



SEATTLE SHAKESPEARE EDUCATION TOUR

ROMEO AND JULIET

BY WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

ADAPTED AND DIRECTED BY MICHAEL NEVÁREZ

EDUCATOR RESOURCE GUIDE



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**Two households, both alike in dignity
(In fair Verona, where we lay our scene),
From ancient grudge break to new mutiny,
Where civil blood makes civil hands unclean.**

— *Romeo and Juliet*, Prologue

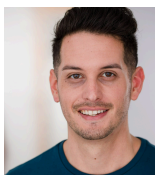
Welcome to our touring production of *Romeo and Juliet* - a timeless story that continues to resonate with audiences, particularly young people, more than 400 years after it was first written. In this adaptation, we aim to bring Shakespeare's world into sharper focus for today's middle and high school students.

At the heart of *Romeo and Juliet* are themes of love, loss, and identity - topics that continue to shape the lives of teenagers everywhere. The intense emotions of first love, the struggles of defying societal expectations, and the tragic consequences of miscommunication all feel as fresh now as they did in Elizabethan times. This story, though set in Verona, Italy, is universal in its exploration of how family pressures, rivalry, and impulsive decisions can have life-altering impacts.

Our production is designed to be fast-paced and accessible, distilling the play's powerful essence into a form that fits within the constraints of a touring performance. With just five actors, we aim to capture the full spectrum of Shakespeare's characters and the rich emotional depth of his writing, while maintaining a dynamic and engaging pace for our student audiences.

As we travel across Washington, we hope to spark conversation and reflection on the timeless relevance of this story. Whether in the classroom or on stage, *Romeo and Juliet* invites us all to examine the ways we connect with others, the consequences of our choices, and the power of love and hate in shaping our world. We are excited to share this production with you, and we hope it encourages you to see this classic in a new light.

Thank you for joining us on this journey, and we look forward to sharing the magic of Shakespeare's words with you!



Michael Nevárez
Director of Romeo and Juliet

seattleshakespeare.org/education
education@seattleshakespeare.org

The play opens with a violent brawl between two feuding families of Verona—the Capulets and the Montagues. The chaos escalates until the Prince arrives, breaking up the fight and threatening death to anyone who disturbs the peace again.

Meanwhile, Romeo is moping over unrequited love for Rosaline, while the Capulets are planning a grand celebration to introduce their daughter, Juliet, to Paris, a young

lord. Everyone in Verona is invited—except the Montagues. Despite the lack of invitation, Romeo is persuaded by his friends, Benvolio and Mercutio, to crash the Capulet party in disguise.

At the event, Romeo lays eyes on Juliet and instantly forgets about Rosaline. The two are immediately smitten but are soon separated, only to learn that the other belongs to a rival family.

Ignoring the danger, Romeo sneaks into the Capulet garden to find Juliet at her window. There, they vow their love and plan to marry secretly the next day.



Seattle Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* (2024), Photo by Giao Nguyen

Romeo seeks out Friar Laurence, who agrees to marry them in hopes that their union will end the long-standing feud between their families. However, on the day of their secret wedding, tragedy strikes. Tybalt, Juliet's cousin, confronts Romeo, who refuses to fight with him. Mercutio steps in and is fatally wounded. In his grief and rage Romeo kills Tybalt in retaliation. As punishment the Prince banishes Romeo from Verona.

A devastated Juliet spends one final night with Romeo before he must flee. Unaware of her secret marriage, Lord Capulet insists she wed Paris immediately, hoping to distract the family from their grief. Juliet seeks the Friar's help out of desperation. He gives her a potion that will make her appear dead, and plans for Romeo to retrieve her when she awakens.



The Youth Shakes Company of *Romeo and Juliet* (2024), Photo by Giao Nguyen

However, the message never reaches Romeo. Instead, Romeo hears of Juliet's "death" and overcome with grief, buys poison to join her in death and travels to her tomb to join her. Juliet awakens to find Romeo dead beside her, and in her despair takes her own life with his dagger.

The deaths of the two lovers prompt the Capulets and Montagues to finally reconcile, understanding too late that their feud has led to the deaths of their children.

ACT 1

SCENE 1

- A street brawl breaks out between the **Capulets** and **Montagues**, escalated by **Tybalt**.
- **Prince Escalus** declares death for anyone disturbing the peace again.
- **Romeo** reveals to **Benvolio** he is lovesick for **Rosaline**.

SCENE 2

- **Paris** seeks **Capulet's** permission to marry **Juliet**.
- **Capulet** invites **Paris** to woo her at the family's feast.
- **Romeo** and **Benvolio** decide to crash the party to see **Rosaline**.

SCENE 3

- **Lady Capulet**, **Juliet**, and **Nurse** discuss marriage. **Juliet** is open to considering **Paris**.

SCENE 4

- **Romeo**, **Mercutio**, and **Benvolio** head to the **Capulet** party.
- **Mercutio** delivers the "Queen Mab" speech.

SCENE 5

- **Romeo** and **Juliet** meet and fall instantly in love.
- **Tybalt** recognizes **Romeo** and vows revenge but is stopped by **Capulet**.

Seattle Shakespeare's Touring *Romeo and Juliet* (2011)

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ACT 2

SCENE 1

- **Romeo** sneaks back to find **Juliet**, avoiding **Benvolio** and **Mercutio**.

SCENE 2

- In the famous “balcony scene” **Romeo** and **Juliet** confess their love and plan to marry in secret.

Seattle Shakespeare's Touring *Romeo and Juliet* (2013)



SCENE 3

- **Romeo** asks **Friar Laurence** to marry him and **Juliet**. The Friar agrees, hoping it will end the feud.

SCENE 4

- **Mercutio** mocks **Romeo** for being lovesick, unaware that his affections have shifted from **Rosaline** to **Juliet**.
- **Nurse** arrives as **Juliet**'s messenger to arrange the marriage.

SCENE 5

- **Nurse** informs **Juliet** of the plan for her to marry **Romeo**.

SCENE 6

- **Romeo** and **Juliet** are married by **Friar Laurence**.

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ACT 3

SCENE 1

- **Tybalt** challenges **Romeo** to a duel, but **Romeo** refuses.
- **Mercutio** fights **Tybalt** and is killed.
- **Romeo** avenges **Mercutio** by killing **Tybalt** and is banished by the **Prince**.

SCENE 2

- **Juliet** learns of **Romeo's** banishment and **Tybalt's** death.



Wooden O's *Romeo and Juliet* (2019)

SCENE 3

- **Friar Laurence** advises **Romeo** to flee to Mantua and plan his reunion with **Juliet**.

SCENE 4

- **Capulet** arranges for **Juliet** to marry **Paris**.

