Oregon Shakespeare Festival®

2012 Study Guide for *Romeo and Juliet* by William Shakespeare

Before seeing/reading the play

1. Research Fortune as the Elizabethans understood her. 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:
   http://ise.uvic.ca/Library/SLT/drama/medievaltragedy.html

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? Give examples of feuds from books, films and/or contemporary news. These and other websites provide information:
   http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Feud
   http://www.ucalgary.ca/applied_history/tutor/endmiddle/bluedot/vendettas.html

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? These and other websites provide information:
   http://elizabethan.org/compendium/26.html
   http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Duel

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

5. What is a sonnet? What is iambic pentameter? 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://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sonnet
   http://www.bardweb.net/grammar/02rhetoric.html

6. The original location of *Romeo and Juliet* is Verona, Italy. The 2012 OSF production of *Romeo and Juliet* is set in the California territory in 1847 during the Mexican-American War. What was being fought of over during the Mexican-American War? What was the result of this war? These and other websites provide information:
   http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mexican-American_War
   http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alta_California

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.folger.edu/template.cfm?cid=865&CFID=6230886&CFTOKEN=25420173
http://www.shakespeare.org.uk/explore-shakespeare.html
http://shakespeare.palomar.edu/life.htm
http://www.bardweb.net/man.html

After seeing/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 the young men in the first scene? For Lord Capulet? For Juliet's Nurse? For Mercutio? For Friar Lawrence?

2. Citing passages from the text, make a precise schedule of the play's events: day of the week, time of day, occurrence. 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?

3. Who makes quick decisions in the world of the play? What effect do these decisions have on the course of events? Which decisions, had they been different, might have changed the fate of Romeo and Juliet?

4. 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? By what signs do they recognize that Romeo is healed?

5. 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 this play? In what way does it not?

6. 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?

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

8. Describe the characters of Mercutio, Benvolio and Tybalt. What is the significance of their names? How are they described by other characters? What is the function of each in the story? Compare and contrast them.

9. 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?

10. Describe the progress of Romeo and Juliet's love for each other. How is it different from Romeo's infatuation with Rosaline? What is love at first sight? How can such a passion be sustained over time? How does the initial exchange between Romeo and Juliet reflect their sudden love for each other? What are the differences between how Paris is presented to Juliet and how Romeo presents himself to her?

11. At their first meeting (Act I, scene v, lines 92–109), Romeo and Juliet create an extended image together. Describe it. What does it foreshadow about their future relationship?

12. Chart the events and specific actions that lead to the deaths of Mercutio and Tybalt. Why does Tybalt hate Romeo? Why does Mercutio despise Tybalt? How might the deaths have been prevented? Whom do you blame for Mercutio's death?

13. 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?

14. 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? Assess his qualities as a ruler, based on his development through the play. To what extent is he responsible for the deaths?

15. Both Romeo and Juliet turn to Friar Lawrence for help. Describe each instance of his assisting them. Which are the result of reflection and which are hasty improvisations? What are the Friar's intentions in each case? What are the results?

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

17. Juliet faces a marriage with Paris arranged by her father and Paris with no reference to 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?

18. What is “foreboding?” Find examples of foreboding in the text. Describe how each comes true.

19. 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?”

20. The Prologue mentions that the death of Romeo and Juliet is caused by “misadventured piteous overthrows,” or unlucky accidents. Make a list of the unlucky accidents in the play. Which unlucky accidents contribute to their death?

21. Describe the dilemma that Romeo and Juliet face together. Describe Romeo’s dilemma when he learns that Juliet is dead. Describe Juliet’s dilemma when she realizes that her plan has failed. Why do they feel that suicide is their best (possibly their only) way out of their problems? Describe the other solutions available to them.

22. In the book *Shakespeare’s Imagery*, Caroline F. E. Spurgeon notes that in *Romeo and Juliet*, “The dominating image is light, every form and manifestation of it: the sun, moon, stars, fire, lightning, the flash of gunpowder, the reflected light of beauty and love; while by contrast we have night, darkness, clouds, rain, mist and smoke.” Find examples in the text where Shakespeare uses imagery of light and contrasts it with darkness or night. What does light represent for the lovers? What does darkness represent? Why does Shakespeare use these images? What effect do these images have on you?

23. *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. Find examples in the text of these opposites. What effect do these contrasting images have on you as an audience member? How were these opposites highlighted in this production?

24. What are the social and family expectations placed on Romeo and Juliet? What is the conflict they face between these social and family pressures and their individual desires? How could they have tried to resolve these conflicts? What different choices

would have prevented the tragic outcome? How do Romeo and Juliet each contribute to the tragic conclusion?

25. 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?

26. When is realistic prose spoken in the play and by whom? When is formal verse spoken and by whom? What does realistic prose represent in the world of the play? What does formal verse represent? What is the significance of the shift from realistic prose to formal verse and vice versa?

27. If you are also seeing *As You Like It* and/or *The Merry Wives of Windsor, Iowa,* 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? How much choice does each have about whom she will marry?

28. If you are also seeing *The Merry Wives of Windsor, Iowa* and/or *The Seagull*, compare the relationship of parents to their children in these plays. How close are the parents to their children? How much power do parents seem to have?

29. If you are also seeing *The Merry Wives of Windsor, Iowa*, compare the relationship between love and marriage in these plays. On what factors do the fathers decide who will marry their daughters? How much influence do the daughters' wishes have? What attributes other than love do the fathers value?

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