

Shakespeare For You 2023



The Most Excellent and Lamentable Tragedy of Romeo + Juliet

Study Guide

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The possibilities are numerous for using the elements of this workshop as a jumping off point for cross-curriculum and interdisciplinary study in your classroom. With activities that introduce Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* while incorporating drama, writing, and the visual arts, this study guide offers many chances to reach any number of curriculum goals for all grade levels.

Shakespeare For You – *Romeo + Juliet* - Study Guide

Shakespeare on the Saskatchewan Festival, Inc. 2023

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Synopsis

Romeo and Juliet is set in the Italian town of Verona, where two prominent aristocratic families, the Montagues and the Capulets, have been feuding for generations. We begin the play in the middle of this feud, with a street fight erupting between members of the Montague and the Capulet families. The brawl, which draws in quite the crowd as townspeople come to watch the drama, is eventually stopped by the Prince of Verona himself, who, having enough with the decades-long feud, declares that any further fighting between the families would be punishable by death.

We are then introduced to the titular characters of the play: Romeo Montague and Juliet Capulet. Both are dealing with turmoil of the heart: Romeo is upset that his feelings for a girl named Rosaline are not returned, and Juliet is unsure whether she wants to accept the courtship of Count Paris.

In an attempt to cheer up his cousin Romeo, Benvolio convinces the young Montague to sneak into the Capulet ball that is occurring that evening. Romeo hopes that he may see, meet, and talk to Rosaline, while Benvolio hopes that Romeo will meet a new lady that will allow Romeo to forget about Rosaline. Benvolio and Romeo enlist the help of their close friend and cousin of the Prince, Mercutio, in order to attend the ball. While there, however, Romeo meets and falls in love with Juliet. Romeo is discovered by Juliet's cousin, Tybalt, who is outraged by his attendance and tries to challenge him to a fight. Lord Capulet intervenes and stops Tybalt, as he does not want to spoil the mood of the party. This leaves Tybalt very angry, swearing revenge. Romeo and his friends decide to leave the party as it is winding down.

Later that evening, Romeo enters the Capulet orchard and overhears Juliet professing her love for him. He follows in kind, and the two agree to be married. They garner the help of Friar Laurence and Juliet's Nurse. The Nurse works as liaison between the two young lovers, and the Friar agrees to marry them in secret the next day.

Tybalt, still enraged by Romeo's attendance of the Capulet ball, challenges him to a duel despite the newly declared law banning violence between the families. Romeo declines the duel in part because of this law, but also because he now sees Tybalt as family through his marriage to Juliet. Unknowing of their secret union, however, Mercutio takes up the challenge on Romeo's behalf, disgusted at Romeo's cowardness and offended by Tybalt's arrogance. During the duel, Mercutio is fatally wounded and dies when Romeo attempts to stop the fight and gets

in the way. Stricken with grief and feeling responsible for his friend's death, Romeo kills Tybalt in retaliation.

The Prince chooses to banish Romeo from Verona rather than have him put to death. He is warned, however, that he would be executed if he should ever think of returning. Juliet grieves not only for the loss of her cousin, Tybalt, but also the loss of her new husband. Her father, in hopes a wedding would rouse the family's spirits, agrees to marry her to Count Paris. Juliet is bound by her father's wishes, and risks disownment (or worse) if she refuses to marry.

Friar Laurence offers his help once again, this time giving Juliet a potion that would put her into such a deep sleep that everyone will think she is dead. He then sends a note to Romeo informing him of the plan and instructing him to be at Juliet's family crypt when she awakens so that they may both leave Verona together. Juliet takes the potion as instructed the night before her wedding to Paris. Being declared dead, she is laid in the family crypt.

The messenger sent by Friar Laurence does not reach Romeo in time to tell him of the plan, and Romeo believes that Juliet is truly dead upon hearing the news from his servant. He buys poison and travels to Juliet's tomb.

At the same time, Paris is visiting Juliet's tomb and confronts Romeo upon seeing him. A fight ensues, which leads to Romeo slaying Paris. Grief-stricken, Romeo consumes the poison and dies. Juliet awakens moments later and, upon finding Romeo dead, takes up Romeo's dagger in order to join him in death.

The Montagues, the Capulets, and the Prince arrive at the tomb and find all three dead. Friar Laurence explains to those remaining what all occurred and moved by the actions of the two young lovers, the feuding families vow to end the violence.

Did You Know?

One of William Shakespeare's most famous plays, *The Most Excellent and Lamentable Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet*, or known simply as *Romeo and Juliet*, has been made into countless movies, and has served as the inspiration for a number of modern movies like *West Side Story*, *Warm Bodies*, and *Gnomeo and Juliet*. Most recently, Disney has released a movie called *Rosaline*, which is a retelling of *Romeo and Juliet* from Rosaline's perspective.