SCENE 5

- **Romeo** and **Juliet** share a bittersweet farewell.
- **Lady Capulet** informs **Juliet** of her impending marriage to **Paris**. **Juliet** defies her parents.

ACT 4

SCENE 1

- **Juliet** seeks help from **Friar Laurence**, who gives her a potion to fake her death.

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SCENE 2

- **Juliet** pretends to agree to marry **Paris** to please her family.

SCENE 3

- **Juliet** takes the potion and falls into a deathlike sleep.

SCENE 4

- The **Capulet** household prepares for the wedding.

SCENE 5

- **Juliet** is found "dead," and the wedding turns into a funeral.

ACT 5

SCENE 1

- **Romeo**, in Mantua, learns of **Juliet's** "death," so he buys poison and heads to her tomb.

SCENE 2

- **Friar Laurence** discovers **Romeo** didn't receive the letter explaining the plan.

SCENE 3

- **Romeo** kills **Paris** at the tomb.
- **Romeo** drinks poison and dies beside **Juliet**.
- **Juliet** awakens, sees **Romeo** dead, and stabs herself.
- The **Montagues** and **Capulets** reconcile after discovering the tragedy.



Seattle Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* (2016)

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**From forth the fatal loins of these two foes
A pair of star-crossed lovers take their life,
Whose misadventured piteous overthrows
Doth with their death bury their parents' strife.**

— *Romeo and Juliet*, Prologue



Elizabeth Wynn

Romeo Montague

Romeo is a passionate and impulsive young man driven by love. Initially heartbroken over his unrequited feelings for Rosaline, he unexpectedly finds himself swept away by Juliet, a girl from his family's sworn enemy. He struggles to balance loyalty to his family with his devotion to Juliet.



Cordelia Carranza

Juliet Capulet

Juliet is a spirited and intelligent young woman who begins the play sheltered by her family's expectations. Though initially dutiful, she quickly proves to be bold and determined when she falls in love with Romeo, the son of her family's greatest enemy.



David Breyman

Benvolio

Benvolio tends to be a voice of reason among his hot-headed friends. He constantly tries to diffuse tension and prevent violence, but his efforts often go unheard.

Capulet

Proud and temperamental, Lord Capulet is a father torn between his desire to control his household and his love for his daughter. His insistence on Juliet's marriage to Paris ultimately drives her to make some of the most difficult choices.

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**The fearful passage of their death-mark'd love,
And the continuance of their parents' rage,
Which, but their children's end, nought could remove,
Is now the two hours' traffic of our stage;**

— *Romeo and Juliet*, Prologue



Rolando Cardona

Nurse

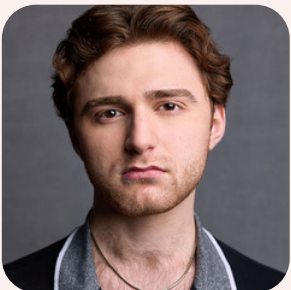
The Nurse is Juliet's confidante and serves as a mother figure. She's full of bawdy humor and down-to-earth wisdom, but her protective instincts sometimes clash with Juliet's growing independence.

Mercutio

A quick-witted, free-spirited master of wordplay, Mercutio mocks Romeo's romantic notions while hiding his own frustrations. Beneath his playful bravado lies a deep loyalty to his friends.

Prince

Authoritative and weary of the violence plaguing Verona, the Prince is a figure of law and order. He strives to keep the peace but is increasingly frustrated by the reckless feuding between the Capulets and Montagues.



Levi Redmill

Tybalt

Juliet's violent cousin, quick to anger, and deeply protective of his family values. Tybalt thrives on conflict, and his hatred for the Montagues fuels his every move.

Friar Laurence

Friar Laurence serves as a trusted counselor to both Romeo and Juliet. He believes their love could end the feud and bring peace to Verona. But his plans spiral out of his control, making him an unwilling architect of tragedy.

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The tangled relationships in *Romeo and Juliet* are driven by love, loyalty, and the bitter feud between two powerful families—the Capulets and the Montagues. At the heart of the story are two young lovers whose bond defies generations of hatred. This character tree will help you visualize the connections, conflicts, and alliances that shape the world of Verona.

THE HOUSE OF ESCALUS



PARIS

KINSMAN OF THE PRINCE
ENGAGED TO JULIET

ESCALUS (THE PRINCE)

PRINCE OF VERONA



MERCUTIO

KINSMAN OF THE PRINCE
CLOSE FRIEND TO ROMEO

THE HOUSE OF CAPULET



LADY CAPULET

MOTHER OF JULIET



LORD CAPULET

FATHER OF JULIET

NURSE

JULIET'S NURSE / CONFIDANT

TYBALT

JULIET'S COUSIN
KILLED BY ROMEO



ROSALINE

JULIET'S COUSIN
ROMEO'S FORMER LOVE INTEREST

JULIET

DIED BY HER OWN HAND

SECRETLY MARRIED

THE HOUSE OF MONTAGUE



LADY MONTAGUE

MOTHER OF ROMEO
DIED OF GRIEF



LORD MONTAGUE

FATHER OF ROMEO

ROMEO

DIED BY HIS OWN HAND

BENVOLIO

ROMEO'S COUSIN

FRIAR LAURENCE

A FRANCISCAN FRIAR
CLOSE FRIEND TO ROMEO

KEY



Dead by the end of the play



Married



Not seen (in our production)

.....> Unrequited Love

..... Cousins / Related

Romeo and Juliet is more than just a story about two young lovers. Shakespeare weaves together big ideas that explore human emotions, relationships, and the consequences of our choices. These themes—like love, fate, conflict, and family—are what give the play its lasting power. They invite us to think about the forces that shape our lives and the ways our emotions can both inspire and destroy us. As you read or watch the play, consider how these themes show up in the characters' actions and how they still resonate with the choices and challenges we face today.

Love and Passion

- The play explores different types of love: romantic love (Romeo and Juliet), infatuation (Romeo and Rosaline), friendship (Romeo and Mercutio), and familial love (Romeo and Benvolio).
- Love is portrayed as powerful but also occasionally impulsive and dangerous.
- The intensity of Romeo and Juliet's love leads to both joy and tragedy.

Fate and Destiny

- The idea of "star-crossed lovers" suggests that their fates were sealed from the beginning.
- Coincidences and bad timing (like the missed letter) suggest that fate plays a role in their downfall.
- Characters often blame fate or fortune when things go wrong.



Seattle Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* (1999)

Conflict and Feud

- Violence is woven throughout the play, from the opening brawl to the fatal duels.
- The feud turns personal disagreements into deadly confrontations.
- Violence is often impulsive, reflecting the quick decisions made by many characters.

