

★ CLASSIC STAGE
COMPANY

PRESENTS

SHAKESPEARE'S

ROMEO & JULIET

★ 2013 ★

STUDY GUIDE

CSC

DEAR TEACHERS,

This study guide from the CSC archives was created by Kathleen Dorman, former CSC Director of Education. It's packed full of information about Shakespeare, his language, the play, and our 2013 production of *Romeo and Juliet*.

Feel free to photocopy pages for your students!

We've also included bonus lessons that correspond with each of our workshops. For more updates on CSC, we encourage you and your students to follow us on Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook @classicstage

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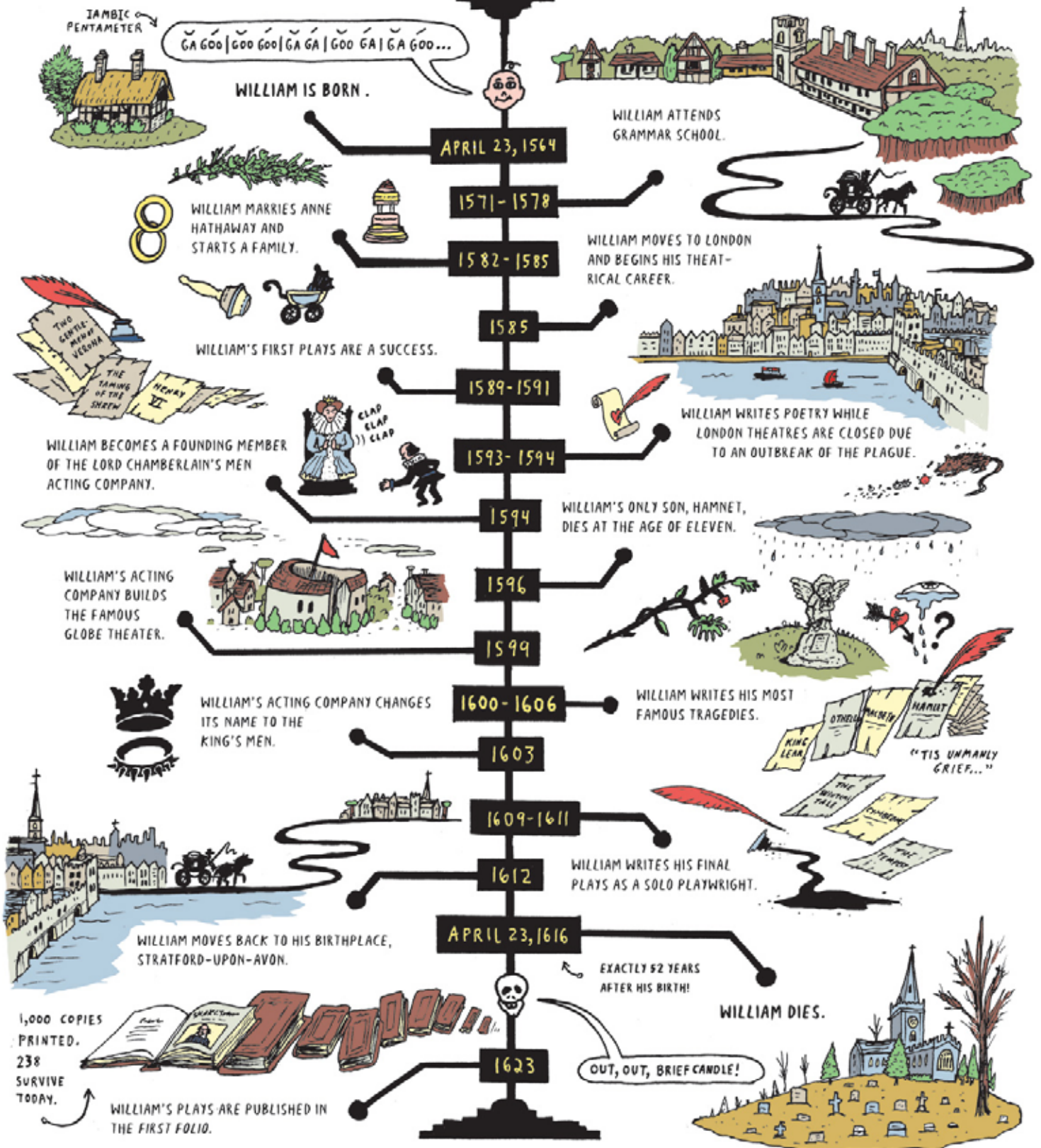
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PART ONE:
SHAKESPEARE'S LIFE AND THEATER

