Romeo and Juliet
A Study Guide

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Drama
The Playwright

William Shakespeare was born in Stratford-upon-Avon, in England in 1564. His father, John Shakespeare, was a tanner as well as an important political figure in Stratford-upon-Avon. There is not much recorded about Shakespeare’s schooling, however it can be assumed that he attended a very good local grammar school where most of his instructors were Oxford graduates and his classes were taught mostly in Latin. When he was eighteen, Shakespeare married a 26-year-old Anne Hathaway. The couple had three kids together: Susanna, Hamnet and Judith.

By 1582, Shakespeare was an established playwright in London. The plague kept many theaters closed during his early career, but he was still able to make money for poems and sonnets. When theaters were open, Shakespeare did most of his work in London. In 1598, Actor Richard Burbage built the famous Globe Theatre, for which Shakespeare was a stock-holder. Shakespeare’s social standing increased, so he applied for and received a coat of arms, with the motto: Non sanz droit (not without right). His coat of arms distinguished him from the social class of actors, who were associated with vagrants and criminals. Instead, Shakespeare was considered a gentleman. Shakespeare’s social class made his plays seemingly more acceptable than those by commoners.

Theater was a competitive business, so patronage from the nobility was important. Shakespeare was lucky enough to have patronage from Queen Elizabeth herself. The Bard knew how to write to please his patrons, so his popularity continued under King James’s rule and his troupe was renamed “The King’s Men” and they were given the Blackfriar’s Theater. Shakespeare’s plays remained well-received until he died in 1616 and was buried in Church of the Holy Trinity in Stratford. A monument to Shakespeare was set up on the north wall of the chancel, with a bust of Shakespeare. The bust and the engraving by Drentsche that prefixed the First Folio are the only renderings of Shakespeare that are considered to be accurate. In Shakespeare’s will, he left most of his property to Susanna and her daughter, except for his "second-best bed," which he left to his wife.
What is R&J About?
What are the first things that come to your head when you think about this play? “Romeo and Juliet” is about love, but what else is it about? As you watch the play think about the friendships portrayed, the family dynamics and scary world it takes place in.

Timeline of the Play
Everything in R&J happens super fast—just in a matter of days. It takes place in Mid-July, with boiling temperature and boiling tempers.

DAY ONE
1.1: Sunday morning: The “thumb-biting scene”
1.2: Sunday afternoon: Paris asks Juliet’s father for permission to marry Juliet
1.3: Sunday evening: We meet Juliet, her mother and the Nurse
1.4: Sunday evening: The boys go to the party; the Queen Mab speech
1.5: Sunday evening into night: Juliet’s party
2.1: Sunday night: Mercutio and Benvolio search for Romeo
2.2: Sunday before dawn: The balcony scene

DAY TWO
2.3: Monday early morning: Romeo asks Friar Laurence to marry him and Juliet
2.4: Monday at noon: The Montague boys fool around
2.5: Monday afternoon: Juliet waits for the Nurse to tell her when Romeo will meet her at the church
2.6: Monday afternoon: Romeo and Juliet wed
3.1: Monday afternoon: Tybalt kills Mercutio, Romeo kills Tybalt and is banished from Verona
3.2: Monday late afternoon: Juliet learns that Romeo is a murderer and banished
3.3: Monday early evening: Romeo despairs his banishment to Friar Laurence
3.4: Monday late at night: The Capulets discuss Juliet’s impending marriage

DAY THREE
3.5: Tuesday early morning: The morning after Romeo and Juliet’s marriage
4.1: Tuesday late morning or afternoon: Juliet visits the Friar in desperation, he gives her a poison to mimic death
4.2: Tuesday evening: Juliet apologizes to her parents
4.3: Tuesday night: Juliet takes the poison

DAY FOUR
4.4: Tuesday night into Wednesday morning: Juliet’s father moves her wedding to Paris to a day sooner
4.5: Wednesday morning: Juliet is found “dead” in her room
5.1: Wednesday afternoon: Romeo learns that Juliet is dead and buys a poison
5.2: Wednesday evening: Friar John tells Friar Laurence that he could not deliver a letter explaining Juliet’s “death” to Romeo
5.3: Late Wednesday into Thursday dawn: Romeo goes to Juliet, he kills Paris, himself
Where Did R&J Come From?

"Romeo and Juliet" is a popular story retold since Biblical times. It is a story rooted in myth, with the themes of love, death, and resurrection.

