

# ROMEO & JULIET

## Study Guide

Know Before You Go.....	2
Director’s Note.....	3
Character List.....	4
Play Synopsis.....	5-6
William Shakespeare Biography.....	7-8
Shakespeare’s Use of Sun and Moon Imagery.....	9-10
The Overall Theme of Love and Hate.....	8
Prose and Verse.....	9
Set Design.....	10
A Look at Theoretical Frameworks.....	11

# KNOW BEFORE YOU GO: THEATRE FIELD TRIPS

## Before Your Field Trip:

- **Share the day's schedule** with all chaperones and students—everyone should know the plan!
- **Know your final head count** (students + staff + chaperones) before arriving. You will need that number for check-in.
- **Make sure your order is paid for.** All tickets must be paid for BEFORE the day of your field trip.

## What to Bring (and What Not To):

- **No backpacks** are allowed inside the theatre (unless for medical needs). Leave them at school or on the bus.
- **Come as you are. There is no dress code here.** It can be helpful to bring an easy-to-remove layer like a light jacket or sweater in case you get cold from the A/C. Alternatively, the theatre may become warm once the seats are filled and stage lights are on.
- **If lunch is on your schedule**, please bring them. There will be carts for you to place them just inside the entrance.

## Arrival & Check-In:

- Arrive during your assigned arrival window. Late arrivals may miss the beginning of the show.
- **Know your final head count** (students + staff + chaperones) before arriving. You will need that number for check-in.
- Your bus will unload at the Main Entrance. Stay on the bus until an Arvada Center staff member or volunteer checks your group in.

## While You're Here:

- The **taking of photos or videos during the show is strictly prohibited.** Publishers do not allow photos and videos of the works they license to us.
- You will likely pass artwork while moving through the building. It's one of the great things about being at the Arvada Center! **Remind students to enjoy the artwork with their eyes only.**
- Chaperones: Please **model great behavior**—stay engaged, silence devices, and help keep students focused.
- Keep all feet on the floor, not on your seat, the seat in front of you, or on the stage if sitting in the front row.
- Laugh, cheer, sigh, and cry if that's how you're feeling, or give a big round of applause when something you like happens. Standing ovations at the end of the show are always welcome. **We do not expect you to be a silent audience**, but please save side conversations until after the show.

## If You Need Help:

- **First Aid, Emergency, or Lost Student?** Head to the Box Office or Security Desk just inside the main entrance.
- **Have a question?** Look for any staff or volunteer wearing a Theatre Button.

## We Love Hearing From You!

- Send letters, thoughts & reflections, feedback, or thank-you notes to share with our amazing staff, volunteers, actors, and donors:

Arvada Center for the Arts & Humanities  
C / O School & Community Programs Manager  
6901 Wadsworth Blvd, Arvada, CO 80003



## DIRECTOR'S NOTE



Every moment of *Romeo and Juliet* is fueled by a kind of violent urgency. The play takes place over four volatile days, in which a mindless and toxic tribalism collides with the force of young love. The result, as described by the Prince, is that “All are punished,” but that isn’t entirely accurate. Yes, the parents mourn, and yes, the other adults who failed to protect the young lovers feel shame and grief. But, when looking at the body count, it is the younger generation that pays the ultimate price.

This 90-minute cut of the play creates a kind of speed that is very current. Our 24-hour news cycle and the continuous river of social media encourage a kind of manic race from crisis to crisis, and this play feels ideally suited to this new reality. Just as we are increasingly programmed to react to the latest outrage, the characters in this tragedy operate in a frantic reaction, which doesn’t allow for critical thinking or empathy.

In this telling of the story, our focus is to lean into this cost and how the young—while rarely the source of feuds and wars—are most likely the first victims. Shakespeare never tells us why these families are at odds. It is an “ancient grudge,” and, as in our world today, these historical grievances are often the deadliest. The young are raised with an inheritance of hate that they don’t fully understand but still they give their lives to revenge.

Which leaves Juliet and Romeo. Their sudden and all-consuming love lets them imagine that they can escape their fate, but despite Romeo’s brave declaration to “defy you, stars!”, there is no place for love in this world, for “violent delights have violent ends.”

**Lynne Collins**

Director and Artistic Director of “Romeo & Juliet”

# CHARACTER GUIDE



Whose values and points of view are included or excluded?

**BENVOLIO:** A Montague, Romeo's cousin. He tries to prevent violence between the families.

**TYBALT:** A Capulet, Juliet's cousin. A principal antagonist, he often heightens the tension between the two families and actively tries to fight the Montagues. He kills Mercutio and is in return killed by Romeo.