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE - AN ILLUSTRATED BIOGRAPHY

ILLUSTRATED BY DAVID HEATLEY



ELIZABETHAN ENGLAND

IN 16TH CENTURY ENGLAND,

religion and politics were one and the same. People believed in the “divine right of kings”—that is, monarchs were given their right to rule directly from God, and were subject to no earthly authority. In 1534, King Henry VIII famously broke from the Catholic Church when they denied him the right to a divorce from his first wife, Catherine of Aragon, who had not produced a male heir. He declared himself head of the new Anglican Church, which eventually became part of the Protestant Reformation. His actions resulted in a time of bitter and violent religious disputes in England, and the crown changed hands frequently in a short period of time.

BY THE TIME SHAKESPEARE WAS BORN IN 1564,

Queen Elizabeth—Henry VIII’s second eldest daughter, born to his second wife, Anne Boleyn—was in power. Her 44 years on the throne provided the kingdom with more stability than the previous short-lived reigns of her two half-siblings, Edward VI (crowned at age 9 and dead by age 16) and Mary Tudor (nicknamed “Bloody Mary” for the nearly 300 Protestants she had burned at the stake).

QUEEN ELIZABETH’S REIGN WAS A TIME OF THRIVING CULTURE.

English citizens loved her, nicknaming her “Good Queen Bess”. Because she remained unmarried throughout her rule and did not give birth to an heir, a distant relative, King James VI of Scotland, was named as her successor. Both Elizabeth and James were great patrons of the theater, and enjoyed Shakespeare’s plays. In fact, King James honored Shakespeare’s company of actors with the title of “The King’s Men”, and they performed at court regularly.



ELIZABETHAN TWITTER FEED

A CSC exclusive! We went back in time and got the scoop from the Royals themselves (plus Shakespeare, and his dad!) via Twitter.



King Henry VIII @VIIIKING · 1531

@CatAra you are outta here. This king needs a #maleheir. #kingsgreatmatter



Anne Boleyn @AnnieB · January 25, 1533

@CatAra check me out!!!. You better recognize, I AM THE NEW QUEEN! #cinderellastory



Catherine of Aragon @CatAra · December 1535

The #kingsgreatmatter is literally killing me. Missing my daughter @BloodyMary.



Edward VI @Eddie_the_KING · January 28, 1547

I’m the King of the world!!!! RIP, Dad @VIIIKING #kidsrule #9yearsold #winning



Mary Tudor @BloodyMary · July 19, 1553

Turn down 4 Protestantism. Turn up 4 Catholicism! This one’s for my mom, @CatAra, RIP. #sorrynotsorry



Queen Elizabeth @GoodQueenB · 1560

Philip II, Eric XIV of Sweden, Henry of Anjou...So many suitors. So little time. #singleNready2mingle (i/k I have work to do) #swiperight



John Shakespeare @Stratfor_Dad · April 26, 1564

Baptized my son William today @HolyTrinityChurch! #blessed



William Shakespeare @BillyShakes · 1589

Working on my 1st play! RT with title suggestions. It’s a comedy w/ a lot of errors.



