



Oregon
Shakespeare
Festival

2018 Study Guide



COMMONS WIKIMEDIA

San Carlo Borromeo Among The Plague Sufferers (detail),
Benedetto Luti

THE IMPACT OF ENVIRONMENT

Environmental factors impact Shakespeare's telling of the story of *Romeo and Juliet* in a couple of important ways. Shakespeare makes a point of telling us several times that it is hot. This is five days in the height of the summer under blistering Italian sunshine, and the youth of Verona, with the short tempers people tend to get on extremely hot days, have nothing to do but pick fights.

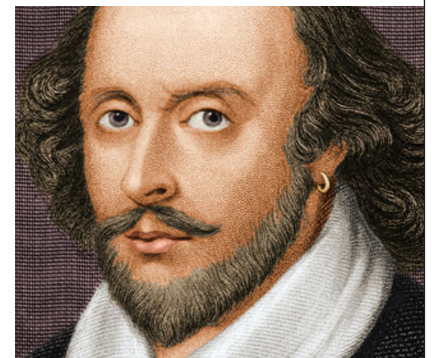
The plague also plays an important role. Mercutio, a relative of Prince Escalus who has no direct connection to the feud, uses his dying words to call a plague down on both the Capulets and Montagues. Devastating outbreaks of plague were common in Renaissance Europe, and quarantining entire towns was not unheard of. Shakespeare's audience had just suffered through an outbreak in London the year before *Romeo and Juliet* premiered. So it was viscerally meaningful to them to hear that Friar Lawrence's letter to Romeo explaining Juliet's plan had not been delivered because the road was closed due to plague in a town ahead.



Stone bridge, Verona, Italy

VERONA, ITALY

- A city on the Adige River in northern Italy, midway between Venice and Milan. Shakespeare used this area frequently in his plays. *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* is set in Verona and Milan, and the beginning of this season's *Othello* takes place in neighboring Venice.
- The name Verona is short for *Versus Romae*, meaning "In the direction of Rome," as it was on the main road south to Rome from northern Europe.
- By the beginning of the 14th century, the Prince of Verona had bought or conquered the northern cities of Padua, Treviso, Parma, Lucca and others. The Dukes of Venice and Florence, fearing that the Prince of Verona was becoming too powerful, started a successful war against him in 1337. The Prince lost control of Verona entirely in 1387.



William Shakespeare

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

- Born around April 23, 1564.
- Married Anne Hathaway at the age of 18. They had three children between 1583 and 1585.
- Became an actor and lead playwright for the Lord Chamberlain's Men, which became the King's Men when King James I was crowned in 1603.
- Wrote 37 plays, 2 epic poems and 154 sonnets over a 25-year career.
- *Romeo and Juliet* was written ca. 1595
- Died in his hometown of Stratford-upon-Avon on April 23, 1616.
- Buried in Stratford's Holy Trinity Church.

Before seeing or reading the play

1. Research fortune as the Elizabethans understood it. Make the case that life is governed by fortune or fate. Define free will. Make the case that life is governed by free will. In what way can life be governed by both free will and fortune? This and other websites provide information:

<https://www.enotes.com/topics/william-shakespeare/critical-essays/fate-and-fortune>

2. What is a feud or a vendetta? What are some of the reasons feuds develop? What keeps feuds going for generations? Why is it difficult to end feuds peacefully? How common were feuds in Renaissance Italy? In Elizabethan England? When did feuds become illegal? These and other websites provide information:

www.faculty.umb.edu/gary_zabel/Courses/Phil%20281b/Philosophy%20of%20Magic/Dante.%20etc/Philosophers/End/bluedot/vendettas.html

<http://blog.shakespearesglobe.com/post/161054467023/violent-ends-in-elizabethan-england>

3. What is honor? What does it mean to defend someone's honor? To defend your own honor? The honor of your family? What were the recognized means of defending and preserving honor during the Renaissance? For men? For women? How far were people willing to go for the sake of honor? What role did duels play in defending honor during the Renaissance? This and other websites provide information:

<http://web.uvic.ca/~mbest1/ISShakespeare/Resources/Honour/Honour.html>

4. Describe Renaissance wedding customs. In what ways were weddings a business transaction, especially among the middle and upper classes? How much choice did men have about whom they married? Women? What was the typical age for men and women to get married? This and other websites provide information:

<http://www.renaissance-weddings.net/index.htm>

“What’s in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet.”

Juliet, Act II, scene 2



Juliet. Costume rendering by Leah Piehl.