**ROMEO:** A Montague, son of the patriarch of the Montague family. He falls in love with Juliet and fights to see her despite their family complications.

**LADY CAPULET:** Juliet's mother. She calls for Romeo's execution following his killing of Tybalt, and tries to convince Juliet to marry Paris.

**JULIET:** A Capulet, daughter of the patriarch of the Capulet family. She falls in love with Romeo and tries to resist her planned marriage to Paris. She attempts to fake her death to avoid the ceremony.

**MERCUTIO:** A friend of Romeo's. He brings Romeo to the ball where Romeo and Juliet meet. When Tybalt challenges Romeo to a duel and he refuses, Mercutio fights Tybalt instead. He is killed when Romeo tries to stop the battle, which gets Mercutio killed. Romeo's response to his friend's death, killing Tybalt, leads to his banishment from Verona.

**LORD CAPULET:** Patriarch of the Capulet family and Juliet's father. He works to convince his daughter to marry Paris, even moving the date of the ceremony to be sooner than originally planned despite Juliet expressing that she does not want to marry Paris.

**NURSE:** Juliet's personal servant. She is one of the few characters that is aware of Romeo and Juliet's romance. She tries to aid them, helping Romeo sneakily meet with Juliet.

**FRIAR LAURENCE:** An advisor to both Romeo and Juliet, Friar Laurence marries the pair in an attempt to stop the fighting between their families. When Romeo is banished for killing Tybalt, it's Friar Laurence's plan to fake Juliet's death with a potion. He sends Romeo a letter explaining the plan, but it does not reach him in time.

**BALTHASAR:** A Montague servant, Balthasar is the one who mistakenly tells Romeo that Juliet is dead.

**APOTHECARY:** A poor merchant of remedies, poisons, ingredients, medicines, and more, the Apothecary sells Romeo the poison that he uses to commit suicide.



Choose a minor character and rewrite a key scene from their perspective.  
What does this character notice that Romeo and Juliet don't see?

# PLAY SYNOPSIS

In Shakespeare's timeless tale of tragedy and love, the powers that be have chosen violence and division, and it is the youth who must fight these battles that started before they were born. In fair Verona, anger and hatred bubble beneath the surface of society, and violence can break out at any moment.

Two noble families, the Montagues and the Capulets, have a longstanding and bitter rivalry. When the only children of both families, Romeo Montague and Juliet Capulet, have a chance meeting at a party, it is love at first sight - as well as doom. They are dismayed to discover that they are both from opposing feuding families.



Who bears the greatest responsibility for the deaths of Romeo and Juliet? Why?

{ Juliet: My only love sprung from my only hate. Too early seen unknown, and known too late.  
Prodigious birth of love it is to me that I must love a loathed enemy. (Act 1, Scene 5) }

Romeo's friends, Benvolio and Mercutio, attempt to cheer him up, but even though Romeo knows that Juliet should be his sworn enemy, he can't stay away and hides in the darkness under her balcony to see her.



Set Romeo & Juliet's famous balcony scene in today's digital world (texts, social media, voice notes, etc.).  
How does technology change the risks and intimacy of the moment?

Juliet warns Romeo that if anyone sees him they will kill him, but Romeo is not deterred, and the two profess their love for each other and vow to meet again the next day to be wed. Romeo goes straight to Friar Laurence to tell them he has fallen in love with his family's mortal enemy, and asks the Friar to marry them in secrecy. The Friar hopes that maybe this union might bring the two families together.

{ Friar Lawrence: O, she knew well Thy love did read by rote that could not spell. But come  
young waverer, come, go with me, In one respect I'll thy assistant be. For this alliance may so  
happy prove To turn your households' rancour to pure love. (Act II, Scene 3) }

Romeo later runs into Juliet's Nurse, through whom he sends a message to Juliet asking her to meet him so they can get married. As Benvolio and Mercutio search the streets for Romeo, they run into the Capulets, and before you can blink, a fight breaks out, ending with Mercutio being killed. With vengeful anger, Romeo then kills Juliet's cousin Tybalt, and it is decreed that Romeo is banished. With that, he may as well be dead.

{ Romeo: Ha, banishment! Be merciful, say 'death'. For exile hath more terror in his look,  
Much more than death. Do not say 'banishment'. (Act III, Scene 3) }

Crestfallen, Romeo runs to Friar Laurence for help, and they make a plan for Romeo to leave Verona with Juliet. Meanwhile, Juliet tells her father that she will not marry Paris, whom he has chosen for her. Her father tells her that he will never speak to her again if she defies him.