Queen Elizabeth @GoodQueenB · April 23, 1597

Saw a HYSTERICAL play by @BillyShakes! Check out Merry Wives of Windsor! #LoveMeSomeFalstaff #ChamberlainsMen



King James I @Scotty · March 24, 1603

RIP @GoodQueenB, thanks 4 the throne! #transformationtuesday #JacobeanEra



King James I @Scotty · May 19, 1603

Congrats to my boy @BillyShakes and his players. #thekingsmen #royalpatent #Othello #MeasureForMeasure



Anne Hathaway @ShakesWife · April 23, 1616

RIP/Happy birthday @BillyShakes. Thanks 4 the bed. @HolyTrinityChurch



GROWING UP SHAKESPEARE:

Fun, Games, and School

BOYS AND GIRLS began “petty school” around the age of four in order to learn how to read. Girls left school at age six to be taught at home by their mothers, or, if they were rich, a private tutor. If boys belonged to a middle class or wealthy family, they could continue on to “grammar school” after leaving petty school, or they were sent to work in some sort of trade, such as farming. At grammar school boys would study Latin, drama, poetry, and history for long hours with no desks. Learning Latin was important for any boy wanting to enter a career in law, medicine, or the Church. Because Shakespeare’s father made a sustainable living in public and government jobs, Shakespeare was able to attend grammar school where he likely picked up his love of drama and writing.



FOOTBALL—or soccer, as we know it—was a popular sport for people in the countryside around Shakespeare’s hometown. The balls were made from inflated pigs’ bladders! **(LEFT)** Shakespeare makes mention of this sport in *THE COMEDY OF ERRORS*: “Am I so round with you as you with me, that like a football you do spurn me thus?” Other popular sports of the day Shakespeare mentions in his works include tennis, bowling, wrestling, rugby, billiards, and archery.

FESTIVALS occurred at various times of the year. One of the most popular was on May 1st, May Day, the celebration of the arrival of summer! Columns were erected (maypoles) and adorned with ribbons and flowers, traditionally as part of a dance **(RIGHT)**. This tradition is reflected in *A MIDSUMMER NIGHT’S DREAM*: “They rose early to observe the rite of May.”



RIGHT: Children learned to read using “hornbooks” like these – a piece of wood covered with printed-paper, protected by a transparent sheet of horn.



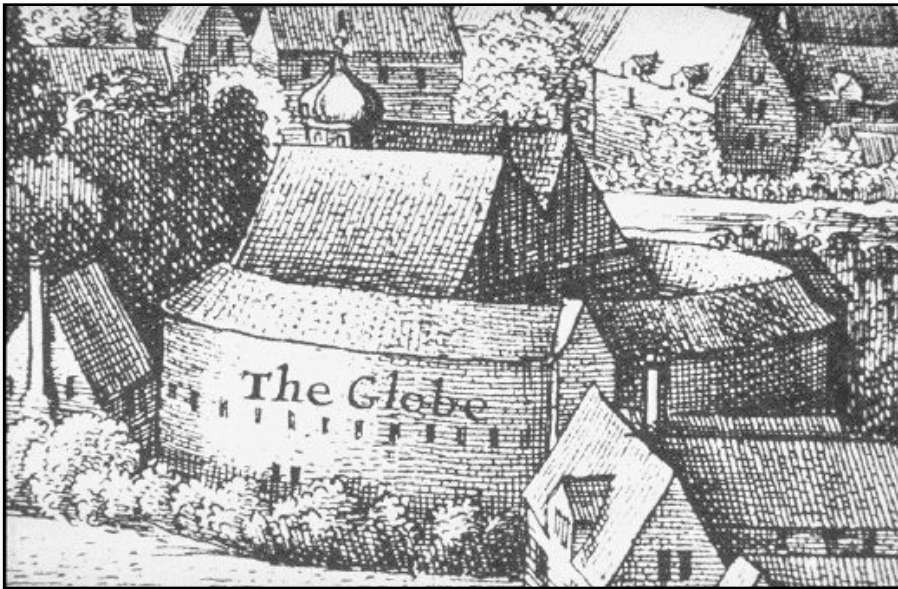
LONDON CITY LIVING:

Filth, Fashion, and Fighting

IF YOU LIVED IN LONDON during Shakespeare's time, you would have encountered overly crowded streets, heaps of trash on the sidewalk, and the heads of executed criminals placed on poles for all to see. But amidst the grime, there were also beautiful churches and large mansions filled with nobles and wealthy merchants. Most items you needed would have been purchased from street vendors, including vegetables, fruits, toys, books and clothing.



