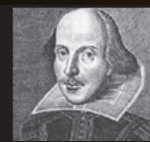




The Plays of William Shakespeare



Romeo and Juliet

Study Guide

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Table of Contents

Note to Instructor	4
A Special Note on Shakespeare's Plays	5
Synopsis	6
About the Author	8
Background Information	9
Ideas for Pre-reading Activities	10
Act I	11
Act II	21
Act III	30
Act IV	40
Act V	45
Summary Questions	52
After-you-read Activities	58
Additional Resources	59
Answer Key	Separate File

A Special Note on Shakespeare's Plays

A first encounter with Shakespeare can be a challenging experience for high school students. The spelling is often nonstandard, the vocabulary is difficult and archaic, and the cadence and structure are unfamiliar. These barriers to understanding the story could cause a student to become frustrated with the literature and give up. To enhance the student's appreciation and understanding of *Romeo and Juliet* we urge instructors to carefully consider the edition your students will read. We suggest selecting an annotated edition that uses standard spelling but retains the original sentence structure. The line references we use in this study guide may not apply to all editions of *Romeo and Juliet*.

In addition, since Shakespeare wrote his plays to be performed and not merely read, we recommend the use of video or audio recordings of *Romeo and Juliet* as part of the learning process. These may be available through your local library. We advise letting students watch or listen to the play before actually reading it. This helps familiarize the students with the story and the language and makes in-depth study of the text easier.

Synopsis

Caught in the trap of a long-standing family feud, the members of the two distinguished Veronese houses of Capulet and Montague engage in bickering, quarreling, and occasional bloodshed when they encounter each other in the streets of Verona. To put a halt to these disturbances, the Prince of Verona enacts a law making street brawling punishable by death.

Tempers flare when Tybalt, of the house of Capulet, discovers that Romeo, heir of the Montagues, has come uninvited and disguised to a great banquet given by old Lord Capulet. Unseen by others, Romeo encounters Juliet, heiress of the Capulets, and is charmed by her beauty and grace. Romeo and Juliet talk briefly and share a clandestine kiss. After the banquet, Romeo climbs into the orchard of the Capulets and overhears Juliet, standing on her balcony, confess her love for him. Romeo speaks, making his presence known, and confesses his love for Juliet. The lovers decide to take quick and decisive action. The next day they are secretly married in the cell of the good Friar Laurence, who hopes the marriage will end the family quarrel.

Following the wedding, Juliet hurries home, while Romeo and his friends Mercutio and Benvolio encounter trouble in the streets. Tybalt, still angry that Romeo and his friends attended the Capulets' party the previous evening, provokes Mercutio to fight. Romeo tries to halt the dispute, but Tybalt manages to kill Mercutio. In anger Romeo kills Tybalt. The Prince of Verona then arrives at the scene and banishes Romeo from the city.

Meanwhile, Juliet's father, knowing nothing of the secret marriage, decides that Juliet shall marry Count Paris. Upset, Juliet turns to Friar Laurence for help. The friar gives Juliet a potion that will give her the appearance of death. The friar tells Juliet that after she is placed in the ancient tomb of the Capulets she will awaken, and he and Romeo will come and take her to Mantua where she can live in peace with Romeo.

The friar promises to send a letter to Romeo explaining the plan. Unfortunately, the letter does not arrive before Romeo receives news of Juliet's death. Grief-stricken, Romeo buys enough poison to kill 20 men. Planning suicide, Romeo

Romeo and Juliet Study Guide

heads for the Capulet tomb so he can die by Juliet's side. When Romeo arrives at the tomb he encounters Count Paris. Romeo kills Paris and drags his body into the Capulet tomb. Seeing Juliet, Romeo promises his love, swallows the poison, and dies.

Friar Laurence hurries to the tomb at the time when he knows Juliet will awaken. He discovers the bodies of Paris and Romeo. Juliet awakens and Friar Laurence encourages her to seek refuge in a convent. Instead she thrusts Romeo's dagger into her heart and falls across his body, dead.

As both families gather at the tomb, Friar Laurence tells them the entire story. Seeing what sorrow their feuding has brought, the two families vow to bury their grudge.

Romeo and Juliet Study Guide

8. These times of woe afford no time to woo.
9. Night's candles are burnt out, and jocund day stands tiptoe on the misty mountain tops.
10. O fortune, all men call thee fickle.

Paraphrasing:

To *paraphrase* means to reword something, yet maintain its original meaning. Write a paraphrase of each of the lines below, simplifying the wording but maintaining the original meaning. Line references have been given so that you may check the context of the original. One has been done as an example.

Example: (Scene i, lines 61, 62)

Tybalt Romeo, the love I bear thee can afford
No better term than this: thou art a villain.

Tybalt: Romeo, The nicest thing I can say to you is this: you are a villain.

1. (Act III, scene i, lines 94, 95)

Mercutio A plague o' both your houses! I am sped.
Is he gone and hath nothing?