Juliet's Nurse reveals that Romeo waits for her, and that Friar Laurence has a plan. Juliet says that she would rather die than live without Romeo. The Friar gives Juliet a vial of poison that will make her sleep and simply appear dead, tricking her family and freeing her to be reunited with Romeo. Juliet takes the vial, and falls into a deathlike sleep.

{ Juliet: Romeo, Romeo, Romeo, here's drink. I drink to thee! (Act IV, Scene 2) }

In Mantua, Romeo is told that his Juliet lies dead in the Capulets' tomb. Distraught, Romeo visits the Apothecary for a poison that will kill him as well so that he may join Juliet in death. He goes to the tomb, sees Juliet laying there and, heartbroken, he takes the poison and dies.

{ Here's to my love! O true apothecary, Thy drugs are quick. Thus with a kiss I die. (Act V, Scene 3) }

Juliet awakens, finds Romeo dead, and kisses his lips hoping that some of the poison he took will kill her too. When it does not, she stabs herself with a dagger, to join her love forever.

## IMAGINATIVE RETELLINGS AND ALTERNATE PERSPECTIVES'S ON R & J FOR YOUNG ADULTS:



How might changing the narrator change who has power in the story?

*These Violent Delights* by Chloe Gong

*Juliet's Nurse* by Lois Leveen

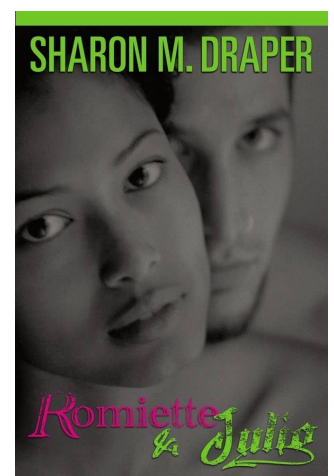
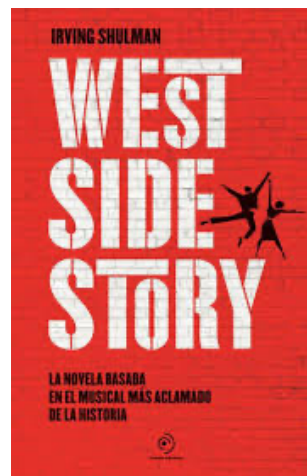
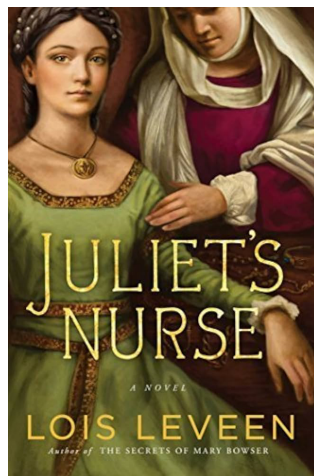
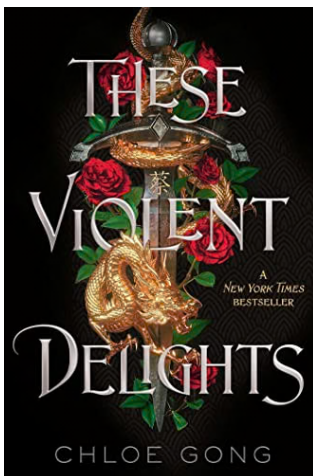
*West Side Story A Novelization* by Irving Shulman

*Romiette and Julio* by Sharon M. Draper

*Romeo's Ex: Rosaline's Story* by Lisa Fiedler

*Prince of Shadows* by Rachel Caine

*Still Star-Crossed* by Melida Taub





# WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE BIOGRAPHY



How is literature a product of its time?



William Shakespeare

William Shakespeare (Author) was born in 1564 in Stratford-upon-Avon and became one of the most celebrated playwrights and poets in the English language, with works spanning various genres including tragedies, comedies, and sonnets. Although much is written about him, very little documentation of his life survives beyond the public records of his birth, death, marriage and financial transactions. Shakespeare probably attended the Edward VI Grammar School, where his studies would have been almost exclusively in Latin.

He married Anne Hathaway and had three children, later moving to London where he gained recognition with the Lord Chamberlain's Men theater company. Over the course of twenty years, he wrote 148 sonnets, 3 long poems, and the 37 plays that continue to be performed around the world today.

Between 1610 and 1612, Shakespeare retired to Stratford-upon-Avon, where he died in 1616 at the age of 52. He supposedly died on the same day he was born, April 23rd. He is buried in the Church of the Holy Trinity in

Stratford-upon-Avon. Shakespeare's lasting legacy includes his vast contributions to literature, the English language, and the enduring performances of his plays. His works have been translated into every major living language, and continue to be studied, performed, reinvented and re-interpreted over 400 years after his death.