ABOVE: Like New York City today, space was tight. Many buildings were designed with vertical living in mind, as London quickly became the epicenter of culture in England.



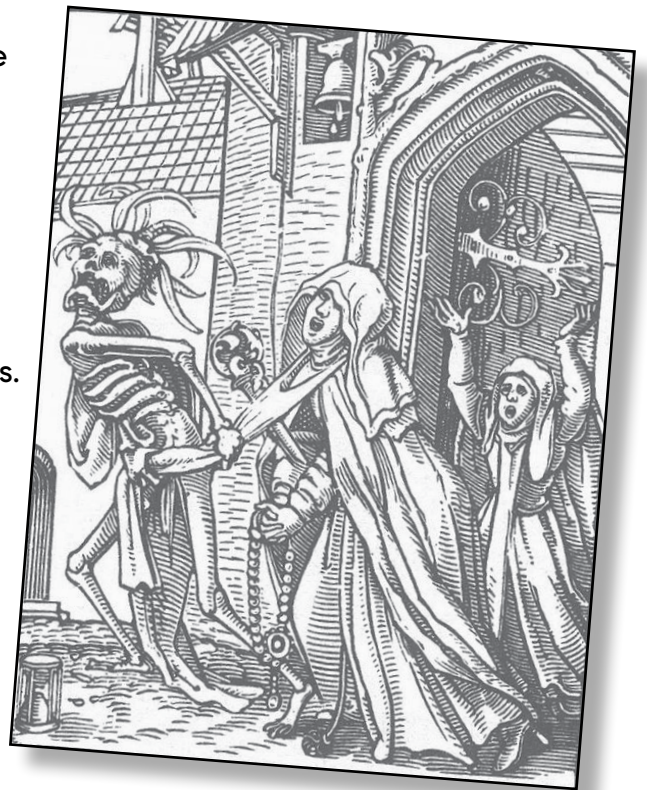
SHAKESPEARE MOVED TO LONDON to work in the theater. But theater wasn't the only cultural event happening in London. You could also view bloody tournaments between animals, and public executions! Gambling was also popular.

The first theater was built in 1576. Its shape, like The Globe (**ABOVE**), was influenced by bear fighting-rings (**RIGHT**), which were popular in London at the time. Shakespeare referenced this Elizabethan sport in Macbeth when Macbeth states, "They have tied me to a stake; I cannot fly, but bear-like I must fight the course."



OUTBREAKS OF THE PLAGUE were common in Elizabethan London. Many Londoners believed the plague was caused by the various smells throughout the city, so they carried containers filled with herbs to combat the stench. What they didn't know was that the plague was actually spread by fleas that lived on rats, which were rampant on the dirty streets.

In 1592, the plague forced London theaters to shut their doors for two whole years. 12,000 Londoners lost their lives. With no playhouses to produce his works, Shakespeare focused his attention on writing narrative poems and sonnets for wealthy patrons.



CLOTHING WAS A SIGN OF ONE'S RANK so there were strict rules dictating what citizens could and could not wear. Those dressing above their status could be arrested! Exceptions were made for actors as they often played nobles on stage.



ABOVE: As a rule, the less practical the outfit, the higher the rank of its wearer. Wealthy men often wore hats with ostrich feathers for decoration, and huge “ruff” collars. Wealthy women wore wide padded dresses with puffy sleeves.



RIGHT: The less wealthy wore practical clothing conducive to labor. While the wealthy were wearing luxurious fabrics such as silk and velvet, the lower-status citizens often wore rough wool.



THE COURT



ABOVE: The procession of Queen Elizabeth I. She is surrounded by her courtiers, ladies maids, and favored knights.

