



# Romeo and Juliet

William Shakespeare



## About the author

William Shakespeare is the most famous writer in the English language. He was born in 1564 and died in 1616 in Stratford-Upon-Avon, England. In his late twenties, he went to London, where he began to write comedies, tragedies and historical plays and achieved great fame. His plays appealed to all social classes thanks to his vivid characterisations and his masterly use of the English language. Apart from being a playwright, he was also an actor and a brilliant poet.

For more information, see the Introduction.

## Summary

In the Italian town of Verona, Romeo Montague and Juliet Capulet, the son and daughter of two rival families, fall in love with each other. This circumstance will trigger a chain of events, which will lead to the lovers' unfortunate deaths.

**Act 1:** Capulet and Montague servants get into a fight in the town square of Verona. During the fight, Lord and Lady Capulet and Lord and Lady Montague arrive on the scene. The fight is interrupted by the Prince of Verona, who tells everyone that if anyone fights in Verona again, they will be put to death.

As Lord and Lady Montague turn to go home they ask Benvolio, Romeo's relative and friend, to find out why Romeo has been acting so strangely. They do not know that Romeo is hopelessly in love with the beautiful Rosaline, a Capulet. Romeo sneaks into Lord Capulet's yearly feast to see Rosaline, meets Juliet, the host's daughter, and they fall in love.

**Act 2:** This secret love between a Capulet and a Montague is most beautifully expressed when Romeo stands under

Juliet's window that night and they decide to marry. Romeo goes to Friar Laurence, who decides to marry them only because he hopes this marriage will bring the two families together at last. Juliet's nurse gets drawn into the plan and helps them too.

**Act 3:** Another sword fight in the town square results in Tybalt, Juliet's cousin, killing Mercutio, a relative of the Prince's and Romeo's friend, and in Romeo killing Tybalt in revenge. When the Prince discovers what has happened, he banishes Romeo from Verona. As Juliet prepares for her wedding night, the news of Tybalt's death and Romeo's banishment is brought to her. Meanwhile, the broken-hearted Romeo goes to the Friar for help. Juliet's nurse arrives at Friar Laurence's with a ring from Juliet and a message asking him to come and say goodbye to her. The action then moves away from the lovers to the house of the Capulets, where Lord Capulet tells Paris, a young nobleman, that he may marry Juliet in three days' time. When Juliet is informed about her parents' plans, she is devastated. In desperation, Juliet seeks help from the Friar once again.

**Act 4:** When she arrives at the Friar's house, Paris is there, telling the Friar about his marriage to Juliet. The Friar sends Paris away and tells Juliet his plan to drug her so that she appears dead in her bed. Everyone except the lovers and the Friar will think she's dead and her family will put her body in the vault. But then Romeo will be told to return at night from Mantua when Juliet is waking up from her deep sleep and he can take her back with him.

**Act 5:** The Friar's message never reaches Romeo. Instead, he hears that Juliet has died. He returns to Verona and breaks into Juliet's tomb. There, he takes some poison and dies beside Juliet's inanimate body. Juliet awakens, sees her dead lover and stabs herself. When both families see the lovers' lifeless bodies they agree to end the feud.

## Background and themes

The story of Romeo and Juliet had been popular in England long before Shakespeare wrote the play. What Shakespeare did was to change some parts and make the story into one of the greatest plays ever written. First performed in 1594, it became an immediate success both because of its masterly style and the tragic story of its unlucky young lovers. It has also been a rich source of inspiration for musicians, painters, and film directors.

Some of them main themes of the play are:



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**Love vs. hatred:** Can hatred destroy love or is love more powerful?

**Order vs. disorder:** Is civil disorder to be attributed to a ruler's weakness or flaws?

**Free will vs. destiny/chance:** Do we govern the course of our lives or is it governed by external forces?

**Passion vs. reason:** Is our reason a better guide than our strong feelings? Do emotions lead to mistakes we cannot go back on?

**Adult responsibility:** Are Friar Laurence and Romeo and Juliet's relatives responsible for the young couple's deaths?

## Discussion activities

### Introduction and page viii

#### Before reading

- 1 **Shakespeare is the most famous playwright in the English language. Is there a similar writer in the students' language? Ask students to fill in the chart with similar information about that writer.**

William Shakespeare	
He was born in 1564.	
He died in 1616.	
He lived in England.	
He wrote 37 plays.	

- 2 **Research:** Ask students to bring a map of Europe in order to place a) England and Shakespeare's birthplace – Stratford on Avon – and b) Italy and Verona – the setting of Romeo and Juliet.

#### While reading

- 3 **Read carefully:** Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*  
Have students check the origin of the play.  
*Was the story of Romeo and Juliet Shakespeare's idea?  
Where did he take it from?*
- 4 **Read carefully:** Only a love story?  
Have students check whether the play is solely about love.  
*Is the play only about love? Will it be boring?*

#### After reading

- 5 **Discuss:** Acting  
Have students read the list of characters and then choose which character they would like to be in a future play at school.

