



William Shakespeare's  
***Romeo and Juliet***  
Directed by Allen O'Reilly

Study Guide Creation

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# Characters in *Romeo and Juliet*

The Prince

Principal of Verona Prep

## The Capulets:

Lord Capulet

Head of the Capulet family, Juliet's father

Lady Capulet

His wife

Juliet

Daughter to Capulet

Nurse

Nurse to Juliet

Tybalt

Niece to Capulet

Peter

Servant to Capulet

## The Montagues:

Romeo

Son to Montague

Mercutio

Kinsman to the Prince, Romeo's friend

Benvolio

Nephew to Montague, and friend to Romeo

Friar Laurence

A Franciscan Friar, Romeo's confessor

Friar John

A Franciscan Friar

Apothecary

Street pharmacist

Paris

A Count, intent on marrying Juliet

Rosaline

Romeo's first love interest (does not appear)

# **Romeo and Juliet**

## **A synopsis**

As *Romeo and Juliet* opens, a fight breaks out between two different groups of students on the grounds of Verona Prep. The two families, the Capulets and the Montagues, have been feuding for a long time, perhaps generations. Not even the teachers are successful in curtailing the feud. In an act driven as much by frustration as policy, the Principal gives the brawling parties an ultimatum: end the violence or suffer the penalty of death.

For the young Romeo, a Montague, the feud is an annoying distraction. His attention is focused instead on the delightful Rosaline, a girl for whom he has developed an intoxicating crush. He is so taken with this girl that his friends, Benvolio and Mercutio, tease him relentlessly about it.

When old Capulet holds a party for his friends and family, Romeo and his friends crash the party to catch a glimpse of Rosaline. On seeing Juliet, however, Romeo forgets all about the other girl. He is so smitten with Juliet, that she displaces Rosaline completely in Romeo's mind. Moreover, Juliet falls immediately for Romeo, as well.

Later that same night, Romeo sneaks into the garden below Juliet's window and, overhearing her confess her feelings for him, declares his love and devotion to her. They decide to marry secretly the next day, aided by Juliet's nurse and abetted by Romeo's confessor, Friar Laurence, who agrees to perform the service in the hope that the marriage will bring about an end to the family violence.

After the ceremony, the feud rears its ugly head again. Romeo discovers his friends in a fight with Juliet's cousin, Tybalt. When Tybalt kills Mercutio, Romeo kills Tybalt and is banished from Verona, avoiding a death sentence.

Prompted by the outbreak of violence, and unaware of Juliet's marriage to Romeo, old Capulet expedites his plans for his daughter's marriage to the County Paris. He arranges the wedding for the next day. Desperately seeking an answer to this impossible situation, Juliet approaches Friar Laurence for help. He convinces her to take a sleeping potion that will make her appear dead to her parents and allow her, as if reborn, to reunite with her banished husband. The well-meaning Friar promises to get word of this plan to Romeo so the young lover will understand the situation and know what to do.

Unfortunately, the Friar's effort fails. Romeo never receives the crucial message. On hearing the news of Juliet's "death," he goes to the tomb where she has been prepared for burial. Stricken with grief, he drinks a vial of poison and dies. Juliet's sleeping potion wears off. She wakes to find Romeo dead and, realizing what has happened, she stabs herself with Romeo's dagger and dies as Friar Laurence arrives at the tomb.

"For never was a story of more woe than this of Juliet and her Romeo."

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## Glossary

Star-cross'd- adj. Ill-fated, destined to misfortune. "A pair of star-cross'd lovers take their life."

Bite your thumb- A phrase used in the french and english wars, when captors would offer the option to prisoners to either be killed or bite a fig from the anus of a donkey. The sign is a huge insult in england, and tells the other person, "I hate you and the only way you can regain my respect is to do something horrible, like to bite a fig out of an ass's rectum." "Do you bite your thumb at us, sir?"

