But, soft, what light through yonder window breaks?
It is the east, and Juliet is the sun.
Arise, fair sun, and kill the envious moon,
Who is already sick and pale with grief
That thou, her maid, art far more fair than she.
Be not her maid, since she is envious;
Her vestal livery is but sick and green,
And none but fools do wear it; cast it off.
It is my lady, O it is my love:
O that she knew she were!
She speaks, yet she says nothing; what of that?
Her eye discourses, I will answer it.
I am too bold, 'tis not to me she speaks:
Two of the fairest stars in all the heaven,
Having some business, do entreat her eyes
To twinkle in their spheres till they return.
What if her eyes were there, they in her head?
The brightness of her cheek would shame those stars,
As daylight doth a lamp; her eyes in heaven
Would through the airy region stream so bright
That birds would sing and think it were not night.
See how she leans her cheek upon her hand!
O that I were a glove upon that hand,
That I might touch that cheek!
Romeo and Juliet Notes and Activities created by the RSC

Act: Two Scene: Two
Character: Romeo

About the speech
Romeo and Juliet is a play full of contrasts: love and hate, life and death, friendship and animosity. These contrasts appear very strongly in the language of the play. In this speech Romeo is overwhelmed by Juliet’s beauty. He describes her as being as bright as the sun, making everything else dark in comparison. Romeo has found his way underneath Juliet’s balcony late at night. The two met for the first time earlier that evening at a party thrown by her father. There was an instant attraction between them. After the party Romeo seeks her out by breaking into the Capulet orchard and searching for her bedroom window. He finds her standing outside on her balcony. Lost for words, he starts to describe her beauty as he watches her from below. He sees her as “the sun” in contrast to the “sick and pale” moon. Her beauty is so “bright” that she makes the birds sing because they “think it were not night”. He also spends a lot of time in the speech focusing on her looks. He describes “her eyes”, “her cheek” and “her hand”. Romeo is caught up in strong feelings of love and is trying to put emotions into words.

How actors work
During rehearsals, directors and actors often investigate the background of the play and character they are bringing to life. Shakespeare often highlights events happening in Elizabethan England through the language, characters and plots of his plays. Understanding the context in which these plays were written will help you make interesting choices about how to perform a particular speech. Actors also connect the character they are playing with their own experiences and the world around them.

Performance Suggestions
There are many ways that you can perform the speech. In rehearsals, directors and actors will explore Romeo’s inner conflicts. He wants to speak to Juliet but also wants to watch her without being seen. Say the speech as if he is:

- bursting to speak to her
- just wanting to carry on watching her
- totally carried away by her beauty

Actors and directors will ask questions about the specific situation a character is in. Romeo says this speech while hiding in the garden of his family’s sworn enemy. What are the dangers for him being there? Does he care how much danger he is in? Try saying this speech as if he:

- is worried about being caught and constantly aware of the danger he is in
- doesn’t care at all if he is caught, he is in love!

Actors and directors will also think about where Romeo is in relation to Juliet. Is he right underneath her? Is he across the garden? Is he near enough to whisper, or far away enough to talk loudly? Try out different locations for Romeo as you say this speech, how does this affect the way you speak?

Take a look at the language of the speech and try mixing these different choices to see which ones work best for specific moments.