**MYTH**

In O rpheus and Eurydice, Eurydice dies and O rpheus defies death to drag his love back from the underworld. A similar story is told with Demeter and Persephone, only about a mother and a daughter. Similar stories and myths exist in almost every culture. **OVID'S "PYRAMUS AND THISBE"**

Pyramus and Thisbe is the story of two lovers in Babylon who occupy houses with connected walls. They cannot marry because of a rivalry that exists between their families, instead they must whisper their love to one another through a chink in one of the walls. They agree to meet at N inus' tomb in order to profess their love for one another. Thisbe arrives first, and, upon seeing a lioness with a bloody mouth from a recent kill, flees. As Thisbe runs, she leaves her scarf behind. The lioness accidentally mangles the scarf when she goes to take a drink of water. When Pyramus arrives to meet his love, he finds the mangled scarf and assumes Thisbe to be dead. Pyramus falls on his own sword and his blood stains the white leaves of mulberry tree. Thisbe returns, finds her beloved dead, and impales herself on the same sword after a period of mourning. The gods listen to Thisbe's lament and permanently change the berries on the mulberry tree to a deep red.

**DANTE'S DIVINE COMEDY**

The names Montague and Capulet are from Dante's Divine Comedy, in which the Montecchi and Cappelletti are mentioned in canto six of Purgatorio:

Come and see, you who are negligent,
Montagues and Capulets, Monaldi and Filipeschi
One lot already grieving, the other in fear.

-Purgatorio, canto VI, ll. 106-8.

This section of The Divine Comedy is about the general moral degradation of Italy, especially around Florence. The section also chastises the rulers and points to the ruling class as the reason for the bickering amongst the political parties in Lombardy. The endless warfare of the factions (historically named Montecchi and Cappelletti) had destroyed both of them.
MASUCCIO SALERNITANO'S "IL NOVELLINO"
In his 33rd novel, Salernitano wrote the earliest version of a story akin to Romeo and Juliet as we know it. The story is called "Mariotto and Gianozza" and was published in 1476.

LUIGI DE PORTO'S "GIULIETTA E ROMEO"
This story, which De Porto claimed was true, was published in Historia novellamente ritrovata di due Nobili Amanti in 1530. This story starts the most recognizable evolution towards Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet. De Porto renames the lovers Romeo Montecchi and Giulietta Capelletti; he calls the Friar "Lorenzo"; introduces Mercutio (called "Marcuccio", noted only for his cold hands), Tybalt (Theobaldo Capelletti) and Paris as characters, although they are poorly developed. This version adds the balcony scene, the ball and the double suicide in Giulietta's tomb. In De Porto's version, Giulietta kills herself by holding her breath.

Bandello published a re-telling of "Giulietta e Romeo" in his book in 1554. Bandello's biggest contribution was that he added sentiment and moralizing to the story. Romeo's initial melancholy is verbalized, the family feud is emphasized, and the characters indulge in rhetorical outbursts. Bandello also added the significance of the role the Nurse plays as well as Benvolio. "Novelle" was translated into French in 1559 in Histories Tragiques, which Shakespeare could have had access to.

ARTHUR BROOKE'S "THE TRAGICAL HISTORY OF ROMEUS AND JULIET"
Brooke's poem is just over three thousand lines and generally considered to be dry and "pedestrian". Brooke's version of the Romeo and Juliet story is taken from a French poem by Pierre Boaistaua ("Rhomeo and Julietta", 1559) that was based on Bandello's story, which was directly inspired by da Porto. Boaistaua's poem was translated into English by William Painter in 1562, which Shakespeare could have referenced. But "Romeo and Juliet" is certainly a dramatization of the Brooke poem.

Brooke presents Romeus and Juliet as examples of bad that happens when people ignore good advice and become slaves to desires. The poem is almost exactly Shakespeare's story, but less fleshed out. Shakespeare took the Brooke poem and added his masterful, imaginative and precise method of story-telling. He expanded on all characters, making them relatable and intriguing- such as the complicated and troubled Mercutio. Shakespeare fleshed out the world of Verona, making it dark and lively, a bustling and bawdy backdrop to the private, intimate scenes of the lovers. Most of all, Shakespeare filled his play with his beautiful poetic language, writing phrases and speeches which people can still recite today.
Why Do This Play?

"Romeo and Juliet" is not a play frozen in time. It includes many modern elements and it is easy to relate to these characters even today.

There have been many modern productions of Romeo and Juliet.
Baz Luhrmann took the play and turned it

From This:  

To This:

There have been countless modernized productions. For instance, the Royal Shakespeare Company did a production in which Mercutio came on stage in a convertible.
LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION!
Shakespeare set his play in Verona, Italy. Verona had the following qualities:
- His source texts used the city
- Verona had a long history of being romanticized
- It had a "small-town" mentality needed for the gossipy community of Romeo and Juliet
- Verona was a particularly hot city, so Shakespeare used the hottest month in a hot city— temps are sure to boil!
- The Montaegus and Capulets are based on two, real Verona families.

Romeo is banished to Mantua (Mantova in Italian) because it was one of the only nearby cities. It would have taken Romeo about five hours to get between Italy and Mantua on horseback, which is important to the timeline of the play.