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Touring Production of *Romeo and Juliet* (2025)
Photo by Spencer Dykstra

Youth and Impulsivity

- Young characters, especially Romeo and Juliet, make quick, passionate decisions.
- Their youthful optimism and belief in love clash with the older generation's desire for control and tradition.
- The impulsiveness of youth is both exciting and dangerous.

Power and Communication

- Power dynamics shape relationships throughout the play, from the parents' control over their children to the Prince's authority over Verona.
- Juliet's struggle for autonomy highlights the limited power young women held in her society.
- The power struggle between the Montagues and Capulets drives the violence and conflict that traps Romeo and Juliet.

Individual vs. Society

- Romeo and Juliet's love defies the expectations and rules of their feuding families.
- Both characters struggle to balance their personal happiness with loyalty to family and social tradition.
- Their attempts to break free from societal constraints ultimately lead to their isolation and tragic end.



Youth Shakes' production of *Romeo and Juliet* (2024)
Photo by Giao Nguyen



Romeo and Juliet (2005)
Photo by Ken Holmes

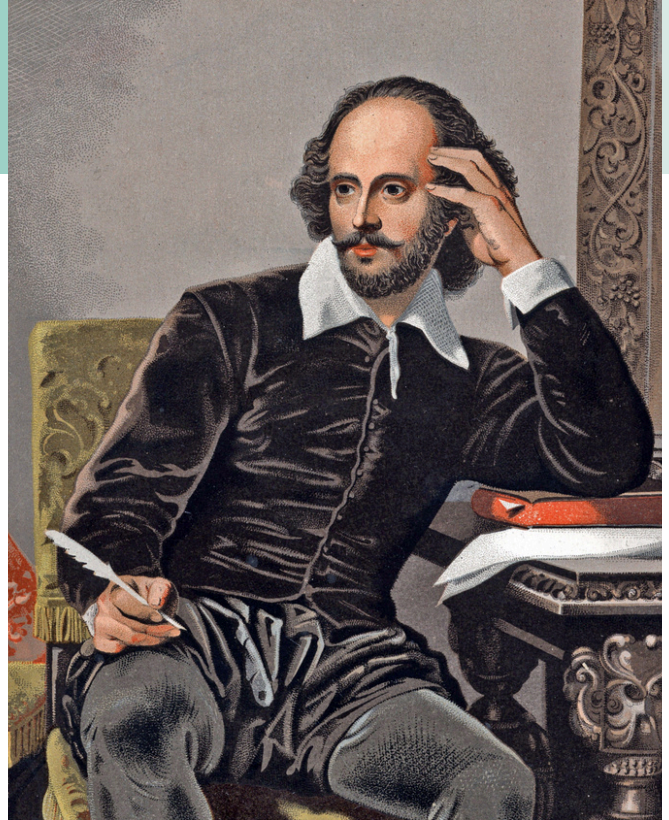
WHO WAS WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE?

William Shakespeare, widely regarded as the greatest dramatist in the English language, was born in April 1564 to John Shakespeare, a city councilman and glove maker, and Mary Arden. He was the eldest son in a family of eight.

Not much is known about William's childhood or education. It's likely he attended the local school in Stratford, where he would have studied classical Latin authors, as was typical in Elizabethan education.

In 1582 at the age of eighteen William married Anne Hathaway (not the actress from *The Princess Diaries*). The birth of their daughter Susanna was the impetus of their hasty marriage six months prior. Two years later, the couple had twins— Hamnet and Judith. After the birth of the twins records of William's life disappear for several years. These "lost years" have sparked much speculation among historians. Some believe he began his theatrical career tending horses at the theatre though no one knows for sure. What is clear is that during this time William must have been honing his skills as a writer.

By 1592 records show that Shakespeare's plays were being performed in London. He joined an acting company called Lord Chamberlain's Men, which he co-owned with several other actors. The company became a favorite of Queen Elizabeth I, and later James I. During this time William often acted in his own plays, typically in minor roles, and also appeared in other productions. His early works were mostly comedies and histories.



Tragedy struck in 1596 when Shakespeare's son, Hamnet, died of an unknown illness. Just three years later, in 1599, Lord Chamberlain's Men were successful enough to build their own venue—the Globe Theatre. As Shakespeare's career advanced, so did the popularity of the company, and his writing deepened with his great tragedies.

In 1603, after the death of Elizabeth I, James I became the new monarch and the official patron of Lord Chamberlain's Men. Their name was then changed its name to the King's Men. In 1608 they expanded by purchasing the indoor Blackfriars Theatre. Shakespeare became quite wealthy from his career and made several property investments, including the purchase of New Place which was the second-largest house in his hometown of Stratford. He eventually retired to Stratford to spend his final years. Shakespeare died on April 23, 1616. The cause of his death remains unknown.

While occasionally divided into further subcategories, Shakespeare's plays are typically classified into three main genres: **Tragedy**, **Comedy**, and **History**.



Education Tour: Macbeth (2024)
Photo by Giao Nguyen

TRAGEDY

Shakespearean tragedies, though they may contain moments of levity, are defined by their intense, high-stakes storylines, typically leading to the death of key characters. Common features of a tragedy are:

- Characters deeply affected by personal or societal turmoil
- Themes of inescapable doom and fate
- A noble but flawed protagonist who suffers a downfall due to their tragic flaw or circumstances
- A final act that ends in death or catastrophe

COMEDY

A Shakespearean comedy doesn't always align with modern expectations of humor. Although there may be laugh-out-loud moments, the most recognizable traits of a Shakespearean comedy include:

- Young lovers struggling to overcome obstacles, often posed by strict or disapproving elders
- Mistaken identities, frequently involving disguises
- Complex, interwoven plotlines
- A frequent use of puns and wordplay
- A happy ending, culminating in a wedding or reunion



Drum and Colours: Comedy of Errors (2024)
Photo by Giao Nguyen

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Drum and Colours: Henry IV (2023)
Photo by Giao Nguyen

THE “PROBLEM PLAYS”

In addition to the three major genres, Shakespeare wrote a handful of works that are harder to categorize, often called “problem plays.” These plays mix elements of comedy and tragedy and tend to challenge traditional storytelling structures. They frequently explore darker themes and complex moral dilemmas, making them difficult to classify as purely comedic or tragic. Some characteristics of Shakespeare's problem plays include:

- Shifts in tone, often moving from light-hearted scenes to serious or unsettling ones
- Ambiguous endings that don't provide clear resolutions or typical comedic or tragic conclusions
- Characters dealing with ethical or social complexities that challenge the audience's sense of justice