5. What is a sonnet? When did Shakespeare write sonnets and to what effect? These and other websites provide information:

<https://literarydevices.net/sonnet/>

<https://freebooksummary.com/the-shakespearean-sonnet-in-romeo-and-juliet-shakespeare-uses-sonnets-72443>

6. What is antithesis? What is a pun? What rhetorical devices did Shakespeare use in his work and to what effect? Research rhetorical devices common in Shakespeare's plays. These and other websites provide information:

<http://www.bardweb.net/grammar/02rhetoric.html>

<https://literarydevices.net/antithesis/>

<https://literarydevices.net/pun/>

Resources

Films:

- *West Side Story* (1961) by Robert Wise and Jerome Robbins
- *Romeo and Juliet* (1968) by Franco Zeffirelli
- *Romeo + Juliet* (1996) by Baz Luhrmann

Learn more about Shakespeare's life and times at the following websites:

<http://internetshakespeare.uvic.ca/Library/SLT/index.html>

<http://www.shakespeare.org.uk/explore-shakespeare.html>

<http://www.bardweb.net/man.html>

After seeing or reading the play

1. Love means many things in the world of *Romeo and Juliet*. What does love mean for Romeo before he meets Juliet? What does love mean after he meets her? What does love mean before and after Juliet meets Romeo? What does love mean for Lord Capulet? For Juliet's Nurse? For Mercutio? For Friar Lawrence?

2. Romeo's love for Rosaline is presented as a sickness. What symptoms of this illness cause his parents, his friends and his spiritual advisor to worry? What remedy does each propose? How is his sickness actually cured?

3. In *Romeo and Juliet* love is a violent, ecstatic and overpowering force that supersedes all other values, loyalties and emotions. What is positive about this kind of passion? What is negative about it? How can love overwhelm a person the way it overwhelms Romeo and Juliet? In what way does romantic love overshadow other forms of love in the play?



Romeo. Costume rendering
by Leah Piehl.

4. What is the role of time in the unfolding of events? What is the effect of having such monumental events happen in such a short time? Who makes quick decisions in the play? What effect do these decisions have on the course of events? How might having more time have changed the choices made or the outcomes of those choices?

5. Compare Juliet's relationship with the Nurse to her relationship with her mother. What is Juliet's relationship with her father? How do these three adults show that they care for Juliet? How do they each try to control or influence her? How do their actions contribute to the outcome of the story?

6. What is Romeo's relationship with his parents? With Friar Lawrence? How do they express their love and concern for him? How do their actions contribute to the outcome of the story?

7. Romeo and Juliet have three main friends and family members of their own age group: Mercutio, who is a relative of the Prince, Benvolio, who is a Montague cousin, and Tybalt, who is a Capulet cousin. Compare and contrast these characters. What is the significance of their names? How are they described by other characters? In what ways does each contribute to the outcome of the play?

8. According to Mercutio, who is Queen Mab? What effect does she have on dreamers? How does Mercutio hope to influence Romeo by telling him about Queen Mab?

9. Refer to your research on sonnets and rhetorical devices. When are formal verse, sonnets and rhetorical devices used in the play, and by whom? When is realistic prose spoken, and by whom? What does realistic prose represent in the world of the play? What do verse and rhetoric represent? What is the significance of the shift from realistic prose to formal verse and vice versa?

10. How is Romeo's love for Juliet different from his infatuation with Rosaline? How are Juliet's interactions with and about Paris different from her encounter with Romeo? What is love at first sight? How can such a passion be sustained over time? What do the language and structure of the initial exchange between Romeo and Juliet (Act I, scene 5, lines 92-109) tell us about them?

11. Refer to your research on honor. What is the value of honor in this society? What actions in the play take place because characters are defending someone's honor? What alternative means of defending and preserving honor are available to them?

12. Prince Escalus appears three times in the play, each time brought onstage by a fight. What is the cause and the outcome of each of the fights? What other characters are onstage for all three of these scenes? What is the progression of the Prince's actions through these three occasions? To what extent is he responsible for the deaths in the play?

13. Both Romeo and Juliet turn to Friar Lawrence for help. How does he assist them? When is his assistance the result of reflection and when is it hasty improvisation? What are the Friar's intentions in each case? What are the results?

14. Review Friar Laurence's first speech (Act II, scene 3). What phenomenon is he describing? How is it played out in his actions and their consequences?

15. Refer to your research on Renaissance wedding customs. Juliet faces a marriage with Paris arranged by her father and Paris with no regard for her wishes. How does she respond initially? How does she respond later in the play? What are the advantages of an arranged marriage? The disadvantages? What choices are available for Juliet in regards to this marriage in the beginning? How do her choices change?



Tybalt. Costume rendering by Leah Piehl.

