## Courtly love

The idea of ‘courtly love’ was a European tradition, dating from the Middle Ages and well known to the Elizabethan audiences of Shakespeare’s time. It was a set of rules and ideals about the way lovers from wealthy and aristocratic families should behave.

Below are some of the conventions of courtly love taken from *The Art of Courtly Love* by Andrea Capellanus:

* The man should fall in love with a woman of equal or higher social class than himself.
* Marriage is not a barrier to loving someone. If the woman is married, she is more difficult to attain and therefore more of a prize.
* The woman must reject the man’s advances in order to preserve her honour and good name.
* The woman’s coldness towards the man increases his passion for her. He is consumed with sadness, sighs with grief and makes up poetry about his love.
* The man tries to perform deeds to make himself good enough for his lady.
* The man cannot eat or sleep for thinking about his lady.
* He suffers continually from jealous thoughts.
* The man can never have enough of the attention of his beloved.
* An old love can be extinguished by a new love.
* A man in love can deny nothing to his love.

The tradition of courtly love was a stereotype from literature and had very little to do with what happened in real life, but some of the ideas about expected behaviour of men and women in love survived beyond the Middle Ages.

**For discussion and consideration in groups:**

* How much have the conventions of love and behaviour of young lovers changed since Elizabethan times?
* Do you think any of the conventions of courtly love still influence the behaviour and actions of people in love today? (Consider the way love and lovers are depicted in modern stories and film.)
* Tick any conventions that you think may still be followed today.

**Questions on the play of *Romeo and Juliet:***

1. In what ways does Romeo conform to the conventions of courtly love at the beginning of the play? (Act I, scenei). Support your answer with examples and quotations from the play.
2. Consider the reaction, behaviour and language of Romeo when he first meets Juliet. (Act I, scene v) Is his behaviour completely different or does he still follow the conventions of courtly love? Support your answer with examples and quotations from the play.
3. At the end of the play, do you think Romeo and Juliet’s love could be described as true love or is it a superficial love and shallow love? (Consider Act III, scenes iii and v and Act V, scene iii, lines 90–170). Support your answer with examples and quotations from the play.