HISTORY

Shakespeare's history plays focus on English monarchs and the political and social conflicts of their reigns. These plays often served as a vehicle for Elizabethan propaganda, shaping public perceptions of royalty. Though historians have noted various inaccuracies, Shakespeare's histories have had a lasting influence on how we view these historical figures. Key elements include:

- A focus on English royalty and battles for power
- Themes of leadership, loyalty, and legitimacy
- Historical events intertwined with dramatic embellishment



All's Well That Ends Well (2019)
Photo by John Ulman

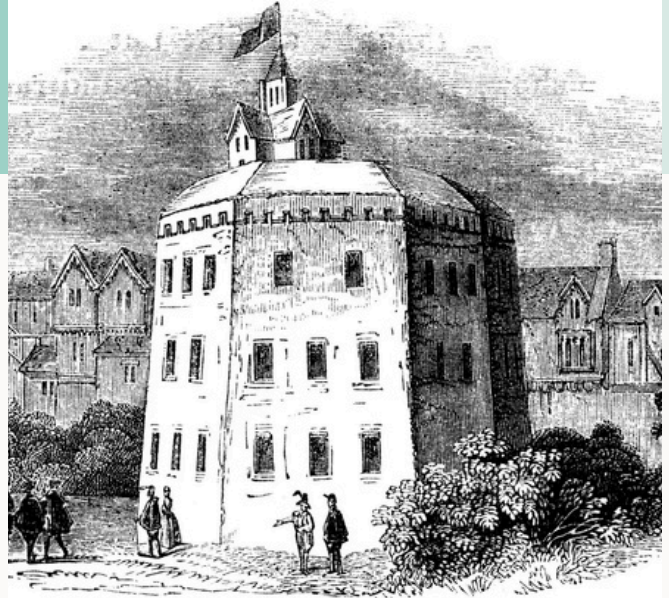
Examples of Shakespeare's problem plays include *Measure for Measure*, *All's Well That Ends Well*, and *Troilus and Cressida*.

WHAT WERE AUDIENCES LIKE IN SHAKESPEARE'S TIME?

Audiences in Shakespeare's time behaved quite differently from what we expect today when attending the theatre. Rather than sitting quietly Elizabethan audiences were rowdy and directly involved in the show. Shakespeare is often associated with the Globe Theatre in London, a wooden stage constructed in 1599, which hosted many of his world premieres, including *As You Like It*, *Hamlet*, *Othello*, and *Macbeth*. On June 29, 1613, the Globe went up in flames during a performance of *Henry VIII*. A modern reconstruction, "Shakespeare's Globe," opened in 1997, located about 750 feet from the site of the original theatre.

London theatres like the Globe could hold up to 3,000 people, with performances running most afternoons. This meant that 10,000 to 20,000 people could see a play each week! Shakespeare's audiences spanned all social classes, from the very rich to the lower-middle class. Theatre was a popular form of affordable entertainment. Admission to the Globe cost as low as a penny—the same price as a loaf of bread or a pint of ale. Those who paid just one penny stood in "the yard," the area closest to the stage, and were known as "groundlings." For an additional penny, audience members could sit on benches behind the yard, or pay another penny for a cushion. Access to the upper galleries, which were covered and seated, started at six pence.

Without electricity all performances took place in broad daylight, allowing for interaction



between actors and the audience. Shakespeare's famous soliloquies were often spoken directly to the crowd, who might even respond! Audiences were highly reactive—they would cheer for the hero, boo the villain, and get excited by special effects. In comedies the audience might even dance with the actors at the end. If they didn't enjoy the play, they weren't shy about causing a ruckus, sometimes even throwing furniture or damaging the theatre.

Shakespeare employed several strategies to capture and hold the attention of his audience. His plays rarely began with the main characters. Instead minor characters opened the first scene. Without house lights to dim performances simply started when actors entered the stage and began speaking, often over the noise of the crowd. These opening scenes usually set the tone, but the dialogue wasn't always crucial, knowing that it might not be heard clearly.

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Love's Labour's Lost (2016)

Another trick was Shakespeare's use of comic relief. Clown or fool characters often appeared throughout his plays, providing humor even in serious or lengthy dramas. This ensured that even during a three-hour history play there was something for everyone.

Audiences today can learn from Elizabethan spectators about how to enjoy a Shakespeare play. Here are a few tips:

- Don't worry if you miss some words at the beginning! The first scene often sets the mood but doesn't usually contain vital information. It's normal to need a few minutes to adjust to the language, much like getting used to someone speaking with a heavy accent. The actors are trained to help you understand, so give yourself time to catch on.
- Feel free to express your enjoyment during the performance. Laugh at the clowns, clap for the heroes, gasp at plot twists, and applaud the actors at the end. This keeps you engaged and shows the performers that you're with them.

- Remember, unlike in a movie, the actors can see and hear you! Even though modern theatre lighting dims the audience, the actors are often very close, especially if you're in the front rows. Keep conversations to a minimum, silence your phones, and avoid distractions like bright screens.
- Lastly, **theatre is for everyone**. In Shakespeare's day, it was an affordable form of entertainment that appealed to all kinds of people. Whether you've seen hundreds of plays or none, whether you're rich or poor, young or old, Shakespeare's work has something for you. His plays contain jokes, banter, speeches, and battles—truly something for everyone. That's part of what makes them still relevant and entertaining today.



An image from the reconstructed Globe in London

ENGAGE, RESPECT, ENJOY

WELCOME BACK TO THE THEATRE

Welcome! Seattle Shakespeare Company is thrilled perform for you!

Here are some helpful tips to get you acquainted with Seattle Shakespeare and theatre-going in general:

THANK YOU FOR BEING HERE WITH US!
ENJOY THE SHOW!



LISTEN

Pay attention to the talented actors sharing their story with you today—they're excited for you to hear it! Also, **listen to instructions from our staff.** We're here to ensure everyone has a great experience, and sometimes we'll guide you on seating or movement to help things run smoothly.

PARTICIPATE

You're part of the experience! **Laugh, applaud, and listen closely to make the show even better for everyone.** **Remember, respect is key.** Playwright Dominique Morisseau reminds us, "This is live theater, and the actors need you to engage with them, not distract or thwart their performance."

PHONES

Keep them in your backpack or pocket, preferably on airplane mode. Share your experience after the show, and **enjoy the performance distraction-free.**

CARE

The actors can see and hear you, so **be the kind of audience member you'd enjoy sitting next to.** Before you leave, check around to make sure you haven't left anything behind.

HOW DID *ROMEO AND JULIET* COME TO BE?

Romeo and Juliet was influenced by a number of stories of doomed lovers, dating back to ancient times.

