

William Shakespeare's
ROMEO AND JULIET
A "Shakespeare in the Ruins" Study Guide

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The SIR production of *Romeo and Juliet* may be an introduction to the play, it may come somewhere in the middle of your study, or it may be the final activity. Wherever it happens, you and your students are sure to enjoy this wonderful promenade production! Let students know that they are in for a unique theatrical experience as they become part of the action as they move to new locations for different scenes in the play.

This Guide does not include the summaries and activities that can be found in most editions of the play. It does include suggestions on how to prepare students for what they'll see and hear, as well as ideas for after reading and after the production. *Enjoy it all!*

BEFORE READING

1. Give each student a packet of a variety of love poems to read through silently. Students choose which poems to discuss in class. After discussion, individuals write a personal response to the poem(s). Teacher leads a discussion about the literary devices in the poetry to help prepare students for some of the devices used by Shakespeare. Topics for discussion include tone, diction, imagery, attitude toward love, etc.

Some suggested poems include:

"The Demon Lover" (This anonymous folk ballad can be found at <http://members.tripod.lycos.nl/Popularpoetrypage/demon.htm>)

"First Person Demonstrative" by Phyllis Gotlieb

"help I've just been run over by a bus" by Gwen Hauser (found in *Inside Poetry*, Harcourt Canada)

"A Red, Red Rose" by Robert Burns

"The Taxi" by Amy Lowell

"Adolescence" by P.K. Page (in *Cry Ararat!*)

"It's Raining in Love" by Richard Brautigan

Shakespeare's Sonnets 18 and 116 (and many others!)

2. "Perfect Mate"

Both students and parents fill out separate surveys to discuss in class. Students are asked to try and figure out what traits *their parents* would list if they were choosing the perfect mate for their son or daughter. Parents are asked what traits they would consider most important if *they* were choosing the perfect mate

for their son or daughter. You can be sure that interesting discrepancies and discussions ensue. The forms can be found at this website:

<http://www.teachersfirst.com/winners/romeo.pdf>

3. Let students “play” with iambic pentameter. Have them write 20 lines that describe a situation. You might put a few lines on the board like these to get them started:

- a) The dining hall, at lunch time yesterday,
- b) The band played loud and fast all through the night
- c) When I was young, I thought I knew it all

4. To introduce the idea of diction, ask students to read the following familiar nursery rhyme whose language has been elevated and made more scientific:

Scintillate, scintillate astral phenomenon.
Often thy nuclear nature I ponder on.
High in the stygian ether, capacious,
Similar to a rare gem carbonaceous.
Scintillate, scintillate astral phenomenon.
Often thy nuclear nature I ponder on.

Then students alter the diction of the following rhymes. Lift one to an elevated plane; make it educated, polite, even scientific. Lower the other to an even more colloquial level; use slang. Do not worry about trying to make it rhyme.

- a) Mary had a little lamb whose fleece was white as snow,
And everywhere that Mary went, the lamb was sure to go.

- b) Jack and Jill went up the hill
To fetch a pail of water.
Jack fell down and broke his crown,
And Jill came tumbling after.

READING THE PLAY

Nothing takes the place of actually reading the play, and the best way for students to do this is to get up on their feet! The scenes below are listed chronologically (with Act, scene and line numbers from the Oxford School *Shakespeare*, 2001) and include a brief intro, the number of readers needed (not including a director), and because not all editions match up line for line, the beginning speaker and his or her first few words. Read them all or pick and choose!

I.i.31-66. Sampson & Gregory fight with Abram, then Tybalt. (5)
Sampson: My naked weapon is out.

I.i.154-232 Benvolio & Romeo speak of love. (2)
Benvolio: Good morrow, cousin.