16. Refer to your research on Fortune. What is the role of Fortune in the play? Which actions seemed to be caused by Fortune or fate? Which seem to be the result of free will? What is the meaning of “star-crossed?” Do Romeo and Juliet fall in love because of fate or choice? What does Romeo mean when he calls himself “fortune’s fool?”

17. What social and family expectations are placed on Romeo and Juliet? How does the conflict between those expectations and their individual desires create a dilemma for Romeo and Juliet? What is Romeo’s dilemma when he learns that Juliet is dead? What is Juliet’s when she realizes her plan has failed? Why do they feel that suicide is the only way out of their dilemmas? What different choices might they have made?

18. *Romeo and Juliet* is a play filled with opposites: comedy/tragedy, old/young, light/dark, fast/slow, love/hate, rapture/despair, life/death, celebrating/mourning, tenderness/violence, immaturity/maturity, freedom/limitations. What effect do these contrasting images have on you as an audience member? How were these opposites highlighted in this production?

19. In the Prologue, the Chorus says of Romeo and Juliet’s parents, “. . . the continuance of their parents’ rage, / Which, but their children’s end, nought could remove. . .” How do the deaths of Romeo and Juliet serve to remove their parents’ rage? Who is transformed by the deaths of Romeo and Juliet? How?

20. In your opinion, what or who is ultimately the cause of the deaths of Romeo and Juliet? The feud, their parents, themselves, hasty actions, destiny, a combination of these factors or something else?

21. If you are also seeing *Destiny of Desire* and/or *Sense and Sensibility*, compare the daughters in the plays. How is each daughter valued, and by whom? Which daughters find power by defying the societal expectations of their role as women?

22. If you are also seeing *Love’s Labor’s Lost*, *Destiny of Desire* and/or *Sense and Sensibility*, compare the relationship between love and marriage in these plays. In each play, how much power or input do the women have in whom or if they will marry? Who holds the final power of choice in each play, and why?

History of the story

William Shakespeare’s dramatization of *Romeo and Juliet* may be one of the greatest love stories of all time, but the truth is Shakespeare did not invent the plot. He almost never invented his stories. With very few exceptions, Shakespeare adapted already existing material.

Parts of the Romeo and Juliet story date back to the third century. Later, there were two families named Montecchi and Capuleti who were on different sides of a larger feud in Renaissance Italy. In 1530, Luigi da Porto was the first author to use the names Romeo and Giulietta. Shakespeare’s chief source is a poem, “The Tragical Historie of Romeus and Juliet,” published in 1562, two years before Shakespeare’s birth. All the major plot elements appear in these earlier versions of the story. Shakespeare expanded and deepened the roles of Mercutio and the Nurse, he rearranged a few scenes for dramatic effect, and, most importantly, he shortened the time frame of the story from three months to five days. But essentially he adapted the existing story.

So why is Shakespeare considered the genius? Why do his versions of these stories live and resonate and have meaning for us today, while other writers are largely forgotten? Much of the answer lies in Shakespeare’s phenomenal understanding of the complexities of the human condition, along with his remarkable ability to tie together diverse plot elements into a unifying theme.



Set design by Efrén Delgadillo, Jr.

The Danvers/Long Feud

In 1594, a chain of events occurred in England which may have influenced William Shakespeare's writing of *Romeo and Juliet*. Two families, the Danvers and the Longs, had been feuding for many generations. The Earl of Southampton, to whom William Shakespeare had just dedicated two epic poems, was a friend of the Danvers family. That same year, the feud flared up anew when Sir John Danvers, a local magistrate, put Sir Walter Long in jail.

The Long family was furious over this judgment. When Sir Walter was released, he and his family set about avenging the insult by provoking brawls in the streets of London between their followers and Sir John's. In one of them, a servant of the Danvers family was killed. Eventually Danvers went to an inn where Long was dining and challenged him to a duel. Long was killed, and Danvers, fearing for his life, took refuge with his friend the Earl of Southampton (the guy to whom William Shakespeare had just dedicated his two epic poems). Despite warrants for Danvers' arrest, Southampton helped his friend escape to France. Queen Elizabeth forbade Danvers to ever return to England, on pain of death.

In 1595, the year after these events unfolded, William Shakespeare chose to dramatize the ancient story of a feud between two rival families. Coincidence? We will never know.



Mercutio ready to fight.
Costume rendering by Leah Piehl.

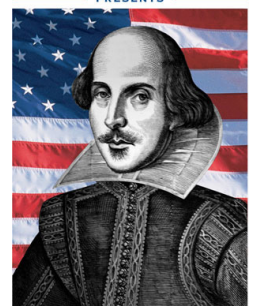


From the *Fechtbuch (Fencing Book)* by Hans Talhoffer, 1467

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