Shakespeare clearly drew from Ovid's telling of *Pyramus and Thisbe*, which tells the story of ill-fated lovers who were only able to communicate through a crack in the wall between their houses. Since their parents refused to consent to their union, Pyramus and Thisbe decided to flee their houses and convene in an agreed upon place in the woods. Thisbe arrived before Pyramus, but heard the roar of a lion and ran away in terror. However, in her retreat she lost her veil which was torn apart by the lion and stained with the blood of the animal's previous kill. Upon finding the mangled veil Pyramus stabbed himself, believing that his paramour had



Seattle Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* (2024)
Photo by Giao Nguyen



Camp Bill's production of *Romeo and Juliet* (2019)

been killed by the animal. When Thisbe returned and found her lover mortally wounded she took her own life to be with him in death. The parallels between these two tales is undeniable. The parents of both lovers' hate each other and, like Romeo, Pyramus kills himself believing Thisbe is dead. *The Ephesiaca of Xenophon of Ephesus* has other elements that Shakespeare used, such as the sleeping potion. Scholars also believe Shakespeare may have drawn for Dante's *Divine Comedy* where Dante refers to the two warring families, Matechhi and Cappelletti.

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Romeo y Julieta Tour (2022), Photo by Giao Nguyen

The plot of *Romeo and Juliet* was based on two sources. The first adaptation came from a narrative poem titled, *The Tragical History of Romeus and Juliet*, translated in 1562 by Arthur Brooke. This poem was later retold by William Painter in 1567. Shakespeare borrowed heavily from both versions, but is believed to have created a number of supporting characters, such as Mercutio and Paris. Scholars hypothesize Shakespeare's play was written between 1591 and 1597. The play is a clear indication of Shakespeare's growth as a dramatist and command of both the comedy and tragedy genre. The characters of the Nurse and Mercutio demonstrate a

growing skill to expand minor characters and use subplots to enrich the main story. His use of language was also improving; different characters expressed themselves in different poetic forms, which would often change as the character developed. For example, Romeo often uses the form of a sonnet to emphasize his romantic nature, while Mercutio and the Nurse often speak in prose. Shakespeare also took the liberty of altering how the characters interacted. In the original Italian story, the balcony scene (*Romeo and Juliet*, 2.2) involves Juliet declaring her love for Romeo alone. This played into the renaissance conventions of how women were expected to behave. By placing Romeo in the scene with Juliet Shakespeare throws this social etiquette out the window by investing in the autonomy of the star-crossed lovers and allowing them to talk about their relationship with each other.



Youth Shakes' production of *Romeo and Juliet* (2024)
Photo by Giao Nguyen

ROMEO AND JULIET IN MODERN MEDIA

Romeo and Juliet is one of the most adapted stories in the world. Its themes of young love, conflict, and tragedy resonate across generations, inspiring countless reimaginings in theater, film, television, music, and beyond. From modern retellings set in city streets to animated family films and pop songs about star-crossed lovers, the influence of Shakespeare's play can be found everywhere in popular culture.



They Don't Know
by Kirsty MacColl



Love Story
by Taylor Swift



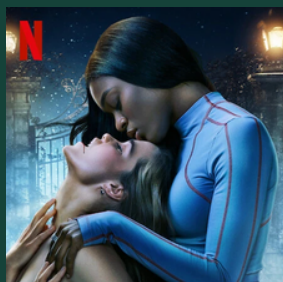
Mystery Dance
by Elvis Costello



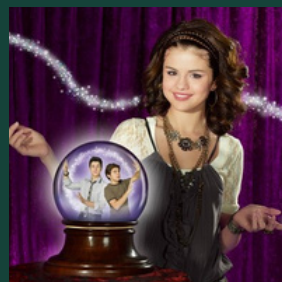
The Cinema Show
by Genesis



Star Crossed
2014



First Kill
2022



Wizards of Waverly Place
Season 2, 2008



Noughts + Crosses
2020

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MOVIES


Rosaline
2022



Warm Bodies
2013



Gnomeo & Juliet
2011



West Side Story
1961 or 2021


BOOKS


Starry Eyes
by Jen Bennett



**Between You, Me,
and the Honeybees**
by Amelia
Diane Coombs



**These Violent
Delights**
by Chloe Gong



**When You
Were Mine**
by Rebecca
Serle

HONORABLE MENTIONS
FILM VERSIONS THAT USE SHAKESPEAREAN TEXT


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1 Why do you think this story continues to be retold in so many forms, even hundreds of years after it was written?

2 Have you encountered a version of *Romeo and Juliet* in pop culture? How did it shape your understanding of the story?

3 Do you think adapting *Romeo and Juliet* into songs, movies, or TV shows makes the story more accessible, or do you think something gets lost in translation?

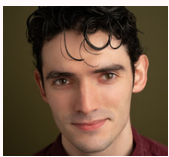
4 What kinds of audiences might each format (books, movies, TV, music) reach? Do you think these adaptations are helping new people discover Shakespeare?



Seattle Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* (2005), Photo by Ken Holmes

WE ASKED SOME OF THE CAST...

WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE R&J ADAPTATION?



"**West Side Story**. Through and through it that has been one of makes me openly weep. especially the new the new version."



"If we're talking about songs, my favorite is **Romeo and Juliet—the Dire Straits song—but the Indigo Girls version**, sung by Amy Ray. It's on my Romeo playlist. The playlist is two hours and 14 minutes long."



"I saw production of **Shakespeare's R&J** done by Roosevelt High School in 2023 that I loved with my whole heart. It's an adaptation of Romeo and Juliet scripted for four boys in a Catholic boarding school. The play-within-a-play format provides this context of repressed young people seeking escapism and finding it by putting on Romeo and Juliet in their dorm room... When they played *Some Nights* by fun. at the very top of the show, I leaned in—and I never leaned back."

In this activity, students will reflect on the themes and plot of *Romeo and Juliet* and explore how the story can be adapted into a new setting and context.

OBJECTIVES

- To learn about how to take a play and reframe it in a new context
- To get a grasp of how Shakespearean stories have been adapted

MATERIALS

- Poster board for students to make a poster for their concept
- Markers and pencils
- A basic plot summary.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1 Students should split into small groups. Use the plot summary, and themes below to select a major theme you would like to focus on.

POSSIBLE THEMES

- Love and Passion
- Youth and Impulsivity
- Fate and Destiny
- Power and Communication
- Conflict and Fued
- Individual vs. Society

You may also choose a theme of your own that you identified within the play.

The theme we will focus on is _____

- 2 Students should then come up with a setting that supports your theme.

POSSIBLE SETTINGS

- Outerspace
- Prison
- School

Choose a setting of your own that you connect with, or believe would be interesting.