SETTING: MODERNIZED AND AMERICANIZED
Our play takes place is a harshly contemporary America. There are several "Veronas" throughout the US and a few "Mantuas" but only one state has them both together— Ohio! They are about a four hour drive apart, which keeps with the original timeline which Shakespeare wrote.
Drug That Mimics Death

Tetrodotoxin, (TTX) a neurotoxin with no known antidote. Fampridine has been tested to reverse the effects in animals, but never in humans. This is the poison of the pufferfish, blue-ring octopus, rough-skinned newt, some bacteria and several other creatures.

It prevents nerve cells from firing by blocking the channels used in the process. It often paralyzes the diaphragm, which then causes respiratory failure. It can enter the body through ingestion, injection, inhalation and through abraded skin. It is not always fatal, but in near-lethal doses **it can leave the person in a state of near-death for several days**. TTX is allegedly used in Haitian Voodoo in order to approximate a zombie-like state.

The toxin usually sets in within thirty minutes of ingestion, but could be delayed for up to four hours. Symptoms include: tingling of the lips and tongue, sweating, headache, weakness, lethargy, tremor, paralysis, dysphagia, seizures, coma, hypertension and many others. The toxin often causes the victim to vomit. **The victim will remain completely conscious**, but may be paralyzed for for up to twenty-four hours. If the victim does not die within twenty-four hours then they will recover without any residual effects. This drug is also called Haitian Zombie Powder.

In 1980, a man appeared in a rural Haitian village claiming to be one “Clarivius Narcisse”. Narcisse had been declared dead almost two decades before. **Narcisse described being conscious but paralyzed during that period, he even remembered the doctors covering his face with a sheet.** When Narcisse resurfaced in 1980 he answered questions about his life and family that not even a close friend would have been able to answer. Narcisse was the catalyst for ethnobotanist and anthropologist Dr. Wade Davis’ work on “Haitian zombies”.

According to Haitian lore, a zombie was created by a bokor, who then captures the part of the soul which makes someone individual. Davis discovered that the bokor used complex powders made from plants and animals. Davis collected eight samples of “zombie powder” in four regions of Haiti. The samples largely had the following in common: one or more species of poisonous animal and human remains.

Davis believed that by rubbing the powder on the skin would cause irritation and breaks, which would then allow the TTX to sink into the skin and then into bloodstream--making the victim appear dead. The family would bury the victim and--if everything went well--the bokor would remove the body from the grave and the victim would believe himself to be a zombie.

Davis’ research has been widely questioned as if they are ethical or even scientific.
Friendship

"Romeo and Juliet" shows us a tight-knit group of guy friends-- and what happens when one of those guys gets a serious romantic interest for the first time. The group we see in the play fits into "types" that were found during an international study about male friendship.

The 6 Archetype Roles:

The Pilot – the leader of the group. Popular, in the know and successful in his career, the Pilot will provide leadership, structure and stability for the group of friends.

The Explorer – the friend that inspires the group, instinctively seeking out new ideas and opportunities. The clothes he wears and the music he listens to this month will be what the rest of the group buys the next.

The Rock – solid and reliable, his friends are his life. The Rock is the embodiment of old-school values like hard work, commitment and common sense and he is the closest to being the soul of the group, the keeper of its true values.

The Hero – has a clear sense of morals and a willingness to stand up for what he believes is right. The Hero is excited by togetherness, providing energy and inspiration to the group.

The Wit – irreverent, satirical and possessed of a great zest for life. He is a tremendous optimist and has a determination to make the most of every moment so he tends to be at the centre of the group’s liveliest conversations.

The Coach – articulate, emotionally intelligent and a great listener. The Coach understands the needs and feelings of individual friends, gravitating instinctively to those who are feeling damaged in some way to be a shoulder to lean on.

W here do you think each character falls? Do you think this model works for girls too?
Discussion Questions

1. How was Romeo and Juliet's "forbidden love" influenced by their peers and family?

2. What is the turning point of this play? Why is that? Do you see a change from comedy to tragedy?

3. Which characters influence both R & J individually the most? Who do they deliberately refuse to listen to? Why?

4. How does violence further the plot?

5. Why are Romeo and Juliet so quick to marry?

6. What is Paris' role within the play? What about Rosaline?

7. Which family do you think started the feud? How long has it been going on?

8. What is the significance of the Friar and the Nurse? If they had done some things differently, how might the outcome of the play changed?

9. How are the relationships in the play similar to relationships you have or have seen?

10. Romeo and Juliet is a play of opposites (i.e. light and dark, old and young, etc), what opposites do you see in the play?

Want More?

Go to www.cmuromeoandjuliet.weebly.com for additional information, including a full glossary of the play!