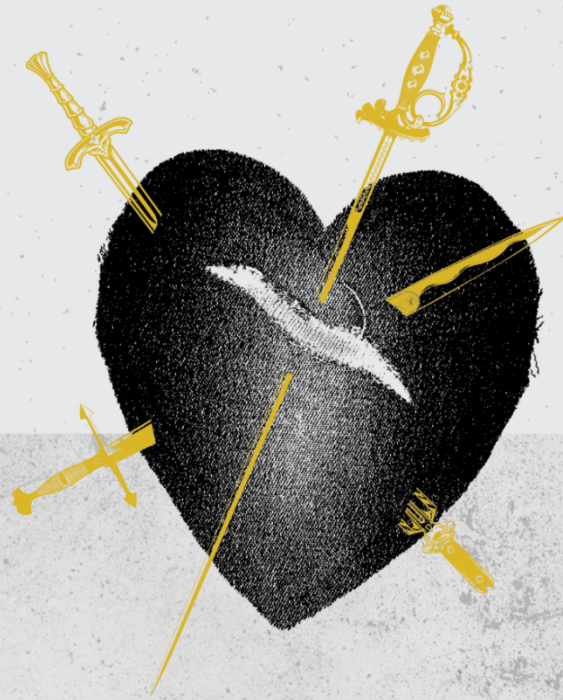


Gamut Theatre Group Shakespeare Educational Engagement 2023-2024 Production



Romeo & Juliet

By William Shakespeare

STUDY GUIDE BY KIM GREENAWALT

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Above: Photos from Atlas Obscura of the sites rumored to be Juliet's Balcony and Juliet's Tomb. Both have become tourist destinations.

Plot Summary – Gamut Theatre Production

ACT I

- The Chorus tells us everything that's gonna happen in this play if you need a big picture summary.
- Gregory & Sampson (some Capulets) get into a fight with Abraham and Balthasar (Montagues) in this slice of life opening scene. Benvolio tries to stop the fight and fails.
- Tybalt shows up late to the party and engages Benvolio in combat
- The Prince—Verona's ruler—intervenes and stops the melee.
- Benvolio meets up with his friend Romeo, who is big sad that his crush, Rosaline, doesn't love him back. Romeo's a lover, not a fighter. Benvolio suggests going to the Capulet ball where Rosaline will be in attendance so Romeo can pursue his romantic interests.
- Meanwhile, the Capulets are preparing for their big party and Lady Capulet delivers some big news to her daughter Juliet: she and her husband have set up a marriage for Juliet with Paris, a well-to-do man of Verona. Juliet's nurse, the woman who raised Juliet, is very excited about this...more so than Juliet.
- Benvolio and Romeo, wearing disguises to attend the Capulet ball, meet up with their bestie Mercutio, who is neither a Montague nor a Capulet. Mercutio is part of the Prince's family. Mercutio gives a now famous speech about Queen Mab and the trio of boys go to the party.
- At the party, Tybalt recognizes Romeo and wishes to fight him. He is held back by Lord Capulet.
- Romeo meets Juliet and, before realizing she is a Capulet, forgets all about Rosaline and falls madly in love. Juliet falls in love with Romeo before the Nurse tells her the man she exchanged a sonnet and a kiss with was Romeo, a Montague. Oopsie!

ACT II

- Romeo leaves the party, ditching his friends, to find Juliet, who is on her balcony. They chitchat in secret and agree to meet up tomorrow to get married.
- In the morning, Romeo visits Friar Laurence, and gets the friar to agree to marry him to Juliet. After all, this marriage could heal the division between the feuding families.
- Benvolio and Mercutio are still looking for Romeo, and finally find him after his visit to the Friar. The Nurse enters the scene, looking for Romeo. Romeo sends the Nurse back to Juliet with news of when Juliet should show up to Friar Laurence's so that they can get married.

- Meanwhile, back at the Capulet household, Juliet impatiently awaits the Nurse's arrival. The Nurse returns to tell Juliet when she needs to show up to Friar Laurence's place to get married to Romeo. Romeo and Juliet get married in secret! Everything's great now, right? Wrong!

