

ROMEO AND JULIET

A PLAY IN ONE ACT ADAPTED BY
Craig Mason

FROM THE ORIGINAL BY
William Shakespeare



CLASSROOM STUDY GUIDE

Introduction

A modern English one-act version of Shakespeare's tragic tale of star-crossed lovers.

Playwright Bio

Craig is the co-founder of Theatrefolk and the Drama Teacher Academy and the president of Theatrefolk. He holds an Honours BA in Theatre and Dramatic Arts from the University of Waterloo.

Synopsis

A family-friendly version of Shakespeare's well known play, *Romeo and Juliet*. The son and daughter of rivals fall in love, resurfacing the age-old grudge between the families. It is a universal story, and Shakespeare's best-known work.

Characters

The Montagues

ROMEO: Male.

BENVOLIO: Male.

MERCUTIO: Male.

The Capulets

CAPULET: Male. One monologue.

JULIET: Female.

NURSE: Female

TYBALT: Male. One monologue.

THE MESSENGER: Male.

Others

NARRATOR: One monologue.

FRIAR LAWRENCE: Male. One monologue.

THE PRINCE OF VERONA: Male. Two monologues.

MANTUA NEWSIE

Themes

Death, love, parenting/family, relationships, obedience, suicide, revenge, jealousy

Pre-Read Questions

- ★ What prior knowledge do you have of *Romeo and Juliet*?
- ★ What are some modern love stories you know?
- ★ What do you think it means to be “star-crossed” lovers?
- ★ Do you believe in true love? Why or why not?
- ★ Why do rivalries happen? Name an example of a rivalry.
- ★ What do you expect to happen in a tragedy?
- ★ How do you think a playwright can modernize Shakespeare?
- ★ How does family play a role in your identity?
- ★ What is an adaptation? Name an example of an adaptation you know.

Pre-Read Activities

Research Project: Author

- ★ Divide students into groups and give them a limited amount of time to research the author of *Romeo and Juliet*, William Shakespeare.
 - » Who was William Shakespeare?
 - » What is his background?
 - » How many plays did he write? Did he write anything else aside from plays?
 - » What inspired his plays?
 - » Was he a “successful” writer?
 - » Was there any criticism of his writings?
- ★ Decide how students will share their knowledge. Will they create a scene based on what they’ve learned? An oral presentation with a visual component? A quiz?

Compare & Contrast Exercise

- ★ Pair students up and assign them a Shakespearean play.
- ★ Have students research two versions of the story: the classical version with Shakespearean language and a modern English version.
- ★ Students should compare and contrast the two versions of the play.
 - » How are the endings different?
 - » Are the characters the same?
 - » What themes are the same? Different?
 - » Do both plays have the same lesson?
- ★ Have students write their findings on a posterboard so you can hang them around your class.

Adaptation Exercise

- ★ Divide students into groups. Give each group a short nursery rhyme as their source material. The point is for students to work quickly.
- ★ Discuss the definition of adaptation, and adaptations of fairy tales that students may know.
 - » Adaptation definition: to make something suitable for a new purpose, to modify, to alter
- ★ The goal of the exercise is for students to adapt the nursery rhyme into a scene. They don't have to use the words of the rhyme, but the scene must be connected to it. Remind students that they are making something suitable for a new purpose. That means the scene must have characters and a conflict, and take place in a specific location.
 - » What characters can be derived from the nursery rhyme?
 - » What location can the scene take place in, as indicated by the nursery rhyme?
 - » What conflict can be derived from the nursery rhyme?
- ★ The scene should be less than one minute. Give groups time to discuss, create, rehearse, and present.
- ★ Afterward, discuss the process. What were the challenges? How did they modify and alter for a new purpose?

Word Association

- ★ This is a group warm-up activity that allows students to get Shakespeare's words in their body before analyzing the text. How does the word feel? What does the student's gut say about a particular word? How does the word transform the text being said?
- ★ Have students walk around the space and tell them you are going to call out words. All of the words you call out can be found in Shakespeare's texts.

- ★ When you call out a word, students must jump into a pose that they feel represents that word. Tell the students not to overthink it and to go with the first thing that pops into their mind. There is no right or wrong. Tell students to allow themselves to be transformed through the text.
- ★ Below is a list of potential words you can use that have several meanings in Shakespeare's texts. They are also words that tie into the lines we will use to examine Shakespeare from a color-conscious lens in a later activity. Feel free to add words as you see fit. You can also repeat words to see how students' interpretations of the word changes the second time they hear it.