FOOLS AND JESTERS were a familiar sight at court. They traditionally wore motley, a colorful patchwork costume, and functioned like resident stand-up comedians or clowns. There were two types of fools: natural, and artificial. In Elizabethan England, mental and learning disabilities weren't understood, but those who had one of these disabilities could earn a living for themselves if they could make people laugh. Fools of this kind were called natural, meaning they were born "foolish." Artificial fools were deliberately foolish or eccentric for the purposes of entertainment, much like the comedians of today.

CHIVALRY, a code of ethics that glorified warfare and armed conflict as well as the pursuit of courtly ladies, was revered by Elizabethan society. They believed that honor was something you attained through physical prowess rather than moral integrity. Some of these values still exist in our culture today—superheroes are often heroic because they have incredible combat abilities. Legendary knights were the superheroes of the Renaissance!



ABOVE: A motley fool! Notice that this fool's motley costume has ass's ears attached, a common symbol of foolishness. He also carries a "ninny stick," a rod with a carved imitation of his own face at the end.

LEFT: One of the most important figures in the history of chivalry was Saint George who, according to legend, tamed and killed a dragon to save a damsel in distress and convert a city to Christianity.



WELCOME TO THE GLOBE THEATRE

LET ME TELL YOU A LITTLE ABOUT "THIS WOODEN O."

THE COMPANY WAS HAVING DIFFICULTY RENEWING THE LEASE ON OUR FIRST THEATER, SO IN 1599 WE TOOK IT DOWN AND MOVED ITS TIMBERS ACROSS THE THAMES RIVER TO THE BANKSIDE AND BUILT THE GLOBE.

THE BANKSIDE IS GREAT—IT'S JUST OUTSIDE THE JURISDICTION OF THE CITY OF LONDON, SO WE'RE SAFE FROM CITY OFFICIALS WHO THINK THAT THE THEATER IS IMMORAL AND WANT TO ABOLISH IT.

THE ORIGINAL GLOBE BURNED DOWN IN 1613 WHEN CANNON FIRE—PART OF A PERFORMANCE OF HENRY VIII—ACCIDENTALLY SET THE THATCHED ROOF AFLAME! OOPS!

WE BUILT A SECOND, MORE ELABORATE GLOBE ON THE SAME SITE, AND IT REMAINED IN USE UNTIL CIVIL WAR BROKE OUT IN ENGLAND IN 1642.

THE FLAG IS FLYING! THAT MEANS WE'VE GOT A PERFORMANCE TODAY.

MY TICKET COST TWICE AS MUCH AS WHAT THAT GENTLEMAN PAID FOR HIS CUSHIONED SEAT. I'M RIGHT ABOVE ALL THE ACTION! EVERYONE CAN SEE THAT I'M A VIP.

THE STAGE ROOF PROTECTS THE ACTORS FROM THE WEATHER, AND ALSO ACTS AS A SET PIECE WE CALL THE "HEAVENS." SEE THE STARRY SKY WE PAINTED?

THE BALCONY IS GREAT FOR WINDOW SCENES.

O ROMEO, ROMEO, WHEREFORE ART THOU ROMEO?

DID YOU KNOW JULIET WAS PLAYED BY A BOY? NO GIRLS ALLOWED!

THIS IS A "THRUST" STAGE, MEANING WE HAVE AUDIENCE MEMBERS ON THREE SIDES. JUST LIKE AT CSC!

THIS TRAP DOOR LEADS TO "HELL," THE SPACE BENEATH THE STAGE. IT MAKES A GREAT GRAVE, TOO!

ALAS, POOR YORICK. I KNEW HIM...

MY TICKET COST TWICE AS MUCH AS WHAT THOSE "GROUNDLINGS" PAID TO STAND IN THE YARD BELOW. AND FOR AN EXTRA PENCE, I GET TO SIT ON A CUSHION!

THE GLOBE CAN ACCOMMODATE NEARLY 3,000 AUDIENCE MEMBERS. CSC'S HOUSE ONLY SEATS ABOUT 200.