## SHAKESPEARE'S USE OF SUN AND MOON IMAGERY



How does a writer use literary devices to demonstrate deeper meaning?

In Shakespeare's time (late 16th and early 17th century) the absence of electric lighting made the cycles of the sun and the moon central to daily life, a reality that informed Shakespeare's use of imagery throughout *Romeo and Juliet*. In the play, Shakespeare repeatedly draws on the moon and sun metaphor to talk about the contrasting forces of love and hate, consistency and instability. This metaphoric language helps create tension throughout the story that builds up to the lovers' tragic end.

For example, Romeo compares Juliet to the sun, when they meet at night under her balcony. He speaks of her as a light that illuminates the darkness, a powerful and constant force. The moon is envious of Juliet's brightness

Act 2, Scene 2 (Balcony Scene)

ROMEO: "It is the east, and Juliet is the sun."

ROMEO: "Arise, fair sun, and kill the envious moon."

In contrast, Juliet speaks of the moon as coldness and instability. Although the night is a shield for the secret meetings between her and Romeo, it also reflects the fragility and uncertainty of their situation and makes obvious the barrier to their open love.

**JULIET:** "O swear not by the moon, th' inconstant moon,  
That monthly changes in her circled orb."

Act 2, Scene 2:

Despite idealizing their love as something constant like the sun in a world ruled by the moon's changeability, Shakespeare foreshadows the lovers' downfall, as their desire for certainty cannot survive the instability and mistimed events that ultimately lead to their deaths.

## THE OVERALL THEME OF LOVE AND HATE IN "ROMEO & JULIET"



### What makes a performance good?

Romeo & Juliet is set in Verona, a town divided by hate and the long-standing feud of the Capulet and Montague families. Shakespeare never reveals how the feud began, - only that it is deeply entrenched in Verona's culture. By the time the story starts, tensions are so heightened that the violence bubbling beneath the surface can erupt at any moment. Romeo and Juliet's love defies these deep divisions, yet, in the reality of the world around them, so shaped by hatred, it can only end in tragedy.

Listed below are some lines from the play that exemplify this central tension of love and hate.



### Which elements and principles of design were utilized in the theatre to further drive the story on stage?

**JULIET:** My only love sprung from my only hate. Too early seen unknown, and known too late. Prodigious birth of love it is to me that I must love a loathed enemy. (Act 1, Scene 5)

**JULIET:** If he be married, my grave is like to be my wedding bed. (Act 1, Scene 5)

**JULIET:** O Romeo, Romeo! wherefore art thou Romeo? Deny thy father and refuse thy name. (Act 2, Scene 2)

**JULIET:** 'Tis but thy name that is my enemy. (Act 2, Scene 2)

**ROMEO:** My name, dear saint, is hateful to myself because it is an enemy to thee. (Act 2, Scene 2)

**ROMEO:** My life were better ended by their hate, than death prorogued, wanting of thy love. (Act 2, Scene 2)

**FRIAR LAURENCE:** Two such opposed kings encamp them still in man as well as herbs: grace and rude will; and where the worser is predominant full soon the canker death eats up that plant. (Act 2, Scene 3)

**FRIAR:** In one respect I'll thy assistant be. For this alliance may so happy prove to turn your households' rancour to pure love. (Act 2, Scene 3)

**ROMEO:** My life is my foe's debt. (Act 3, Scene 1)



### What risks come with being authentic?

# PROSE AND VERSE: HOW CHARACTERS CHANGE THE WAY THEY SPEAK

Shakespeare used prose (non-rhyming speech) and verse (poetic, structured language) with intention in *Romeo & Juliet*. Much of the play's verse is written in iambic pentameter - a rhythmic structure that combines unstressed syllables and stressed syllables arranged in five beats per line. Characters speak in prose or verse to signify their social standing, education level, as well as their emotional state.

For example, the educated and wealthy Romeo and Juliet both speak in verse, while the less-educated nurse speaks in prose. Shakespearean audiences would have immediately been able to recognize these distinctions, giving them context about these characters' backgrounds and status simply through patterns of speech. How a character speaks gives the audience clues about who they are and how they see the world.

Romeo (speaking in iambic pentameter) (Act II, Scene 2):  
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.

Nurse (speaking in prose) (Act I, Scene I):  
Lord, how my head aches! What a head have I!  
It beats as it would fall in twenty pieces.

Shakespeare also used prose and verse to show a character's emotional state. When their emotions run high, characters will often switch from prose into verse to reflect intensity or excitement. In Mercutio's famous "Queen Mab" speech in Act I, Scene 4, he talks to Romeo about dreams in general prose, but as he animatedly moves to talking Queen Mab, the spirit who visits you in your dreams. He becomes more animated, the language changes from casual conversational prose into poetic verse.