- I.ii.45-103 Benvolio & Romeo intercept the invitation Capulet's party. (3)
Benvolio: Tut, man, one fire...
- I.iii.60-106. Juliet is not interested in marriage, especially not to Paris. (4)
Nurse: Peace, I have done.
- I.iv.11-52. Mercutio & Benvolio try to convince Romeo to attend the party. (3)
Romeo: Give me a torch...
- I.v.40-143. For Romeo it's love at first sight. Tybalt discovers the intruders. (6)
Romeo: What lady's that...
- II.ii. The balcony scene. (3)
- II.iii.31-94 Romeo visits Friar Lawrence the first time. (2)
Romeo: Good morrow, father.
- II.iv.1-35 Mercutio & Benvolio discuss Tybalt's challenge. (2)
Mercutio: Where the dev'l...
- II.iv.46-90 Romeo joins them in their teasing. (3)
Romeo: Good morrow to you both.
- II.iv.132-198. Nurse has a message for Romeo from Juliet. (3)
Nurse: I pray you, sir...
- II.v.18-78. Nurse returns to Juliet with Romeo's response. (2)
Juliet: O God, she comes!
- II.vi. The wedding. (3)
- III.i.33-198. The BIG fight scene. Mercutio & Tybalt die; Romeo is banished. (8)
Benvolio: By my head, here comes the Capulets.
- III.ii.36-143. Nurse tells Juliet the news. (2)
Juliet: Ay me, what news?
- III.iii.29-70. In agony over what has happened, Romeo goes to the Friar. (2)
Romeo: 'Tis torture, and not mercy.
- III.iii.80-175. Nurse comes with word from Juliet. (3)
Nurse: I come from Lady Juliet.
- III.v.1-64. Romeo and Juliet have spent the night together. (3)
Juliet: Wilt thou be gone?

- III.v.137-195. Juliet's dad is not pleased with her. (4)
*Capulet: How now, wife,
Have you deliver'd to her our decree?*
- III.v.196-242. Juliet is feeling quite sorry for herself. (3)
Juliet: Is there no pity...
- IV.i.1-43. Juliet & Paris accidentally meet at the Friar's. (3)
Friar Lawrence: On Thursday, sir?
- IV.i.44-126. The Friar comes up with a plan to help Juliet. (2)
Juliet: O shut the door...
- IV.ii.15-37. Juliet pretends to obey her father. (4)
Nurse: See where she comes...
- IV.iii. Juliet considers suicide, then takes the potion. (2)
- IV.v.i-64. The Capulets believe Juliet is dead. (5)
Nurse: Mistress, what mistress!
- V.i.57-86. Romeo visits the Apothecary. (2)
Romeo: What ho, apothecary!
- V.iii.45-87. Romeo & Paris fight at Juliet's tomb. (3)
Romeo: Thou detestable maw...
- V.iii.88-120. Romeo's dying speech. (1)
Romeo: How oft when men are at the point of death
- V.iii.139-170. Juliet awakes, discovers the awful truth, and kills herself. (2)
*Friar Lawrence: Romeo!
Alack, alack...*
- V.iii.270-310. The prince is convinced that Friar Lawrence has told the truth. (3)
Prince: We still have known thee...
- V.iii.305-310. The final words. (1)
Prince: A glooming peace this morning with it brings

For a closer look at Language and Imagery, these speeches work particularly well:

- I.i.165-177. *Romeo: Alas that Love, whose view is muffled still...*
- II.ii.10-25. *Romeo: It is my lady, O it is my love:*
- II.ii.26-32. *Romeo: She speaks,
O speak again, bright angel...*
- II.ii.38-49. *Juliet: 'Tis but thy name that is my enemy;*
- II.ii.176-181. *Juliet: 'Tis almost morning, I would have thee gone:*
- III.ii.1-32. *Juliet: Gallop apace, you fiery-footed steeds...*
- III.ii.73-85. *Juliet: O serpent heart, hid with a flow'ring face!*
- IV.iii.14-58. *Juliet: Farewell! God knows when we shall meet again.*
- V.iii.88-120. *Romeo: How oft when men are at the point of death...*

ANTICIPATING CHANGES

All directors put their own imprints on a script before an audience sees the final product on stage. Shakespeare gave so few stage directions that productions of the same play can vary widely. In this *Shakespeare in the Ruins* production, little of the actual language has been changed, but you will notice some other changes. Transcona is now the setting, and the Apothecary has become a Dealer. There are no servants or officers, nor are the Montagues ever seen.