Mistemper'd- not in dictionary. Thought to be a synonym to distempered, meaning a deranged condition of mind or body. "It argues a mistemp'd head"

Midwife- n. a person trained to assist women in childbirth. "She is the faeries midwife".

Alderman- n. a member of a municipal legislative body. "The forefinger of an Alderman".

Atomies- pl. n. An atom. "Drawn with a team of little atomies"

Athwart- adv. From side to side. "Athwart men's noses as they lie asleep."

Sweetmeats- pl. n. a sweet delicacy, prepared with sugar, honey, or the like, as preserves, candy, or, formerly, cakes or pastry. "because their breaths with sweetmeats tainted are."

Elflocks- pl. n. tangled locks of hair. "elflocks and foul sluttish airs"

Solemnity- pl. n. the state or character of being solemn; earnestness; gravity; impressiveness. "To scorn at our solemnity this night".

Palmers- n. a pilgrim, esp. of the Middle Ages, who had returned from the Holy Land bearing a palm branch as a token. "And palm to palm is holy palmers kiss."

Truckle bed-n. a low bed moving on casters, usually pushed under another bed when not in use. Now known as a trundle bed. "I'll to my truckle-bed"

Soft- an archaic interjection. Be quiet, or hush. "But soft, What light through yonder window breaks?"

Wherefore – adv. For what? Or Why? "O Romeo, Romeo, wherefore are thou Romeo?"

Osier cage- n. a basket made from willow branches. "I must upfill this osier cage of ours".

Mickle- adj. great, large, much. "Mickle something..."

Benedicite- as expressing a wish: Bless you!

Shrift- n. confession to a priest. "Bid her devise some means to come to shrift today."

Passado – n. a forward thrust with the weapon while advancing with one foot.

Punto Reverso –n. a fencing move

Nightingale --- any of several small, Old World, migratory birds of the [thrush](#) family, esp. *Luscinia megarhynchos*, of Europe, noted for the melodious song of the male, given chiefly at night during the breeding season.

Lark --- any of various similar birds of other families, as the meadowlark and titlark.

Beseech --- to implore/ beg earnestly

Bridegroom --- groom, the man getting married

Chopped Logic --- illogical reasoning

Hurdle --- a frame or sled on which criminals, esp. traitors, were formerly drawn to the place of execution.

My fingers itch --- Lord Capulet is expressing a violent urge, possibly to strike Juliet

Forsworn --- having broken an oath or vow

Hold --- can mean stop ex. “hold where you are.”

Surcease --- to cease an action, desist, or come to end of an action

Gadding --- to move restlessly from one place to another

I warrant --- to give your word for, vouch for. Similar to: “ I *bet* he did!”

Apothacary --- a druggist: pharmacist

Caitiff --- cowardly, or base person

Wretch --- a deplorably unfortunate or unhappy person

Dram --- a small quantity of drink

Cordial --- courteous and gracious; friendly; warm: a cordial reception.

Churl --- a rude, boorish, or surly person

Scourge --- a person or thing that applies or administers punishment or severe criticism.

It is often said that behind every legend is a grain of truth, some basis in fact. With a few hundred years' time and few narrative embellishments, a Briton monarch can become a King Arthur, a seafaring wanderer can become an Odysseus, and an ancient Italian feud, combined with a tragic couple, can become the basis of one of the best-known love stories of all time, a *Romeo and Juliet*.

In thirteenth-century Italy, there were two actual Italian families that the Montagues and the Capulets were based on, the Montecchi and Capelletti, each of who belonged to differing political factions. However, while the Montecchi family did live in Verona, the Guelf Capelletti were involved in the political affairs of Cremona, a different Italian region altogether. Both families were associated with murders and plundering, but there is no record of them ever having any kind of quarrel against one another, although a line from Dante's *Purgatorio* suggests that they did.