The setting for our production is _____

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

- 3 Next, students should pick each character's role in this world. You do not need to choose a role for every character, but pick five that you could determine contemporaries for within the world you've chosen.

FOR EXAMPLE

LOCATION	CHARACTER	EQUIVALENT ROLE
A high school	Romeo	Captain of the basketball team
	Juliet	Head of the mathletes
	Friar Laurence	Their drama teacher
	Nurse	Juliet's best friend
	Benvolio	Team manager and Romeo's cousin
	Mercutio	Point guard of the basketball team

Keep in mind the **family tree found on page 11** of the study guide.

Keeping all the information you've decided on—your chosen theme, setting, and initial character ideas—in mind, move on to the next page. Fill out the table by reimagining each character's equivalent role within the world you've created. Think about how their relationships, status, and motivations might shift in this new context. How does your setting influence who they are and what they do?



Romeo and Juliet (2024), Photo by Giao Nguyen

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Romeo	
Juliet	
The Nurse	
Friar Laurence	
Benvolio (Romeo's Cousin)	
Tybalt (Juliet's Cousin)	
Mercutio (Prince's Kisman, Romeo's Friend)	
Paris (The man who wants to marry Juliet)	
Rosaline (Romeo's beloved before Juliet)	
Others	

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

- 4 After completing the initial brainstorming, each group should decide on the following:



GENRE

What style or tone best fits your adaptation?
(e.g., comedy, sci-fi, drama, action)



TITLE

What is the name of your production?



PITCH

How would you summarize your adaptation in a few compelling sentences to get others interested?



KEY SCENE ADAPTATION

How would you adapt key scenes or sequences to draw engaging parallels and enhance the story?

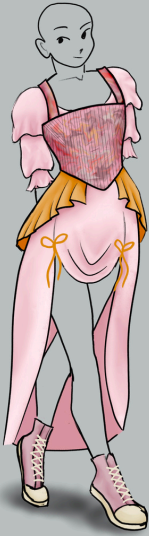
FOR EXAMPLE

LOCATION	SITUATION	EQUIVALENT SITUATION
A high school	Romeo and Juliet first meet	They randomly get paired up during karaoke while both their families are on vacation at the same resort.

Keep in mind the **scene breakdown starting on page 4** of the study guide.

- 5 Design a poster for your production (feel free to label elements as needed), and prepare a short pitch to present your vision to the class. If desired, the class can “vote” on the production concept they would most like to “produce.”

Juliet



Romeo

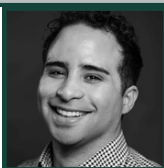


Tybalt



We wanted to bring in a lot of that Seattle grunge, especially with the younger characters—making sure they had a distinct look from everybody else, but not putting them in a completely different world. So, there's still a lot of modern fabrics, but with that Elizabethan flair. — Kacey Kamps, *Romeo and Juliet* Costume Designer

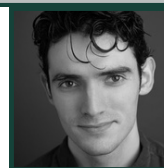
Mercutio



Nurse



Benvolio



Capulet





O teach me how I should forget to think!

— Romeo, *Romeo and Juliet*, Act 1, Scene 2

***Romeo and Juliet* is packed with beautiful, emotional language.** While this play is one of Shakespeare’s earlier tragedies, the way Shakespeare plays with language reflects the intensity of young love and rivalry, and the tension between fate and free will. The characters often speak in rich, flowing poetry when they’re feeling their deepest emotions, but there are also playful puns and witty banter that add humor and energy to the story. As you experience the play, listen for how the language shifts with the characters’ moods and relationships.

PUNS

Puns are jokes that exploit different meanings of a word or words that sound similar but have different meanings. Shakespeare uses puns for humor, tension, and even to highlight the play’s themes of love, fate, and death. **For example:**

ROMEO Give me a torch. I am not for this ambling.
Being but heavy I will bear the light.

MERCUTIO Nay, gentle Romeo, we must have you dance.

ROMEO Not I, believe me. You have dancing shoes
With nimble soles. I have a soul of lead
So stakes me to the ground I cannot move.

In this passage, Shakespeare uses “sole” of a shoe vs. “soul” as his heavy heart.

WHY IT MATTERS:

- Puns often lighten the mood, especially in the early parts of the play.
- They highlight the youthful, playful nature of the characters, particularly Mercutio.
- They contrast with the darker themes of death and fate later in the play.

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OXYMORONS

An oxymoron is a figure of speech, usually two words, in which seemingly contradictory terms appear side by side, such as “awfully good” or “old news”. In *Romeo and Juliet*, oxymorons highlight the conflicting emotions and the tension in the play. **For example:**

ROMEO Why then, O brawling love, O loving hate,
O anything of nothing first create!

- Act 1, Scene 1

OR

JULIET Beautiful tyrant, fiend angelical!
Dove-feathered raven, wolfish-ravens lamb!

- Act 3, Scene 2

WHY IT MATTERS:

- In Romeo’s example, these phrases reflect the chaotic nature of love and violence in the play.
- In Juliet’s example these phrases capture her intense inner conflict—she loves Romeo, but he’s just done something horrible.

Romeo and Juliet’s love is intense and beautiful, but it exists within a world full of hate and danger. The contradictory language reflects the central tension of the play: love trying to survive in a society driven by conflict.



Romeo and Juliet (2013)

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REPETITION

Repetition is when a word, phrase, or idea is repeated multiple times to emphasize a point, heighten emotion, or create a sense of urgency. **For example:**

JULIET Come, night. Come, Romeo. Come, thou day in night,
For thou wilt lie upon the wings of night...
...Come, gentle night; come, loving black-browed night,

- Act 3, Scene 2

In this speech, Juliet eagerly awaits her wedding night. Repeating “come” emphasizes her impatience and longing, as she summons night like a friend to bring Romeo to her.

ALSO

NURSE O woe, O woeful, woeful, woeful day!
Most lamentable day, most woeful day
That ever, ever I did yet behold!
O day, O day, O day, O hateful day!
Never was seen so black a day as this!
O woeful day, O woeful day!

- Act 4, Scene 5

This outburst occurs when the Nurse believes Juliet is dead. She repeats “woe” seven times and “day” ten times, showing how grief and shock disrupt the natural order—just like Juliet’s tragic death does.

WHY IT MATTERS:

- In Shakespeare, repetition often appears in moments of crisis or longing.
- Amplifies raw emotion—whether it’s the Nurse’s overwhelming grief or Juliet’s passionate longing, repetition heightens the intensity of their feelings.

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IN SUMMARY...

Shakespeare's wordplay in *Romeo and Juliet* brings the characters' emotions to life and highlights the extremes of love, joy, and grief. These language techniques deepen our understanding of the characters and make the play's emotional highs and lows even more powerful.