Some lines have been given to different characters to make the production work with fewer actors than Shakespeare used. For example, in the opening scene, it is Benvolio and Mercutio who argue and then fight with Anthony (rather than Abram) and Tybalt.

In other places lines have been cut, combined, or re-ordered. Some of the changes you'll see in this production are listed here:

I.ii.63+ Rather than Romeo reading the invitation aloud and conversing with Benvolio and Mercutio, Mercutio reads the letter and Romeo only speaks the final couplet.

There is no chorus to end Act I.

II.ii. ends with Juliet's exit.

In II.iv. the Nurse comes alone and the teasing is shortened.

After Romeo runs off in III.i, we see Juliet and the Nurse from III.ii, and then we are returned to the crime scene in III.i. When we return to Juliet's bedroom (III.ii), quite a few lines are re-ordered.

In IV.i, Paris holds a bouquet of roses and asks Juliet: *Do you make plans with thy gardener?* Rather than: *Come you to make confession to this father?*

IV.ii, in which Juliet promises her parents to obey during the wedding preparations, is omitted.

In IV.v, a great deal of the wailing is omitted, along with the musicians and Peter.

In V.i, Balthasar is replaced by Benvolio, and Romeo asks for letters from the *gardener*, rather than from the Friar.

Also in V.i, Romeo's monologue about the Apothecary is omitted, and there is some re-ordering: a shortened V.ii without Friar John interrupts V.i right after Benvolio (Balthasar) exits. We return to V.i following Friar Lawrence's discovery that his letter was not delivered, and we find Romeo approaching a Dealer in a "shadowy place."

The final scene (V.iii) is quite short. It begins with Romeo entering "The City Morgue" to find Juliet laying "on a slab." (line 91: *My love! my wife!*) She starts to wake; he does not see her. Romeo drinks the potion and dies. Juliet quickly discovers what has happened and stabs herself. Friar Lawrence does not re-appear. The scene cuts approximately 125 lines. There is no final entrance by the families and the Prince. The Chorus delivers the play's final three couplets.

AFTER THE PLAY

1. Have students reflect on the benefits and/or limitations of a promenade theatre production.

2. Revisit the text and discuss some of the changes. What reasons might the director have for making these changes? What changes would you make?

3. Film study – Using Baz Luhrman's energetic and wildly stylistic 1996 film version along with Franco Zeffirelli's classic 1968 film, three scenes in particular stand out for comparison and offer a glimpse into the decision-making carried out within each director's unique vision of the story as it relates to the characters, theme, and setting. It should be an interesting discussion taking into account SIR's use of downtown Winnipeg as a backdrop for this current production.

The scenes are: I.i. – The fight.

II.ii. – The party/balcony scene.

III.i. – Mercutio's death.

4. Put Romeo on trial. This is a good project for interdisciplinary study combining English and Canadian Studies or Law. Students study the Young Offenders Act and our justice system while looking carefully through the play to find evidence for both sides.

5. Students write “The Ballad of Romeo and Juliet,” creating four original four-line verses per act. Singles or partners.

A FEW ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Auden, W. H. *Commentary on the Poetry and Tragedy of “Romeo and Juliet” in The Laurel Shakespeare*, Dell Publishing Co., Inc., USA. 1971.

Willinsky, John and Bedard, Jim. *The Fearful Passage: Romeo and Juliet in the High School – A Feminist Perspective*. The Canadian Council of Teachers of English, Monographs and Special Publications. 1989.

<http://us.imdb.com/Glossary/> (Film terms.)

<http://students.ed.uiuc.edu/bach/rnj24/rj1968.html> (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign page for students and teachers of *R & J*.)

<http://www.romeoandjuliet.com/> (Official site of Baz Luhrman’s film.)