CHEAPEST SEAT IN THE HOUSE! WELL, IT'S NOT A SEAT, EXACTLY. AT LEAST I GET TO SEE THE SHOW!

THE "GROUNDLINGS" SOMETIMES THREW FRUIT AT THE ACTORS IF THEY DIDN'T LIKE A PERFORMANCE!

Joseph B. Redman

DAVID HEATEY



PART TWO: THE PLAY

PLOT SYNOPSIS for **ROMEO & JULIET**

THE LONG-STANDING HATRED BETWEEN THE MONTAGUE AND CAPULET FAMILIES IGNITES CONTINUED VIOLENCE IN THE CITY OF VERONA

ROMEO
A MONTAGUE

SIGH ROSALINE HAS REJECTED MY LOVE!

COMPARE HER FACE WITH SOME THAT I SHALL SHOW, AND I WILL MAKE THEE THINK THY SWAN A CROW.

HIS COUSIN
BENVOLIO

AT A COSTUME PARTY AT THE CAPULET HOUSE THAT EVENING...

JULIET
LORD CAPULET'S DAUGHTER

I NE'ER SAW TRUE BEAUTY TILL THIS NIGHT.

'TIS HE, THAT VILLAIN ROMEO. HOW DARE A MONTAGUE CRASH OUR PARTY!

LORD CAPULET FORBIDS HIM TO FIGHT IN HIS HOUSE, UNINTENTIONALLY FREEING ROMEO TO WOO JULIET.

TYBALT, JULIET'S COUSIN

ONLY AFTER THEY HAVE FALLEN IN LOVE DO THEY DISCOVER EACH OTHER'S IDENTITIES

IS SHE A CAPULET?

MY ONLY LOVE SPRUNG FROM MY ONLY HATE!

LATE THAT NIGHT IN THE CAPULETS' GARDEN

O ROMEO, ROMEO! WHEREFORE ART THOU ROMEO? 'TIS BUT THY NAME THAT IS MY ENEMY.

CALL ME BUT LOVE, AND I'LL BE NEW BAPTIZED. HENCEFORTH I NEVER WILL BE ROMEO.

RISKING DEATH

THEY MAKE A PLAN TO WED IN SECRET THE NEXT DAY.

PARTING IS SUCH SWEET SORROW THAT I SHALL SAY GOODNIGHT TILL IT BE MORROW.

AT DAWN, ROMEO RACES TO FRIAR LAURENCE, ASKING HIM TO MARRY THEM. SEEING THE POTENTIAL TO ABSOLVE THE FAMILIES' LONG-STANDING FEUD, THE FRIAR AGREES TO HELP.

ROMEO SENDS WORD TO JULIET THROUGH HER NURSE

COME, WHAT SAYS ROMEO?

HIE YOU HENCE TO FRIAR LAURENCE'S CELL. THERE STAYS A HUSBAND TO MAKE YOU A WIFE.

THE TWO ARE WED LATER THAT MORNING.

RETURNING HOME FROM THE WEDDING, ROMEO ENCOUNTERS THE HOTHEADED TYBALT HARASSING HIS BEST FRIEND, MERCUTIO...

G # \$ % & !

ROMEO! THOU ART A VILLAIN.

VILLAIN I AM NONE.

BOY, THIS SHALL NOT EXCUSE THE INJURIES THAT THOU HAST DONE ME. THEREFORE TURN AND DRAW.







NOTES ON THE PLAY

Fate and Tragic Timing

The tragic events of this play often seem like matters of bad timing. Romeo steps in front of Mercutio at the exact second that Tybalt lunges; the Friar's explanatory letter to Romeo is delayed, so Balthazar's misinformation reaches him first; Romeo drinks the poison mere moments before Juliet opens her eyes. These instances of close timing make the play even sadder than it otherwise would be, because we can see that the difference between life and death was just a few seconds. A moment earlier, or a moment later, and everything would have been okay. Individually, these moments of tragic timing look like awful accidents, but when taken all together, they seem more like the work of fate.