CAN YOU IDENTIFY THE WORDPLAY?

Below are lines from *Romeo and Juliet*. Match each one to the correct wordplay technique: Pun, Oxymoron, or Repetition.

PUN	OXYMORON	REPETITION
A play on words with multiple meanings.	Two opposite ideas combined.	The same word or phrase repeated.



Ask for me tomorrow, and you shall find me a grave man.

- Mercutio, Act 3, Scene 1

1

A. Pun

B. Oxymoron

C. Repetition



Parting is such sweet sorrow.

- Juliet, Act 2, Scene 2

2

A. Pun

B. Oxymoron

C. Repetition



O, I am fortune's fool!

- Romeo, Act 3, Scene 1

3

A. Pun

B. Oxymoron

C. Repetition



O Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo?

- Juliet, Act 2, Scene 2

4

A. Pun

B. Oxymoron

C. Repetition

ANSWERS: 1: A, 2: B, 3: B, 4: C



**Can I go forward when my heart is here?
Turn back, dull earth, and find thy center out.**

— Romeo, *Romeo and Juliet*, Act 2, Scene 1

For nearly 20 years, Seattle Shakespeare has brought live, 90-minute versions of Shakespeare's plays to schools all across Washington. That means over 125,000 students—just like you—have gotten to experience these stories up close. No matter where we go, we hear the same thing: students who thought Shakespeare was confusing in their textbooks say it finally clicked when they saw it live. Watching the characters come to life helps make the language easier to understand—and way more fun.

HOW IS THE REHEARSAL PROCESS BEEN SO FAR?



DAVID

The rehearsal process has been good. It's been speedy... long rehearsal days, and it still never feels like quite enough. [Preparing for the tour requires] a different kind of mindset. In [a traditional] production, we go, 'We'll be in the background and in dim lighting,' or, 'Okay, this will be here when we get on set.' But **we're performing this in rehearsal just as they're going to see it.**



CORDELIA

Rehearsal has been wonderful. It's very interesting to be in this new position of having to think about how a show will work in any given space. **You need to be agile because there's much less you can count on when you're going to be in a new space every time you perform it.** I think that makes it feel more free-flowing but I've also never done a tour before, so it could still end up being very scary—but right now, I'm quite excited about it.



Romeo and Juliet (2025)
Photo by Spencer Dykstra

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WHAT IS COOL ABOUT SHAKESPEARE?



DAVID

I do like Shakespeare, but I didn't always. I didn't get interested in it until college, when I had a professor who really dug into the nitty-gritty—like, 'This is the core of what they're talking about, and these are the conflicts.' ... [We did this] exercise where we took a monologue and distilled it down to one sentence of modern-day speech, and that's what got me excited. Up until then, I'd just read it for school, and it was fine, but it felt flowery... It can feel a little inaccessible when you approach it like that... **Shakespeare is meant to be seen, not just read**, so I'm excited for people to engage with the story and the richness of the characters.



ELIZABETH

I think one of my favorite things about Shakespeare is that—because it's been around for so long—there are all these different things people have done with it, and get to do with it... With newer scripts, you can't necessarily mess around with them as much. [But with Shakespeare] you can just go, 'I don't like that line. I'm gonna get rid of it for now.' ...There are just so many different ways you can take it, and it'll be the same story... **and every different version you see, you learn something new—about the show, about the characters... you hear different parts of the language... even if you've studied the play intensely... yeah, you'll hear new things every time.**



Elizabeth as Lady Macbeth in Seattle Shakespeare's 2024 Touring production of *Macbeth*
Photo by Giao Nguyen

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WHAT ARE YOU EXCITED ABOUT FOR THE TOUR?



CORDELIA

I'm very excited to be performing for high schoolers, especially as someone who just graduated from high school and loves Shakespeare a lot. I really want to help bring Shakespeare to more students, because I feel like I was very lucky to have been exposed to it at such a young age. I know many teenagers don't share my love for Shakespeare, and I understand why, but **I am looking forward to demonstrating how accessible and amusing Shakespeare can be because Shakespeare is for everyone.**



Cordelia as Beatrice in Seattle Shakespeare's 2023 Camp Bill production of *Much Ado About Nothing*
Photo by Giao Nguyen



ELIZABETH

I love being in the van. I love getting picked up early in the morning and driving out. I'm from Colorado—which is out on the plains, and it looks a lot like Eastern Washington—so **I love when we get to cross over the mountains; it feels like I'm going home.** I also love when we do overnights and get to play board games in the hotel the night before, then go to a school in the morning... set up in a different space every day... I love being at different schools, and I love packing down the show when we're done. It's this really good sense of closure—like, 'And we're done. All the feelings associated with that performance—closed up, done for the day.'

HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT THE CHARACTER YOU'RE PLAYING?



CORDELIA

Romeo and Juliet is a play so entrenched in the cultural zeitgeist that you feel like you know it. Especially if you're someone who likes Shakespeare and has seen a lot of it. I'd seen adaptations of *Romeo and Juliet*, but it wasn't until I got cast that I realized I didn't know the play [or] Juliet as well as I thought I did. **It was only in prepping for rehearsals that I came to realize how demonstrative and full of life she is.** Qualities that I think get overshadowed in societies eyes by the fact that she kills herself. But for most of the play she is incredibly present tense and transparent and I love that about her.

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ELIZABETH

I really love [Romeo]. He's such a teenager. And—I mean, I am no longer a teenager—but I'm not that far removed from it, and I still remember going through so many of the same big emotional things that he goes through. That's one of the things I love about Shakespeare—reading this text from so long ago and realizing how familiar it feels. **I remember reading *Romeo and Juliet* for the first time when I was in ninth grade... and thinking, 'Oh my gosh... this is what I am like. I have felt this... I've been in this situation.'**

...I think we don't give teenagers enough credit for the depth and complexity of their feelings—and sometimes for how good they are at expressing those feelings, if we give them the chance and the tools to do it. **That's something I think is really valuable about this show in particular... It gives young people space to be messy...** Obviously, Romeo faces serious consequences for being rash, for being violent, for loving hard and fast—there are consequences—but he's not shamed for it. And I think that's important.



DAVID

I've played Benvolio before... I love him so much... He's often seen as the mediator, the middle ground, but this time I want to experiment with the idea that he's still a Montague. **He wants peace, but he's also flawed and biased—just as much as anyone.**

Wooden O's *Romeo and Juliet* (2019)



Imagine *Romeo and Juliet* characters scrolling through social media—what would they post? Would they vent about family drama or throw some poetic shade? In this activity, you'll craft status updates from a character's point of view. Whether it's a passionate declaration or a cryptic thought, this is your chance to give your character a modern social media makeover.