ACT III

- After Romeo and Juliet's secret wedding, Romeo and the boys encounter Tybalt on the street. Tybalt tries to engage Romeo in a fight, but Romeo is hesitant now that he's married to a Capulet. Mercutio engages Tybalt in a duel on Romeo's behalf. When Romeo tries to stop the fight, Tybalt gives Mercutio a mortal wound. Enraged, Romeo duels and kills Tybalt. After this, Romeo, in shock, leaves the scene of the crime. The Prince shows up, Benvolio is forced to recount what happened, and the Prince banishes Romeo on pain of death (aka if Romeo is found in Verona, he'll die).
- News of Tybalt's death and Romeo's banishment reaches Juliet through the Nurse. Both women are distraught. Meanwhile, Lord Capulet thinks speeding up the marriage between Paris and Juliet will be a great idea.
- Romeo, also distraught, goes to Friar Laurence for help. The Nurse shows up. The two elders set up Romeo to spend a night with Juliet and then leave for Mantua.
- After Romeo leaves, Lady Capulet drops a bombshell that Juliet will be marrying Paris ASAP. Juliet is distraught and does everything she can to avoid it, but to no avail.

ACT IV

- Not wanting to be married to two men, Juliet reaches out to the Friar for help. He gives her a sleeping potion that's going to make her look dead...long enough for her body to get placed in the Capulet's creepy crypt and then run away with Romeo. Juliet tells her parents she's down to marry Paris, enacts the Friar's plan, and on the morning of her wedding, everyone thinks she's dead.

ACT V

- Meanwhile in Mantua, Romeo receives word that Juliet is dead. Very upset, he purchases poison from an apothecary with the intent to go back to Verona and die on Juliet's grave. He enacts his plan, travels to Verona, kills Paris who happens to be outside of the gravesite, and dies on Juliet's grave.
- Friar Laurence shows up too late to stop Romeo's plan, but tries to get Juliet to run away when she wakes up and finds Romeo deceased. Juliet refuses and stabs herself with Romeo's dagger. Both young lovers are now dead and Lady Montague, Lady Capulet, and the Prince are left to pick up the pieces.

Characters – Gamut Theatre Production

The Montague Family:

Romeo: son, heir, and only child to the Montague Family.

Lady Montague: Romeo's mother and head of the Montague family.

Benvolio: Romeo's cousin. Not a violent person.

Abraham and Balthasar: Montagues of a lower status

The Capulet Family:

Juliet: daughter and only child of Lord and Lady Capulet.

Lord Capulet: Head of the Capulet family and Juliet's father. Believes he is looking out for his daughter's best interests by securing her marriage to Paris.

Lady Capulet: Juliet's mother.

Nurse: Raised Juliet from childhood.

Tybalt: Cousin of Juliet. Adept fighter.

Gregory and Sampson: Capulets of a lower status

Other Parties:

Mercutio: friend to Romeo and Benvolio. Loyal to his friends, yet unpredictable. Related to the Prince.

Prince: ruler of Verona struggling to remain peace between the Capulets and Montagues.

Friar Laurence: Verona priest who also serves as a confidant to Romeo.

Paris: arranged to marry Juliet by Lord Capulet. *[Paris is referenced but not seen in the Gamut production.]*

Shakespeare's Text

Verse: a form of writing that follows rhythmic rules. When you read a play by Shakespeare, every line of verse begins with a capital letter, even in the middle of a sentence. Shakespeare's verse uses a special rhythmic pattern called iambic pentameter. In iambic pentameter, each line of text contains ten syllables, which are broken down into five iambs. An iamb is a set of two syllables, with the first unaccented and the second accented. Look at the example below to find the stressed syllables of iambs in bold.

Juliet: Wilt **thou** be **gone**? it **is** not **yet** near **day**:
It **was** the **nightingale**, and **not** the **lark**,

Blank Verse: follows the rhythmic pattern of iambic pentameter but the ends of lines do not rhyme. The example listed above demonstrating iambic pentameter is also an example of blank verse.

Rhyming couplets: form of verse when the ending of each line rhymes.

Romeo: I have more care to stay than will to **go**:
Come, death, and welcome! Juliet wills it **so**.

Prose: does not follow the rhythmic pattern of iambic pentameter and does not rhyme. When you read a play by Shakespeare, prose is only capitalized at the beginning of a sentence rather than each new line of text having a capital letter. Prose is typically, but not always, reserved for lower-status characters or for relaxed situations.

Sampson: Nay, as they dare. I will bite my thumb at them; which is a disgrace to them,
if they bear it.