Interestingly enough, Shakespeare was inspired by contemporary and early pieces of literature to write *Romeo and Juliet*. A contemporary piece of work, written in the mid-sixteenth century by Arthur Brooke, is entitled "The Tragic History of Romeus and Juliet" and, similar to Shakespeare's play, centres around the young love of Romeus Montague and Juliet Capulet, whose noble families have been feuding in the streets of Verona, Italy, for generations. The story of Romeo and Juliet seems to go even further back, however: written two centuries prior

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was Dante Alighieri's epic poem, *Divine Comedy*. In it, he references a number of feuding noble families that are "cruel" and needing to "cleanse their rottenness." The name of these noble families? You guess it -- the Montagues and the Capulets. It is possible, even, that the Montagues and the Capulets were real families in medieval Italy.

Fun Facts!

1. *The Most Excellent and Lamentable Tragedy of Romeo + Juliet* first premiered sometime between 1591 and 1595.
2. *Romeo and Juliet* was likely one of the last plays performed by Shakespeare's theatre group, the Lord Chamberlain's Men, at The Theatre (that was actually the name of the theatre... very original.) After the lease on the site expired in 1597, the owners of The Theatre dismantled the building (because, while they didn't own the land, they *did* own the wood that the theatre was built out of) and rebuilt it on a different piece of land, renaming it The Globe. There's an urban legend that they accomplished this in one evening.
3. The Globe would become synonymous with Shakespeare's work, and a modern reconstruction of the theatre was built and opened in 1997.
4. Two editions of the play were published before the *First Folio*: the first, known as "The Bad Quarto" was published in 1597. The second, higher quality Quarto was published in 1599 and is the first instance we see the play being called *The Most Excellent and Lamentable Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet*.

Main Themes

1. The Certainty of Fate
2. The Importance of Honour and Obligation to Family
3. The Persistence of Love
4. The Denouncement of Violence

Characters

The Ruling House of Verona

- Prince Escalus
Prince Escalus is the ruler of the city of Verona. He is fair, and appears to administer justice and authority to the chaos that permeates the streets of Verona as a result of the Montague-Capulet feud.

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- Count Paris
A member of Prince Escalus's family, Paris is a handsome, wealthy, and highly sought after bachelor of Verona's dating scene. He's rather good with a sword, too.
- Mercutio
A relative of both Prince Escalus and Paris, Mercutio is also a close friend to Romeo. Because of this, he is able to infiltrate both the Montague and the Capulet household. Mercutio is witty and is known to have both a sense of humour and sudden outburst of temper.

Members of the House of Montague

- Romeo Montague
One of the protagonists of the play, Romeo is the only child of Lord Montague and Lady Montague. He falls in love with Juliet, a member of the rival household, the Capulets. Romeo is quick to make rash decisions, but he is ultimately loyal to his family and to his obligations as Juliet's (secret) husband.
- Lord Montague
Lord Montague, simply known in most renditions of the play as "Montague," is an extremely wealthy nobleman of Verona. He has the same social status as Lord Capulet, and the two families have been in a generations-long feud. He cares for his only son, Romeo, and pleads for the Prince to spare his son's life after he kills Tybalt.
- Lady Montague
Lady Montague is Lord Montague's wife. She, too, deeply cares for her only son Romeo. She appears only twice within the play: once in the first scene of the play to restrain Montague from participating in the brawl that breaks out on the street, and a second time in the third act to learn of Romeo's banishment. She dies of grief offstage.
- Benvolio
Benvolio is Lord Montague's nephew and Romeo's cousin. The two men are close with one another. Benvolio is also friends with Mercutio. Benvolio appears to be less-than-enthusiastic about the Montague-Capulet feud, as he tries to back down from a fight with Tybalt and later attempts to stop the duel between Mercutio and Tybalt altogether.

Members of the House of Capulet

- Juliet Capulet
Juliet Capulet is the other protagonist of the play. She is described as young, beautiful, and the only daughter of Lord Capulet. She is close with her Nurse, who cared for her as a child. While she pushes against her obligations as a daughter to her father, she is loyal

to her husband, Romeo, and gives up her future, her place within her family, and eventually her life to be with him.

- Lord Capulet

The patriarch of the Capulet family, Lord Capulet (often referred to as simply “Capulet” in renditions of the play) is on the same social status as Lord Montague and is equally wealthy. He is authoritative and quick to anger when it comes to the Montagues, but he is capable of showing mercy: he allows Romeo to leave his ball and stops Tybalt from dueling with him. He forces his daughter into an arranged marriage with Paris.

- Lady Capulet

Lady Capulet is dutiful to her husband, Lord Capulet. She appears more often than Lady Montague and attempts many times to convince Juliet that obeying her father is not only the morally right thing to do, but Juliet’s only duty as a daughter. She does grieve the death of her daughter and agrees wholeheartedly with the peace.

- Tybalt

Tybalt is Lady Capulet’s nephew and Juliet’s cousin. He is hot-headed and quick to violence. This is not helped any by the fact he is an extremely skilled swordsman. He is extremely insulted by Romeo’s appearance at the Capulet ball and becomes engaged with a number of fights before eventually being slain by Romeo as revenge for the death of Mercutio.