2. (Act III, scene i, lines 124, 125)

Romeo This day's black fate on more days doth depend;
This but begins the woe others must end.

Romeo and Juliet Study Guide

5. What is the Prince's punishment? What is the purpose of the punishment?

6. Underline all the paradoxes Juliet uses to describe Romeo after she hears the news of Tybalt's death.

Beautiful tyrant! fiend angelical!
Dove-feather'd raven! wolvis-ravens lamb!
Despised substance of divinest show!
Just opposite to what thou seemst—
A damned saint, an honorable villain!

7. How does Juliet react to the news of Tybalt's death and Romeo's banishment?

8. In scene iii Friar Laurence tries to comfort Romeo after telling him he is banished. The Friar says: "Be patient, for the world is broad and wide." What does the Friar mean?

9. How does Romeo's reaction to his banishment compare to Juliet's reaction?

Romeo and Juliet Study Guide

15. Lord Capulet says, “I think she [Juliet] will be ruled in all respects by me.” Explain what Lord Capulet means by this.

16. In scene v, Romeo and Juliet part before the morning’s light. Romeo says: “More light and light: more dark and dark our woes!” (line 36) Explain what Romeo means.

17. Juliet speaks to Romeo in following passage (lines 54–57):

Juliet O God! I have an ill-divining soul!
Methinks I see thee, now thou art below,
As one dead in the bottom of a tomb.
Either my eyesight fails or thou look’st pale.

What is being foreshadowed?

18. In scene v, lines 69–130, (“Why, how now, Juliet? . . .”) Juliet chooses her words carefully so that she may appear to be saying what seems appropriate to her mother without really attacking Romeo. Give two examples of the double meaning in Juliet’s words.

Romeo and Juliet Study Guide

That he shall soon keep Tybalt company;
And then, I hope, thou wilt be satisfied.

Write a two- or three-sentence character description of Juliet's mother.
Consider everything you have learned about her in the play so far.

Dig Deeper:

1. In his despair, Romeo seeks the counsel of Friar Laurence. Juliet's nurse is her counselor and confidant. Read Proverbs 12:5, 15; 13:14, 20; 19:20. Why do you think it's important to have someone you can go to for advice? Do you think it's important who our advisors are? Why or why not?
2. What sort of qualities should one look for in an advisor or counselor?
3. Who do you go to for advice? Why?

Romeo and Juliet Study Guide Answer Key

Scene v: Romeo and Juliet part at dawn. Juliet's parents tell her that she is to be married to Paris. Horrified, Juliet seeks the help of Friar Laurence.

Act IV

Vocabulary:

1. d; 2. c; 3. a; 4. d; 5. c; 6. a; 7. c; 8. d.

Similes and Metaphors:

1. S; 2. M; 3. M; 4. S; 5. M.

Questions:

1. Juliet tells Friar Laurence that if he can give no help, she will kill herself.
2. The friar gives Juliet a potion to take that will make her appear to be dead. He tells Juliet to pretend that she is willing to marry Paris. Juliet must take the potion that night. Her family will think she is dead and will place her in the family tomb. She will sleep for 42 hours. The friar will write to Romeo to tell him of the plan. Romeo and the friar will go to the tomb at the time Juliet awakens, and she will be free to spend the rest of her life with Romeo.
3. Juliet's father assumes Juliet is still being defiant when she returns. Juliet asks her father for forgiveness. Juliet claims to have repented of her disobedience and says she agrees to the marriage.
4. Juliet tells the nurse that she must spend time in prayer before the wedding.
5. Juliet fears that the potion may be poison. She fears that she might waken in the tomb before Romeo comes and die suffocated by the bad air. She fears that she may be driven mad by spirits or ghosts that may be present in the tomb, or by her own fears. Ironically, she fears that in her madness she might kill herself.
6. Answers will vary, but it does seem strange to have a comic scene immediately following the mourning. The effect might be that the family's sorrow is made to appear ridiculous or exaggerated to a comic extreme. It is also a stark contrast to the end of the play.
7. Answers will vary. Consider the question of whether Paris is mourning Juliet, or that he has been cheated out of marriage by death ("Beguiled, divorced, wronged, spited, slain! Most detestable Death, by thee beguiled, . . ."). Consider that Lord and Lady Capulet might be more upset that their plans were foiled ("All things that we ordained festival turn from their office to black funeral . . ."). The friar's words of comfort are as cheerful as the family's are sorrowful. Both seem exaggerated. Also, the following comic dialogue between the servants hints that this sorrow should not be taken too seriously.

Character Study:

Answers will vary.

Lord and Lady Capulet: They mourn loud and long, but perhaps more so for the wedding that will not take place.

Paris: Paris is upset, but perhaps more that he has been cheated out of marriage by the death of his future wife.

Juliet's Nurse: The nurse doesn't have much to say for a change. It is rare to find her speechless. Her sorrow may be the most genuine.

Summary:

Scene i: Paris is at Friar Laurence's cell planning the wedding when Juliet arrives. After Paris leaves,