But it was the idea of the feud itself that worked for Shakespeare's Elizabethan drama, regardless of the veracity of the tale. It provides the basis for the conflict of *Romeo and Juliet*, the thing that sets this world off balance for the young lovers even as it explains the world. In fact, the Capulet/Montague feud is the first thing that we hear about in the opening Prologue:

Two households both alike in dignity  
(In fair Verona, where we lay our scene)  
From ancient grudge breaks to new mutiny,  
Where civil blood makes civil hands unclean. (1.1.1-4)

This "ancient grudge" is of extreme importance to the story, for if there was no feud, there would be no tragedy and Romeo and Juliet's deaths would be for nothing. We never find out who or what started the feud, whether it was a Capulet grandfather who never repaid a debt to a Montague, or a silly argument over a public building for the city. In fact, no one in the play seems to even remember what started it all. But the cause of the feud is inconsequential in terms of the play's action; what matters is its effect on the people involved, the conflict that it generates for the individuals contained within the story. The play's ending is a direct consequence of "their parents' strife" and everyone pays a price: Romeo and Juliet's parents, Mercutio, Tybalt, the Nurse, Friar Laurence, and most of all, the lovers themselves.

The best stories contain a reflection of humanity, a weight that can still be felt, even after centuries. That is why we are still telling the story of two "star cross'd lovers," adapting it for every medium from theatre stage to movie screen. There is a grain of truth in *Romeo and Juliet*. But that truth does not lay so much in historic factuality so much as it does in the fact that we do see humanity in Romeo and Juliet and their tragic love. We cheer for them, relate to them, feel the painful ache at the end. They go against the odds and because of that, they are heroes, people that we admire. This is the stuff that legends are made of.

~Alaina E. Jobe

## Duels and Weaponry

During the sixteenth century, quarrels between the Montague and Capulet family would have still been settled through attacks made by hired gangs of assassins. Gradually, the duels seen in *Romeo and Juliet* became more common. These fights were viewed as a more honorable means to settle a dispute, using a fair fight with witnesses.

Duels were often caused by jealousy over a woman. Gentlemen would agree to an encounter in an arranged location. Often, one man's sword would be sent to the opposition to be "matched." This way both men would be assured of a fair fight using similar sized instruments. The rapier and the dagger were popular weapons of the period. The rapier was a long, pointed two-edged sword with a cup-like hilt. The dagger was a short and pointed weapon, not unlike a small sword used for thrusting and stabbing.

In this particular production of *Romeo and Juliet*, the duelers use another type of weapon as well.



### **Why Lacrosse in Romeo and Juliet?**

The opening fight of *Romeo and Juliet* of Shakespeare's day probably featured fighters wielding rapiers and daggers. The rapier was a long, pointed two-edged sword with a cuplike hilt. The dagger was short and pointed, used for thrusting and stabbing. These were fearsome and deadly weapons of the time, however, our *Romeo and Juliet* takes place at an all girls private school during modern times. Rapiers and daggers would have been out of place in our modern-educational setting, so we searched for weapons that would fit our world and yet still brought to life the fearsome nature or the deadly rapier dagger duo.

Lacrosse, with its incredibly competitive nature made this possible. Lacrosse is a contact sport full of body checking, and aggressive use of the netted poles the players use to hurl and catch the ball. An expert lacrosse player would be deft at utilizing his or her Crosse (netted pole) in both attack and defense, making dangerous opponents, which is just what we needed to bring the fight between the Montagues and Capulets in the beginning of the show to life.

### **Brief History of Lacrosse**

Lacrosse was originally developed by Native American tribes in what is now North America and Canada. It featured two teams of players, each armed with netted poles used to catch and throw a single ball that the athletes attempted to score into a goal. The game held ritual, religious, and military significance by upholding community values of teamwork, strength, and quick witted agility. The game was adopted by French and English settlers in the early 1600's, the game as we know it today was officially founded in the late 1800s. It was soon picked up by colleges and high schools all over the forming nation.