Complete the timeline below with some moments from the play. Feel free to post as one character, or multiple. Don't forget to give them a username and a profile picture! We've got one post already on the feed to get you started!

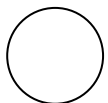
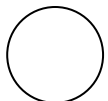
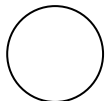
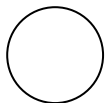
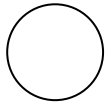
Discover

Feeds ✨



Rosaline 🇺🇸❤️ @HolyMolyRosaline

I've got better things to do than fall for some guy. My future's about something higher. 🙏 #NotForMe #FocusOnTheFaith #ChoosingThePath



In this activity, we'll explore some of the key themes of *Romeo and Juliet*, like conflict, love, and the pressures of authority, through a game of "Cross the Line." The game is a way for you to reflect on your own experiences while connecting them to the struggles faced by the characters in the play. By stepping across the line, you'll show how similar situations might feel in your own life and how they might mirror the events in *Romeo and Juliet*. There's no talking allowed, so just focus on the statements and think about how they apply to you.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Set up the Space:** Move all the desks to the sides of the room to create an open space. Arrange the students into two rows, facing each other, leaving 7-10 feet between the rows. Make sure everyone understands that there's an imaginary line down the center, between the two rows.
- 2. Explain the Game:** This is a game to be played without talking. The goal is to observe and react to the statements you'll be making.
- 3. Introduce the "Cross the Line" Prompt:** The instructor will read a series of phrases beginning with, "Cross the line if..." (statements listed below). Students should step across the imaginary line if the statement applies to them.

CROSS THE LINE IF...

- 1... you've ever been confused about why two groups of people hated each other.**
- 2... you've ever liked someone you weren't supposed to like.**
- 3... you've had friends who fought with each other.**
- 4... you've gotten conflicting advice from authority figures.**
- 5... you've felt unsupported by the adults in your life.**
- 6... you've gotten into a situation that seemed like it had no way out.**

REFLECTION: After the activity, ask the students to share any surprising moments they had during the game. Encourage them to reflect on how the statements might relate to *Romeo and Juliet*, especially in terms of the characters' struggles and conflicts.

These questions are designed to help students think about some of the big ideas behind the play before watching it.

1. Have you ever seen people in your life (friends, family, or others) make big decisions because of love? What happened?
2. How can family expectations shape the choices we make?
3. What happens when your loyalty to friends or family conflicts with what you believe is right?



Romeo and Juliet (2005), Photo by Ken Holmes

4. Why do people and groups sometimes hold onto anger or hatred for a long time?
5. Do you believe that some things in life are meant to happen, or do you think we control our own destinies?

6. Have you ever had a situation where a misunderstanding caused a major problem? What could have helped prevent it?
7. How do you balance listening to advice from others with making your own choices?
8. Can keeping a secret ever protect someone, or does it usually lead to bigger problems?



Youth Shakes' Romeo and Juliet (2024)
Photo by Giao Nguyen

The following questions are designed to guide a class discussion after seeing the play.

There are many possible answers, and student responses will vary. There is no wrong answer, as long as students support their opinions with examples from the play. Some possible responses are provided as a reference.

1. Who is responsible for what happens to Romeo and Juliet?



The parents are most responsible because their feud created the environment that made everything dangerous and secretive.



Romeo and Juliet made their own choices. They rushed into things and ignored warnings from people who cared about them.



Fate played a big role. Even when people tried to fix things, everything kept going wrong—like the letter not getting to Romeo.

2. Do you think Romeo and Juliet were really in love, or was it something else?



I think they were in love, but it was young and intense. They didn't have time to figure out if it was going to last.



It felt more like infatuation—they barely knew each other and moved super fast.



Only two people in love would be willing to risk so much in order to be together.

3. How does the feud between the Montagues and Capulets affect people beyond their families?



It pulls everyone into the violence—Mercutio dies because of it, even though he wasn't part of the feud.



People can't just live their lives because any argument can turn deadly.



Even the Prince has to get involved. The fighting causes problems for the whole city.



MISSION STATEMENT

With the plays of William Shakespeare at our core, Seattle Shakespeare Company engages our audiences, our artists and our community in the universal human experience inherent in classic drama through the vitality, immediacy and intimacy of live performance and dynamic outreach programs.

ABOUT US

Seattle Shakespeare Company is the Puget Sound region's year-round, professional, classical theatre. The company's growing success stems from a deep belief in the power and vibrancy of the timetested words and ideas of Shakespeare and other classical playwrights along with a commitment to artistic excellence on stage. The results have been provocative performances that both challenge and delight audiences while fostering an appreciation for great stage works. Our combined programs – which include indoor performances, free outdoor productions, regional tours, educator and youth programs – reach across barriers of income, geography, and education to bring classical theatre to Washington State.

EDUCATION STAFF CONTACTS

In-School Residencies, Touring, and Camps

Anna Klein, Education Director
206-733-8228 ext. 251
educationeseattleshakespeare.org

Emily Kight, Touring Manager
emilykeseattleshakespeare.org

Student Matinees

Lorri McGinnis, Box Office Manager
206-733-8228 ext. 220
lorrimeseattleshakespeare.org

General Inquiries

- **Ticket Office:** 206-733-8222
- **Administrative Offices:** 206-733-8228
- **Fax:** 206-733-8202

Mailing Address

Seattle Shakespeare Company
PO Box 19595
Seattle, WA 98109

EDUCATION PROGRAMS

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- **In-School Residencies** bring dynamic, customized Shakespeare lessons directly into classrooms across Washington State. Professional teaching artists collaborate with educators to tailor each residency to the unique needs and objectives of the class. Through engaging, hands-on exercises, students explore the language, themes, and action of Shakespeare's works.
- **Student Matinees** invite over 3,000 students each year to experience our mainstage productions at the Seattle Center. Teachers receive free study guides, and student groups are encouraged to stay for a post-show Q&A with the cast.
- **Pre-show and post-show workshops** are available to enhance the matinee experience. These workshops provide students with an introduction to the play, interactive activities, and insights into the direction and design of our specific production.

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- Each Spring, **we bring fresh, accessible 90-minute productions to schools and communities across Washington**, reaching more than 14,000 students and adults. These versatile performances fit perfectly in settings from school gyms to professional theaters. Teachers get free study guides, and students can enjoy a post-show Q&A with the cast.
- Schools can also book **in-school residencies alongside touring shows**, led by the cast and additional teaching artists for a deeper dive into the play.

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- **Camp Bill** offers a variety of summer camps for young actors, including a three-week production intensive. There's a camp for every level of experience!
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