The theme of fate and foreboding turns up repeatedly in the play's language. On the way to the Capulet ball, Romeo uneasily senses the approach of "Some consequence yet hanging in the stars"—he has a premonition of doom. After avenging Mercutio's death by killing Tybalt, Romeo calls himself "fortune's fool"—he feels that he has been cheated by fate. As the lovers part at daybreak, Juliet envisions Romeo "dead in the bottom of a tomb", although she has no reason to think that he will soon die. When Romeo hears from Balthazar that Juliet has died, he shouts his defiance to the stars, demonstrating that he blames fate for the tragedy.

In the play's prologue, Romeo and Juliet are called "star-crossed", and their love is referred to as "death-marked". These terms indicate that the lovers were destined to die tragically. But are the play's events really the result of fate? Do you think that the teens from Verona were doomed from the start, or could this tragedy have been prevented? What factors stopped Romeo and Juliet from living happily ever after?



Warring Families, Warring Generations

The most obvious impediment to Romeo and Juliet's love is the feud between their parents. The bad blood between the Capulets and the Montagues makes any romance between their heirs dangerous and forbidden. We know that the two families hold an "ancient grudge"—a hate so strong and deep-rooted that their servants fight in the streets. What the play doesn't tell us is why this feud exists. What happened? Who started it? The audience isn't given any of these details. It is as though the two households have been fighting for so long that they have forgotten why the fight started in the first place. This ambiguity makes the play's feudal violence and eventual loss of life seem all the more unfair and pointless. Why should the young people of Verona kill each other over an argument begun by their ancestors? Why should two young people in love be kept apart because of a war that they had nothing to do with?

These questions point to another conflict in the play: that between youth and age. Romeo and Juliet are stuck in the midst of warring families, but they are also two young people forced to live under the rules and values of their parents' generation. Romeo and Juliet's love must be kept secret because it would not be understood or tolerated by the rest of society. Even the adults whom the teenagers trust for advice (Friar Laurence and the Nurse) don't fully understand the intensity of their feelings. The adults of the play are weaker, slower, and less impassioned than their younger counterparts. Juliet comments that "old folks" are "unwieldy, slow, heavy", and her dawdling Nurse exemplifies this behavior. In contrast, the young people of the play move fast and feel deeply. Their tempers ignite in an instant, and so do their feelings of love.





These Violent Delights Have Violent Ends: Youth, Love, and Violence

Romeo and Juliet fall deeply in love at first sight, and make plans to marry each other mere hours after they meet. This is a fast-moving relationship by any standards! Just like the violent encounters between the Capulets and the Montagues, their love fires up immediately. Although it seems incredibly romantic to fall for someone instantly, Friar Laurence warns Romeo that this kind of speed can be dangerous. He cautions him to “love moderately” and to act “wisely and slow”. Do you think that this advice is helpful, or does Friar Laurence just not understand what Romeo is going through? Does Friar Laurence actually do anything to try to slow down the young couple’s relationship, or does he ignore his own advice?

Later in the play, when Romeo and Juliet are faced with the prospect of a life without one another, their extreme love turns into extreme grief. Their intense feelings drive them to commit suicide. Do you believe that “violent delights” always “have violent ends”, and that

people “who run fast” necessarily stumble? Are these intense emotions and extreme feelings an accurate representation of what it’s really like to be a teen? Have you ever felt like your love for someone else was the only thing in the world that mattered? Have you ever been so sad that you felt like things would never get better?

But soft, what light through yonder window breaks? Light and Darkness in ROMEO & JULIET

This play is filled with references to light and darkness. When we first hear about Romeo, he is described as shutting “fair daylight out” of his room, and making himself “an artificial night” in which to sulk about his unrequited love for Rosaline. Here, darkness is described as the ideal environment for a lover. Darkness continues to serve this role throughout the play, as Romeo and Juliet meet in the dark of night to conceal their relationship. They cannot parade their forbidden love around town in the light of day—instead, they must be together at nighttime, and Romeo must leave Juliet’s bedroom before the sun comes up.