Notes on Rule Breaking: These are some basic rules of writing in verse--however, in some instances, Shakespeare breaks these rules. There will be lines that have greater or fewer than 10 syllables or won't sound right read strictly as iambs. It is up to the performer to figure out how to possibly elide a word or words to make the line 10 syllables--or purposefully break the rhythm of the verse for dramatic effect. See if you can find which lines are breaking the rules in the example below:

Nurse: Even or odd, of all days in the year,
Come Lammas-eve at night shall she be fourteen.
Susan and she--God rest all Christian souls!--
Were of an age: well, Susan is with God;
She was too good for me: but, as I said,
On Lammas-eve at night shall she be fourteen.

Romeo and Juliet in Performance

In this section of our study guide, we'll take a brief look at the conditions in which *Romeo and Juliet* may have been originally performed and the choices that Gamut made with our production of *Romeo and Juliet*.

What was theatre like in Shakespeare's England?

Shakespeare belonged to a company of actors known as The Lord Chamberlain's Men, writing for them between roughly 1590 and 1613. Later, under the patronage of King James I, they would be called The King's Men. Because Shakespeare belonged to a company as a shareholder, or manager, he would be able to write his plays knowing the actors who would be performing in each one, thereby able to tailor his work to his company. While the troupe may have spent lots of time in London, many troupes toured throughout England when London had to close theatres due to the Plague. Audiences came from all walks of life to see theatre at outdoor theatres, like the Globe, or indoor theatres, like the Blackfriars. It cost a penny to stand in the uncovered yard, directly in front of the stage, at the Globe. Balcony seats, providing shelter from the elements, cost two pennies. Indoor playhouses, with fewer seats, cost more to attend. A basic seat in the Blackfriars cost sixpence while a well-to-do audience member could sit on the side of the stage for 2 shillings (24 pence). Outdoor theatre spaces relied on natural light while indoor spaces utilized torches and candles. Costumes helped to distinguish characters apart from each other as actors sometimes had to play multiple roles. However, scenery and props were likely kept to a minimum.

Some historical trivia about *Romeo and Juliet*...

- Stories of the separation of lovers, unkind parents and useful sleeping potions can be traced back to the Greeks and Romans. For example, the story of Pyramus and Thisbe, the thwarted lovers who die tragically, is one of the stories told in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Shakespeare would have read this in the original Latin as a boy at school and an English translation was published by Arthur Golding in 1567. Shakespeare uses this story to wonderful comic effect in his *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, written at the same time as *Romeo and Juliet*.
- In 1562 Arthur Brooke published *The Tragicall Historie of Romeus and Juliet*, the first English version of the story of Romeo and Juliet. His long poem was very popular among Elizabethan readers.
- *Romeo and Juliet* was first printed in 1597, from what we believe to be pirated edition. However, the cover page of this edition tells us that the play was a great success: '...it hath been often (with great applause) plaid publicly'.
- We even have an idea of who some of the actors were—Romeo was most likely played by Richard Burbage, the “leading man” of the Lord Chamberlain's Men, who was proficient with poetry and combat. Popular comedian Will Kemp played Peter, the

Nurse's servant. (Peter doesn't show up in the Gamut production but keep an eye out for this comic role in a full-length production!)

What choices did Gamut make in this performance of *Romeo and Juliet*?

Unlike Shakespeare, who had to write a play of which the reigning monarch and the censors/censorship laws would approve, Gamut's mission is to tell classic stories in new and exciting ways so that future generations continue to pass these stories along. So how did we do that with this production of *Romeo and Juliet*?

- This production, along with many of our other Educational Engagement productions, uses an extremely small cast—a choice that creates exciting opportunities for actors and a chance for an audience to ask “how did they do that?!” as actors shift seamlessly between multiple characters.
- The understanding of the story is a key part of this production—hence Gamut adds narrations that bridge the gaps between scenes we had to remove for the sake of the show fitting into the amount of time allotted for a school assembly or field trip. This allows the play to move quickly and builds excitement and dramatic tension.
- Gamut will often use modern music to underscore scenes and transition dramatic moments. This gives our audience a familiar reference when sometimes the language can seem unfamiliar.