### Some Basic Rules

The central idea of lacrosse is for teams, armed with netted poles, to run and pass a single ball up the field to the opponent's goal where they can score.

1. As long as player's have the ball in the crosse (the netted pole) they may run with the ball and pass it
2. The only player who can touch the ball with his hands are the goalies
3. A player can attempt to take possession of the ball by knocking it out of an opponent's crosse by slapping or poking of the stick and gloves of whoever has the ball.
4. Like in Hockey, body checking is allowed as long as the check is above the waist.



## FENCING



Our characters also combat using fencing foils. The fencing foil is historically accurate for the Shakespearean theater because in the 16<sup>th</sup> century townspeople actually used foils when fighting..

### A Brief History

The Combatants may use one of several types of weapons:

- Foil- a light thrusting weapon; In the 17th century it used to be named fleuret and it was developed in France.
- Épée- a heavy thrusting weapon.
- Sabre- a light cutting and thrusting weapon. The sabre is also used for training because of its light weight.

The English term *fencing*, in the sense of "the action or art of using the sword scientifically" dates to the late 16th century. The first known use of *defens* in reference to Renaissance swordsmanship is in William Shakespeare's *Merry Wives of Windsor*: "Alas sir, I cannot fence."

## Pre-Show Activities

*Romeo and Juliet* is a feast of language, from the insults hurled by the quarrelers, to the puns of Mercutio, to the glorious poetry of Juliet. Perhaps the most fun category for students is the insults! Here's an exercise that gets Shakespeare's syllables in their mouths in a fun, interactive way.

1. Split the class into two groups and have each student compose their own insult from the three columns below. The students should select a word from each one of the columns A, B & C. Have them precede their insult with the word "thou".

**Example:** "thou knavish lily-livered manikin!" Have the "A's" hurl their insult at the "B's" and then switch!

bawdy

brazen

greasy

queasy

saucy

reeky

waggish

prating

wanton

unmuzzled

bunch-backed

clay-brained

fat-kidneyed

iron-witted

onion-eyed

rump-fed

horn-mad

sour-faced

eye-offending

pale-hearted

canker-blossom

clot-pole

dogfish

malkin

pantaloon

waterfly

gull-catcher

rudesby

moldwarp

scullion

2. A pun is described in Webster's dictionary as: "The usually humorous use of a word in such a way as to suggest two or more meanings or the meaning of another word similar in sound." In *Romeo and Juliet*, Shakespeare uses many puns most notably by Mercutio: "ask for me tomorrow and you shall find me a grave man." Note the pun on the word "grave," meaning both "serious" and "dead." This pun use here is both ironic and appropriate, because Mercutio is about to die. Have your students construct their own puns enabling them to have fun using words and to explore the "double meanings" of those words. However unlike Mercutio and his puns, (the majority of which are bawdy), keep it clean!

## Post –Show Activities

1. The Friar states in the final scene of the play “that some shall be pardoned and some punished.”

Discuss whom you think should be pardoned, and whom should be punished when all is said and done. Who is most responsible for the deaths of the two lovers? Is it the Capulets? Are the Friar and the Nurse to blame? Certainly they *meant* well, but their wishful thinking proved disastrous. Do their actions deserve a pardon from the Prince? What about the neglectful Friar John? Should he get off without punishment? Romeo and Juliet are certainly *guilty* in their way, but they end up being *punished* through their deaths. Who else should be punished or pardoned? No easy task for a Prince or any *judge* to determine when *all* in one way or another are responsible.
2. Now that you have seen this particular production of *Romeo and Juliet*, compare or contrast other versions of this timeless classic. For example: Franco Zeffirelli’s 1968 film version set in Elizabethan England or Baz Luhrmann’s 1996 modern retelling set in contemporary Miami. For that matter, where does the musical *West Side Story* fit into the picture? It’s fascinating to see where Shakespeare left off and where modern film director’s and composer’s like Leonard Bernstein pick up, taking Shakespeare’s words and ideas to create something vibrant, controversial and sublime. Compare and contrast Georgia Shakespeare’s version with these other famous treatments.
3. Now it’s time to take the stage! You’ve seen Georgia Shakespeare’s production, you’ve discussed other versions of the play either in film or musical form, you’ve most likely read the play by now, you should be experts! Put your expertise on display, by having your class act out scenes from *Romeo and Juliet*! Try the balcony scene, or the palmer’s scene when Romeo and Juliet first meet. Get your bravest actor to attempt the “Queen Mab” speech, or get the entire class involved by staging one of the plays many duels, utilizing safe weapons like cardboard or balloon swords. Remember, it doesn’t have to be a certain way, take the words and situations and create your own new version of *Romeo and Juliet*! When students act these wonderful words as opposed to just reading the possibilities for discovery and understanding are limitless!