### Act 1

#### Before reading

- 6 **Discuss:** Going to the theatre  
*Have you ever been to the theatre to see a play by Shakespeare? Have you ever watched a film of one of Shakespeare's plays? Did you like it?*

#### While reading

- 7 **Discuss:** Relatives vs. friends  
Have students discuss the difference between trusting friends and relatives.  
*Why does Romeo tell his friend Benvolio about his problem and not his father? Is this usual with young people?*
- 8 **Guess:** Tybalt  
Have students discuss what Tybalt means by the words he says before leaving the party (page 9).
- 9 **Discuss:** Romeo and Juliet's love (page 10)  
Have students discuss whether they believe in love at first sight. *Do Juliet's first words to Romeo surprise you? Why or why not?*

#### After reading

- 10 **Artwork:** A Valentine  
As if they were Romeo, ask your students to design a card for Rosaline on Saint Valentine's day (14 February).
- 11 **Discuss:** Bad Dreams  
Have students discuss whether dreams can tell us about our future or not.  
*Romeo has had a bad dream and is very much afraid. Have any of your dreams come true?*
- 12 **Write:** A future wife/husband  
Have students write a short paragraph on the kind of person their parents would like them to marry or wanted them to marry.

### Act 2

#### Before reading

- 13 **Guess:** Romeo and Juliet's future  
Have students discuss the couple's immediate future  
*How will Romeo and Juliet meet if their families are enemies? Will they lie to them? Will they meet in secret?*

#### While reading

- 14 **Discuss:** Time and love  
Have students discuss the following:  
*Juliet is afraid because their love has happened too suddenly? Do you agree with her? How long does it take lovers to get to know each other?*
- 15 **Discuss:** Friar Laurence  
Get students to discuss the friar's agreement to marry Romeo and Juliet without telling their parents. Is this right?
- 16 **Discuss:** The type of play  
Have students discuss the use of humour in the play.  
*Romeo and Juliet's story is very sad but it has scenes which are very funny. Why did Shakespeare put the Nurse in the play? Was it a good idea?*

#### After reading

- 17 **Role play**  
Have students dramatise the dialogue between Romeo and Juliet on pages 12 and 13 or that between Romeo and Friar Laurence on pages 16 and 17.



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## Act 3 Scenes 1–2

### Before reading

**18 Guess:** Murder and banishment

Have students discuss the title of the section  
*Who will die in this part of the play? Who will have to leave Verona?*

### While reading

**19 Discuss:** Dramatic irony

When the audience has more information than the characters the playwright is using dramatic irony. Have students discuss all that we readers know about Romeo which Mercutio doesn't know.

**20 Role play:** The fight

In groups have students perform the fight as from when Romeo arrives on page 23 up to when he escapes on page 26.

**21 Discuss:** The Nurse's personality

Have students discuss why the Nurse doesn't tell Juliet right away that Romeo isn't dead.

### After reading

**22 Discuss:** Rule and order

Have students discuss who is to blame for Mercutio's death: Tybalt, Romeo, the quarrel between the families or bad luck?

## Act 3 Scenes 3–5

### Before reading

**23 Guess:** Romeo and Juliet's future

*Will the lovers meet again? How?*

### While reading

**24 Discuss:** The generation gap

Have students discuss the Friar's and Romeo's different views on the Prince's verdict.  
*What do Romeo and the Friar think of Romeo's punishment? Who do you agree with?*

**25 Discuss:** Breaking the rules

In pairs have students discuss what would happen to Juliet if she told her parents that she has married Romeo.

### After reading

**26 Write:** Banishment

Have students write how they would feel if they were banished, like Romeo, from their hometown.

**27 Pair work:** Romantic language

In pairs have students pick out the sentences that they find most romantic in Romeo and Juliet's farewell scene on pages 33–34.

**28 Guess:** Help for Juliet

Have students guess how the Friar can help Juliet.

## Act 4

### Before reading

**29 Discuss:** Women and marriage

Have students discuss the position of young women in the play.  
*Juliet must obey her father and marry Paris or leave her house. What does this tell us about the position of women in the past? If the story took place today, would it be different in Italy? Can young people choose their husbands or wives in your country?*

### While reading

**30 Pair work:** Right or wrong?

In pairs have students discuss the Friar's plan on pages 38 and 40.

*What do you think of the Friar's plan? Isn't it too dangerous? Is the Friar lying by not telling Juliet's parents that Juliet is married?*

**31 Guess:** The change of dates

Have students predict what will happen:  
*What will happen now that Lord Capulet has changed the wedding day from Thursday to Wednesday?*

### After reading

**32 Artwork:** Have students design the Capulets' invitation card to Juliet's wedding.**33 Write:** Lord Capulet's speech

*Lord Capulet is very sad at Juliet's 'death' and is planning to say some words about his daughter at the church. Write down what he is going to say.*

## Act 5

### Before reading

**34 Guess:**

*The title of the act is 'Death in the Vault'. Who will die in the Capulets' vault? Why?*

### While reading

**35 Write:** Romeo's letter

*Romeo says to his servant Balthasar 'Get me a pen and paper' (page 45). Decide who the letter is for and then write it down.*

**36 Discuss:** Gold and poison

Have students discuss Romeo's words to the doctor: 'More people are murdered for gold than die by poison.' Is this true?

**37 Discuss:** The picture on page 51

*Why didn't Juliet die inside the vault? Where were the dead people put?*

### After reading

**38 Write:** An article in Verona's newspaper

Have students write a newspaper article on the many people who have died because of the hate between the Capulets and the Montagues.

## Vocabulary activities

For the Word List and vocabulary activities, go to [www.penguinreaders.com](http://www.penguinreaders.com).