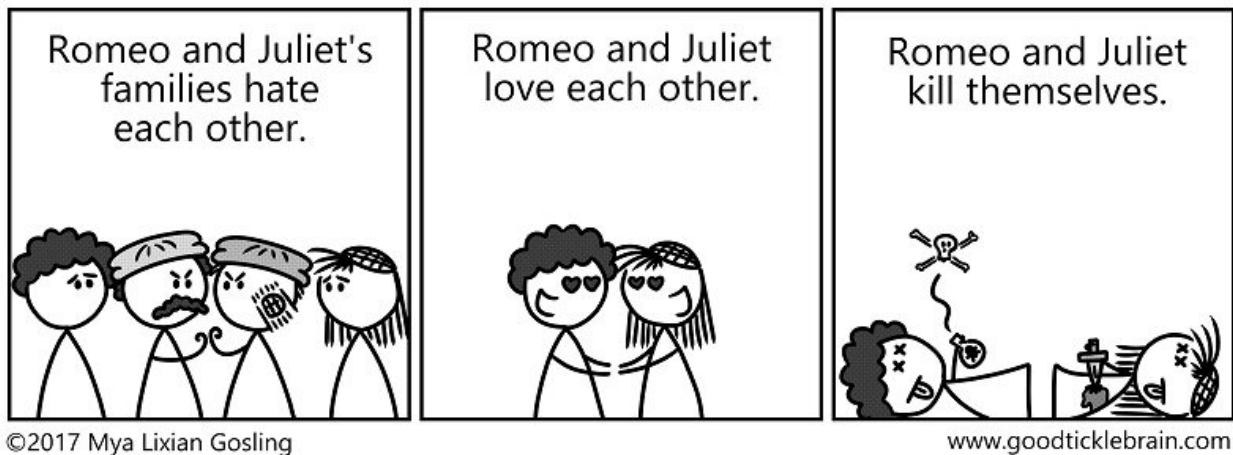
Above: NYC's Public Theatre's Mobile Unit Tour of *Romeo and Juliet*

Post-Show Discussion and Activity

Discussion Questions for large or small groups:

What's it all about? The Royal Shakespeare Company has described the play as follows: "*Romeo and Juliet* is a play about falling in love and young people being let down by an older generation." This is just one example of an elevator pitch or a tag line—a catchy single sentence that grabs a reader's attention. Something you could tell someone in the time it takes to ride the elevator. Discuss as a class or in small groups what you think of the Royal Shakespeare Company's elevator pitch of this play? Then, in small groups or as individuals, write your own tag lines for the play and justify them. If you want to take it a step further, illustrate your elevator pitches and tag lines into comic form, no longer than three panels. Look at Mya Gosling's example below for an example of how to condense a full length play into a three-panel comic!

ROMEO AND JULIET



Themes in *Romeo and Juliet*—the following list contains three of the big themes in *Romeo and Juliet*

- Chance vs. Choice
- Family
- Love

In small groups, pick a theme. Imagine that you are going to stage a production of *Romeo and Juliet*. How would you emphasize the theme you chose? Discuss and have each group share with the class.

Activities:

- **Sonnet Exchange:** Have a sonnet exchange, much like a Secret Santa gift exchange. Each participant draws the name of a classmate out of a hat. Each participant then has until the Sonnet Exchange to write a complimentary sonnet about their person. Remember, a sonnet is a 14-line poem with the following rhyme scheme:

A
B
A
B
C
D
C
D
E
F
E
F
G
G

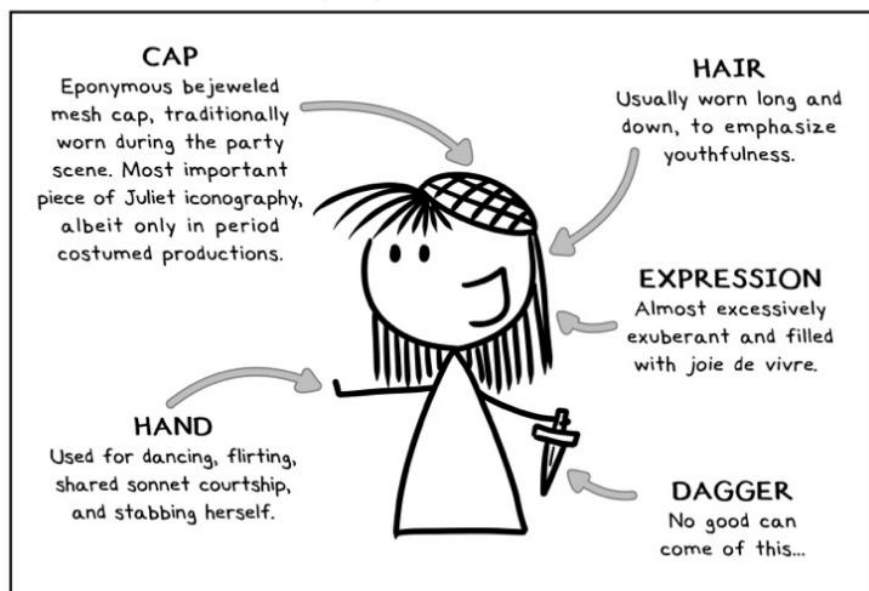
With the rhyme scheme above, 1st and 3rd lines rhyme with each other and the 2nd and 4th lines rhyme with each other. That creates a single stanza. A sonnet has three stanzas and ends with a rhyming couplet.