## Theatre Etiquette

Ever wonder where the term “break a leg” comes from?  
 What is the difference between t-h-e-a-t-r-e and t-h-e-a-t-e-r?  
 Why is whistling back stage not a good idea?  
 Who were the groundlings?

We encourage you to explore the role of the audience in Shakespeare’s day.  
 How does it differ from the role of the audience today?

### What rules apply when attending live theatre and why are they different than attending a movie theater?

**The main reasons for the differences in etiquette are safety and courtesy.**

For obvious reasons, safety is an issue because the theatre is dark during a performance. However, in live theatre, you may not always know what is coming next! Not only is it dark, the door you may need to go through to get to the restroom may be the same door being used by an actor with a broadsword. As a courtesy to the actors, house management staff and those seated around you, it is best to remain seated until a scheduled break in the performance.

### Here are a few behavioral guidelines for the Georgia Shakespeare Student Matinee Patron:

Proper performance etiquette lends itself to a quiet and non-disruptive environment. The performers, crew and administrative staff are all professionals working to provide an exceptional theatre-going experience. The duty of the audience is to aid us in our efforts by abiding by school and theatre rules at all times. We encourage your students to fully engage in the performance by reacting to the events on stage in an appropriate manner. In addition, we expect the utmost respect to the actors and other patrons.

- ***The use of flash photography or recording devices is strictly forbidden at all times while in the theatre.***  
 (This includes camera phones, digital cameras, video cameras and audio recorders.)  
 Flash photography creates a safety hazard for the actors on stage.
- ***Cell phones are strictly forbidden in the theatre.***  
 The signals disrupt the technical equipment used to call important lighting and sound cues during the performance. Use of a cell phone for any reason will not be tolerated. [This includes **TEXT MESSAGING.**]
- ***Disruptive behavior will not be tolerated.***  
 The definition of disruptive behavior is at the discretion of stage and house management and may not result in re-admittance. If for any reason a student is asked to leave the auditorium, a school appointed chaperone will need to accompany the individual at all times.
- ***Students must be accompanied by a school appointed chaperone at all times.***
- ***Please encourage your students to remain seated during performance.***  
 Unaccompanied students will not be permitted to leave the auditorium during performance. Bathrooms are located in the lobby and will be available for use prior to the scheduled curtain time of 10:00 AM. Please have your entire group seated and accounted for prior to the 10:00 AM curtain time. Each act of *Romeo and Juliet* will last approximately one (1) hour. There will be one (1) 10-minute intermission to allow patrons to use the restroom after Act 1. Any patron who leaves the theatre during performance will be re-seated at the discretion of house management.
- ***Food and drinks are not permitted in the auditorium.***
- ***Unaccompanied students will not be allowed to leave the building at any time.***
- ***Please remain in your seats after the performance.***  
 Our house management staff will release you to the buses in order to insure your students’ safety.

If you have any further questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact our offices at 404-504-3422 or [katie@gashakespeare.org](mailto:katie@gashakespeare.org).