MERCUTIO: Why, may one ask?

ROMEO: I dreamt a dream tonight.

MERCUTIO:

ROMEO: Well, what was yours?

MERCUTIO: And so did I. That dreamers often lie.

ROMEO: In bed asleep, while they do dream things true.

Mercutio: (Speaking in verse):

O, then, I see Queen Mab hath been with you.  
She is the fairies' midwife, and she comes  
In shape no bigger than an agate stone  
On the forefinger of an alderman...

This switch from prose to verse allowed Shakespeare to quickly change the mood and tone of a scene, or to show when a character goes from being casual to serious. Much like in a musical, when a character's emotions are just too big for words and can only be expressed in song, the shift from prose to verse can signify a moment when only poetry will do.



## How does structure impact meaning?

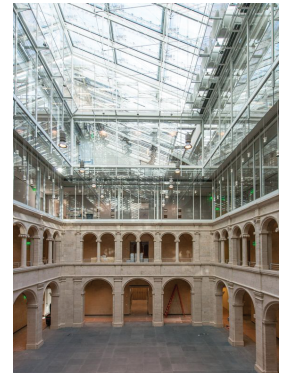
### CONTEMPORARY YA LITERATURE WRITTEN IN VERSE:

*Home Is Not a Country* by Safia Elhillo  
*Brown Girl Dreaming* by Jacqueline Woodson  
*The Crossover* by Kwame Alexander  
*The Poet X* by Elizabeth Acevedo  
*Starfish* by Lisa Fipps  
*Bright Red Fruit* by Safia Elhillo  
*Red, White, and Whole* by Rajani LaRocca  
*The Black Flamingo* by Dean Atta  
*The Magical Imperfect* by Chris Baron

## “ROMEO & JULIET” SET DESIGN BY MATTHEW S. CRANE



## How do we synthesize two different interpretations of a work?



When approaching *Romeo and Juliet*, we wanted to create a world of tension and inevitability that the story lives within. Tension between the new and old, between living and dying, between peace and violence. The inevitability in the play can feel self-explanatory (I would argue that *Romeo and Juliet* may have the most well-known ending of any play in the western canon) in that this story, and this relationship, was only ever going to end in violence and death.

Visually, we looked toward architectural inspiration that showcased the juxtaposition of the new and the old, of a modern world living within a timeless place. New styles growing out of old styles, but ultimately rooted in the past and rooted in tradition. I was especially interested in the ways that modern architecture with its focus on glass and clean lines can feel so fragile compared to the heaviness of classical stone and mortar work. Because of the inevitability of this story, we also wanted the final tomb/crypt to be ever present at the literal center of our playing space, sitting under a large concrete centerpiece, with its weight bearing down on *Romeo and Juliet* until their end.

**Matthew S. Crane**  
Scenic Designer



# A LOOK AT THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	THEMES	POINT OF VIEW	QUESTIONS
Feminist Theory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gender</li> <li>• Power</li> <li>• Social roles</li> </ul>	<p>Society is shaped by unequal power between genders. Literature reflects who is allowed agency, choice, and authority. Marriage, family, and tradition can be tools of control rather than protection.</p>	<p>Who benefits most from the rules of society?</p> <p>Is love an act of freedom or a reaction to being controlled?</p> <p>How are masculinity and honor tied to violence?</p>
Psychoanalytical Theory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unconscious desire</li> <li>• Emotional conflict</li> <li>• Identity</li> <li>• Fear</li> </ul>	<p>Human behavior is driven by hidden emotions and psychological needs. Love, aggression, and rebellion often express deeper inner struggles. Families pass down emotional patterns across generations.</p>	<p>What emotional needs do the characters try to satisfy through love?</p> <p>How does defiance reflect a struggle to separate from family?</p> <p>What role does fear play in the decisions made?</p> <p>How do dreams and premonitions reveal the characters' inner anxieties?</p>
Archetype Theory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Universal symbols</li> <li>• Classic character templates</li> <li>• Timeless story forms</li> </ul>	<p>Stories repeat across cultures because they express shared human experiences. Characters often represent archetypes (the lovers, the tyrant, the peacemaker). Symbols carry meaning.</p>	<p>What archetypes do Romeo, Juliet, Tybalt, and the Friar represent?</p> <p>How do light and dark function as symbolic forces in the play?</p> <p>What myth-like lesson does the ending teach?</p> <p>How is this tragedy similar to other famous myths or legends?</p>