41 .G41636

Gerard, John, *The herball or Generall historie of plantes. Gathered by John Gerarde of London Master in Chirurgerie: very much enlarged and amended by Thomas Johnson, citizen and apothecarie of London.* London : printed by Adam Islip, Joice Norton, and Richard Whitakers, anno 1636. STC 11752.

Act 2, Scene 2, lines 1-30

- A. Read Friar Laurence's speech at the beginning of Act 2, Scene 2, in *Romeo and Juliet*. Explore the meaning of the lines. Consider what he says about medicine and poison.
- B. Peruse Gerard's *Herbal* and look through the table of contents. Record one interesting detail.
- C. Find the entry for "Sleepy Nightshade" (Lib. 2, p. 340-1). How does Gerard's description of this plant compare or contrast to the Friar's description of plants?
- D. Anything else about this primary source that is relevant to the play as a whole?

2. Early English Books Online (Library Database)

Barrough, Philip. *The methode of phisicke conteyning the causes, signes, and cures of inward diseases in mans body from the head to the foote. VVhereunto is added, the forme and rule of making remedies and medicines, which our phisitions commonly vse at this day, with the proportion, quantitie, & names of ech [sic] medicine.* By Philip Barrough. Imprinted at London : By Thomas Vautroullier dwelling in the Blacke-friars by Lud-gate, 1583. STC 1508.

Act 2, Scene 1, 1-44

- A. Read Mercutio and Benvolio's banter at the beginning of Act 2, Scene 1. Explore the action of the scene and discuss what Mercutio says about the "medlar tree."
- B. Research "medlar" using the *Oxford English Dictionary*. Look for Shakespeare's usage.
- C. Find the *The Methode of Phisicke* (1583) 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>
- D. 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 "1508" for the "Bibliographical Number." You can also search by Author and Title.
- E. Click on the camera to see the images of the book. Peruse it and look through the table of contents.
- F. "Medlars" are mentioned as a curative for disease on pg. 56, 5 lines down.
- G. What disease will medlars treat? What other names are associated with medlars in this book?

- H. How does Barrough's description of this plant connect to Shakespeare's usage?
- I. Anything else about this primary source that is relevant to the play as a whole?