- **Designing the Capulet Ball:** While Gamut’s educational engagement productions are light on set, props, and costumes so we can tour them to many different locations, a non-touring production of *Romeo and Juliet* has much to consider. Find out for yourselves by designing the Capulet Ball!
 - **Step 1: Choose a setting.** Divide into groups of 5-6 individuals. As a group, decide on a setting for your version of *Romeo and Juliet*—is it set in the 1920’s between two feuding mafia families? Or is it set in modern day America between two rival schools? Is it set in Renaissance Italy, or does your group want to choose a different time and place? This is all important as it will guide your next steps.
 - **Step 2: Design the play.** Use your setting from step 1 to start thinking like designers. One person in the group can sketch out or find pictures of costume designs. Another person should think about what the set might look like. Go ahead and draw it or find pictures that represent what you would create. A third person should think about props...are there glasses for drinks? Is the set decorated for a party? A fourth person can think about the lighting—is the party lit with bright overhead lights or is it lit dimly with mood lighting? A fifth person should make a soundtrack—what music would people be dancing to at the Capulet ball, based on the chosen setting? Have a 6th person, working with the

selected soundtrack, thinking about what dances might be happening at the Capulet Ball. Either choreograph them or find videos of something that you would want to see staged. Make sure that all elements of your imagined production are working together to create a cohesive, believable scene. This work may take longer than a single class period or require some work outside of class.

- **Step 3: Design presentations.** After students have had a few sessions to work together as a group, come back together as a class and have each group present their designs. Encourage groups to use visuals and audio to present their idea to the class—show pictures on PowerPoint, use YouTube if there are video references, and play one or two of the songs suggested.
 - **Step 4: Reflection.** As a class, talk about which productions of *Romeo and Juliet* you would want to see, based on the design presentations, and why.
- **Character Summary:** have each student choose a character from *Romeo and Juliet* and draw that character—stick figures are encouraged, but a more detailed drawing can be done if desired. Using the below picture as an example, have students indicate features of their drawing and why they are the way they are. For instance, is Mercutio’s tongue for making jokes? Is the rapier at Tybalt’s side for getting into brawls?
 - If the class creates one of these for every character in the play, post them on a corkboard or whiteboard to create your own dramatis personae to reference as you continue working on the play!

STICK FIGURE ICONOGRAPHY: JULIET



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www.goodticklebrain.com

Above: Character description of Juliet by Mya Gosling

For Further Study

***Romeo and Juliet* on Film—bunches of film adaptations exist of this play. Here are just a few:**

- Baz Luhrman’s modern take on *Romeo + Juliet* (1996), starring a very young Leonardo DiCaprio and Claire Danes. You might even recognize Paris as the Antman actor, Paul Rudd.
- *Rosaline* (2022) flips the original play on its head, telling the story from the perspective of Romeo’s initial love interest, Rosaline.
- *West Side Story*! Yup, Stephen Sondheim’s musical is on film and is totally a *Romeo and Juliet* adaptation. And there are two filmed versions: one from 1961 and another from 2021, directed by Stephen Spielberg.
- *Gnomio and Juliet* (2011) features the Montagues and Capulets as two different colors of garden gnomes in an adaptation that viewers of all ages can enjoy.

Other Teacher Resources

- [Click here](#) from education resources from the Royal Shakespeare Company.
- [Click here](#) for lesson plans from the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, featuring the drawings of Mya Gosling’s Good Tickle Brain—the only comic dedicated to Shakespeare in stick figure drawings!
- [Click here](#) for resources from Shakespeare’s Globe centered around their educational production of *Romeo and Juliet* (2019).
- [Click here](#) for Mya Gosling’s website Good Tickle Brain—in case you couldn’t get enough of her work from Shakespeare’s Birthplace Trust, where she illustrates Shakespeare’s plays with stick figures. This is a fun resource for teachers and students alike.