- Nurse

An extremely important role, the Nurse raised Juliet as a child and has now become a close friend and ally to her as a young woman. The Nurse is made aware of the love between Romeo and Juliet and helps the two marry and spend an evening together.

- Rosaline

Interestingly, Rosaline is never actually *seen* in the play. Nevertheless, her role is important as she is the first object of Romeo’s love and is the reason he attends the Capulet ball. Rosaline is Lord Capulet’s niece and Juliet’s cousin.

Other Prominent Characters

- Friar Laurence

Friar Laurence, like the Nurse, helps Romeo and Juliet marry. He is a neutral character, however, as he has no allegiance to the Montagues or the Capulets. He agrees to help Romeo and Juliet because he believes that, through their marriage, an end to the feud may be possible.

For Discussion

- **Before your workshop:**
 - What do you know about the play, *Romeo and Juliet*? What do you associate with the title, the name of the characters, or both?
 - The play begins by telling us how it ends. Why do you think Shakespeare does this?
- **After your workshop:**
 - Has your understanding or conceptions of the play changed after learning about the plot, its characters, and its ending?
 - Do you think that the peace created between the Montagues and the Capulets will last? Why or why not?
 - Create a family tree for the Capulets and the Montagues, drawing connections to their family members, friends, and servants. Discuss the complexity of these relationships and how they affect the progression of the play. How do these relationships change by the end of the play?

Visual Art Prompts

Draw Family Crests for the Montagues and the Capulets. What elements would you include and why?

Drama Activities

The Hot Seat: Gaining Perspective

A story can change depending on who tells it. People see the world from different viewpoints. A group of people might see the same event from completely different perspectives and tell about the event in very different ways.

Objective: Students will analyze events from the play through the perspective of different characters.

Step 1: Make a list of the important events in the story of *Romeo and Juliet*.

Step 2: Set up the “hot seat”: a single chair in front of your classroom.

Step 3: Have students or a group of students choose one of the characters from the story.

Step 4: One by one, each student or group of students takes the “hot seat.” Have them introduce themselves in the voice and manner of the chosen character.

Step 4: Using the list you made of important events in the story of *Romeo and Juliet*, ask the “characters” in the “hot seat” questions about how these events affect them.

Step 5: After the class has interviewed several “characters,” discuss how the characters’ viewpoints differed. How were they alike? Was there a point in the story when most of the characters’ viewpoints were the same?

Writing Extension: Describe 5 of the characters in the play: write down 10 adjectives describing them then use your adjectives to write a paragraph description of each character. Now write about one of the

characters, describing them as another character sees them. Describe one character from the perspective of a different character.

Writing Prompts

Point of View

Example point of view questions:

- Use clues from the play and your own ideas to identify (character's name) point of view.
 - How might the story be different if it was told by (another character's name)?
- Identify the main point of view or perspective in the play by using details and your own background knowledge.
 - Explain another point of view or perspective that could exist.
- How might (character's name) point of view differ from your own?
 - Use three details from the play in the explanation of your thinking.
- How might your background, experiences and perspective have influenced the way you understood the play?
- Using evidence from the play and what you can infer about the character's point of view, explain how it is similar or different from your own perspective.
- What does the character's decision mean to you and how might it affect other characters in the story?

Monologue Writing

In the exercise, students will map out the character traits of several of the characters in the play. Then they will write a short monologue from the perspective of one of the characters. Students will demonstrate an understanding of character traits, recall facts, characters and events from the story.

Discussion Outline:

1. Use the character of your choosing. This could be either a whole class or small group discussion.
 - First plot out the main points of what happens to the character in the play.
 - Discuss what the character does in each section in response to what is happening.
 - Discuss how the character acts and interacts with different characters in each section.
 - Make a list of words that describe the character during each section.
 - Choose four words from the list that best encompass their whole character.
 - Discuss where in the play these character traits reveal themselves. (At this point, students are acting like detectives to find evidence to back up the character traits they have chosen. What the character does or says in the play is the proof that this word helps describe him/her.)
2. Then, have students choose one of the other characters from the play and on their own complete the character analysis process used above. Students fill in a character analysis diagram for their character. In the middle of the diagram is written their character, then the four character traits are drawn in circles flowing out of the center, then come out the proof is drawn in circles coming out of the traits.

- An example of what this diagram looks like is at:
<http://www.enchantedlearning.com/graphicorganizers/cloud/43.shtml>
3. Students think about what their character wants in the play. It should be expressed in the form of a “to” verb. This is the character’s objective. Their objective should encompass what drives them through the whole play.
 4. Students write: My name is _____ (Fill in name of character.) I want to_____. (Fill in what the character wants in the overall play.)
 5. Students use the character’s objective as a jumping off point to write a short monologue from their character’s point of view. The monologue should start with their completed sentence, I want_____. The rest should tell how they go about getting what they want or not. Or why they want it so much and why is it important to them.

Drama Extension: Students perform their monologues for the class.