- » Rose
- » Fair
- » Nature
- » Dignity
- » Devil
- » Monster
- » Love
- » Proper
- » Cupid
- » Prince
- » Darkness

Shakespearean Language

- ★ Provide students with a list of words or phrases that appear in *Romeo and Juliet* that are in Shakespearean English.
 - » 'Tis
 - » Morrow

- » Wherefore
- » Art
- » Thou
- » Thy
- ★ Tell students to infer what these words and phrases might mean. They can use prior knowledge to come up with their inferences.
- ★ Once students make their inferences provide them with examples of lines that use these words. Take turns picking students to read the lines aloud with the class.
- ★ After reading the lines, have students reflect on their original inferences and discuss what they now think the words mean.
- ★ Ask students if they can think of any other Shakespearean words not mentioned previously. Discuss Shakespeare's language choices and why they are important to understand.
- ★ You can also ask students how they would choose to turn this language into modern English. How would they explain what Shakespeare is trying to say?

True Love Monologue

- ★ Give students a set amount of time to freewrite on the prompt "What is love?" Remind students that when they are freewriting their pen should never come off the paper nor should they judge what they write. Freewriting reflects a stream of consciousness.
- ★ After the time is up tell students to reflect on what they wrote and create a monologue based on their freewrite. It can be for themselves or a character.
- ★ After students finish writing their monologues, have them present. Once everyone presents, discuss:
 - » What was it like to freewrite? Did you write anything that surprised you?

- » What stood out about any of the monologues you saw?
- » How did it feel to think about love? Do you believe in love at first sight?
- » What do you think it means to be a “star-crossed” lover?

Close Reading Analysis Questions

Close reading is an analysis tool. Students read a text multiple times for in-depth comprehension, striving to understand not only **what** is being said but **how** it’s being said and **why**. Close reading takes a student from story and character to drawing conclusions on author intention. Close reading prompts students to flex their thinking skills by:

- ★ Teaching students to engage with a text.
- ★ Teaching students to be selective. We can’t highlight everything in the text, only the most important elements.
- ★ Teaching students to make educated decisions. All conclusions and opinions must be backed up with a text example.

Have students analyze *Romeo and Juliet (Modern English)*, individually or in groups, using the following text-dependent questions:

Read One: What is happening?

1. Who are the two families that are fighting?
2. Why does Lord Capulet decide to throw a party?
3. Why is Tybalt mad?
4. How does Romeo say he found Juliet?
5. What happens to Mercutio after Romeo’s wedding?
6. How does the Prince punish Romeo?
7. Why does Juliet go to Friar Lawrence? What does he give her?

8. Where does Romeo go when he is banished?
9. What does Romeo do when he finds out about Juliet's death?
10. How do the Montagues and Capulets begin to talk again?
11. What is the key idea of the play?

Read Two: How is it happening?

1. How does the narrator help guide the audience? Why do you think this character is important when telling the story?
2. What does the line, "Is the day so young?" mean? What literary device is the author using?
3. What do you think the line, "It is the east, and Juliet is the sun" means?
4. In your opinion, which character is the voice of reason in the play? Why?
5. Throughout the play many actions occur as a chain reaction. Cite a cause and effect from the story and analyze how it happened. In your opinion, why did this action have to happen to cause another?
6. When designing the play would you use contemporary or classical costumes? Why?
7. Why do you think we never see Paris or Rosaline? How does this affect you as you read the story?

Read Three: Why is it happening?

1. In this adaptation the playwright uses modern English to tell the story of Romeo and Juliet. How do you think this affects how you view the story? Cite an example where the playwright begins to intertwine Shakespearean language and modern English. How does this help you understand what is happening?
2. What is the playwright trying to say about love? Cite the text to support your answer.

3. What do you think happens next to the Montague and Capulet families?
4. Which line in the play resonated with you the most? Why? What did the author want you to take away from this line?

Post-Read Questions

- ★ What is one question that you still have about the play?
- ★ What did you learn from reading the play? What lesson(s) are you taking away?
- ★ What surprised you about the adaptation?
- ★ What is one thing you would change about the adaptation?
- ★ Which character was your favorite? Why?
- ★ Do you believe any of the characters were in the right? Why or why not?

Post-Read Activities

Character Costume Design

- ★ Choose a character and design their costume.
- ★ Based on their personality, what would they wear? What pieces of clothing define them? What colours and textures would they choose?
- ★ Draw a colour costume rendering.

Staged Scenes

- ★ Divide students into small groups and assign each group a scene from the play, or a short moment within a scene.
- ★ Give students time to rehearse.
- ★ Each group will present their moment.

- ★ Discuss the scenes afterward.
 - » How did seeing the scenes acted out differ from reading them?
 - » Why is it important to act a scene as well as read it?
 - » Did any of the presentations offer a different interpretation of the characters than yours?

Shakespearean Tableau Series

- ★ Divide students into groups and tell each group to pick three lines from the play. The first line should be from the beginning, the second should be from the middle, and the third should be from the end.
- ★ Tell students they are going to create a tableau for each line they picked. Together the tableaux should summarize the play. Once students create a tableau for each line, tell them to create transitions between each tableau that tells the story of Romeo and Juliet.
- ★ Once students have created their tableaux, have them present their series.
- ★ After every group presents, discuss:
 - » What stood out from the tableaux you saw?
 - » How did you choose which lines to pick?
 - » What challenges did you face as you created the tableaux and how did you overcome them?
 - » How can you tell a story without using words?

Adaptation Scenes

- ★ Divide students into groups and assign each of them a scene from the play.
- ★ Tell students they are going to stage their own adaptation of that scene. For example, they can have the scene take place in space or create a fairy tale version of the scene. Remind students to make bold choices and embrace their creativity.

- ★ Have students present their scenes to the class, then discuss:
 - » How did you decide how to adapt the scene?
 - » What challenges did you face and how did you overcome them?
 - » What stood out from the other scenes you watched? Did anything surprise you?
 - » What other adaptations of *Romeo and Juliet* can you think of?

Adaptation Research

- ★ Now that students have read one adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* they will research another adaptation. Divide students into groups and assign each one a movie adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* to research. Examples are below:
 - » *Gnomeo and Juliet*
 - » *Romeo & Juliet (1996)*
 - » *West Side Story*
 - » *Romeo & Juliet (2013)*
 - » *Warm Bodies*
- ★ Have students answer the following questions:
 - » Compare and contrast your adaptation to the one we just read as a class.
 - » What makes this adaptation stand out? How is it different?
 - » Who created the adaptation? What inspired them?
 - » When did this adaptation come out? What is the history behind this adaptation?
- ★ Decide how students will share their knowledge. Will they create a scene based on what they've learned? An oral presentation with a visual component? A quiz?

Shakespearean Character Types

- ★ Tell students that they are going to explore character types in class today. Have them begin by walking around the room as themselves. When you call out a character type students should transform into how they think that character would walk. Examples of types are below:
 - » The fool/jester
 - » Star-crossed lover
 - » The tragic hero
 - » Woman who dresses like a man
 - » The wise mentor
- ★ As students walk around the space have them begin to interact with one another. How does the fool talk? Do they make eye contact? Do they shake hands?
- ★ Once students explore the types, tell them to pick their favorite and walk around as that character.
- ★ Once the activity is finished, discuss:
 - » Which was your favorite character type and why?
 - » What was it like to interact with one another? Did any interactions surprise you?
 - » What characters from *Romeo and Juliet* were you reminded of as you walked around?
 - » Why is character work important?

Playwright Process

Playwright Craig Mason talks about his process adapting *Romeo and Juliet (Modern English)*. Have students read and then discuss/reflect on how their perception of the writing process compares to the playwright's.

What was the inspiration for adapting this play?

Lindsay Price and I used to write and perform plays for elementary schools. So the show was originally written for two people to perform. We had learned a little about shadow puppetry so we decided to give it a try with this show. So the whole show was performed with us behind a white screen. We used an overhead projector to cast the light and we made all of the puppets ourselves.

What challenges did you encounter during the writing process?

Since the show was written for a younger audience, it was challenging to streamline the story for the short length that we were allotted. It was also tricky to figure out how to handle some of the scenes with more than two characters in them.

When we started publishing scripts, I then had to go through the process of making the play work more organically with a larger cast. In a way, this was the easier part of the process.

What was it like to see the play performed?

I've performed it many times but I've never seen it myself!

As a playwright, what is your favourite moment/character in the play and why?

I was always thrilled to play the messenger in the play. He messes everything up in the original so I turned him into a comedic character for the adaptation.