But although Romeo and Juliet interact under the cover of “black-browed night”, their love is a source of metaphorical light. When Romeo first sees Juliet at the ball, he exclaims that she “doth teach the torches to burn bright”. He compares her to other shining sources of illumination: a rich jewel, stars, and the sun. Even when Juliet is lying entombed in the dark Capulet crypt, Romeo says that her presence creates “a feasting presence full of light”. Her beauty makes a grave look like “a lantern” to him.

This moment in the play emphasizes another theme traditionally associated with darkness: death. Think of the creepiest scenes you’ve read and seen in books and movies: lots of them are probably set in the dark. There’s a reason that people go trick-or-treating and watch scary films after the sun goes down—darkness can be scary! In this play, though, darkness is associated with death and with love—two themes that seem very different until we see how they are pulled together by the storyline. The cruel circumstances of Romeo and Juliet mean that for them, death is the only place that they can be together. While they are alive, they will be forced to be apart: Romeo banished to Mantua, and Juliet married to Paris. In *Romeo and Juliet*, Shakespeare deliberately weaves together themes of light and dark and day and night in ways which emphasize the play’s other opposing themes: life and death, love and hate.



Essays by Clara Rozee. Costume sketches by Clint Ramos.



QUIZ:

WHO ARE YOU IN *ROMEO & JULIET*

1) THE PEOPLE IN YOUR LIFE WOULD DESCRIBE YOU AS:

- A. Sweet and thoughtful.
- B. The center of attention, and a little crazy.
- C. Reserved and quiet, but deeply passionate within.
- D. A worrier, always fretting about something.
- E. Someone not to mess with.

2. IT'S FRIDAY NIGHT. YOU CAN BE FOUND:

- A. Stuck in your room. Your parents keep you on a tight leash.
- B. Cruising around town with a group of friends. Anyone know a good party to crash?
- C. In a quiet place, alone with your thoughts. You've been thinking about your crush a lot lately, and your friends don't understand how you feel.
- D. Reading, gardening, and working on other private projects.
- E. Settling a score with an enemy...nothing like a little revenge and intimidation to kick off the weekend.

3. WHAT WOULD YOU SAY IS YOUR BEST QUALITY?

- A. Your imagination.
- B. Your sense of humor.
- C. Your capacity for love.
- D. Your compassion.
- E. Your fearlessness.

4. A FRIEND CALLS YOU UP, ASKING FOR A HUGE FAVOR. IF YOU HELP THEM, YOU'LL BE PUTTING YOURSELF IN HARM'S WAY. YOU:

- A. Are surprised. Still, you agree to help - you can be pretty brave if you have to be.
- B. Tease them for a while, but agree to help them out.
- C. Reluctantly agree. You care about your friends, but you don't want to get into trouble.
- D. Create an elaborate plan to help your friend, complete with disguises and lies.
- E. Sharpen your set of knives. Nobody messes with your friends.

5. IF YOU COULD CHANGE ONE THING ABOUT YOUR LIFE, WHAT WOULD IT BE?

- A. It would be nice if your parents would let you make your own decisions.
- B. You'd make sure your group of friends stayed together, no matter what.
- C. All you want in the world is to be with the person you love!
- D. You're pretty content, actually. Doesn't take too much to make you happy.
- E. You'd want to see all of your enemies destroyed, one by one.

6. HOW DO YOU REACT WHEN YOU'RE IN A DIFFICULT SITUATION OR FIGHT WITH SOMEONE?

- A. Appeal to their compassion, and beg them to see things your way - but if that doesn't work, you might resort to desperate measures.
- B. Taunt them; mess with their head; get under their skin.
- C. You avoid conflict at all costs, but when you're really worked up, you tend to act without considering the consequences.
- D. You offer them a few wise words.
- E. You never back down. Fighting is what you do best.

7. IF YOU COULD HAVE ONE SUPERHUMAN POWER OR ABILITY, WHICH WOULD YOU CHOOSE?

- A. Telepathy. It would be amazing to be able to communicate without words.
- B. The ability to fly! Your friends would be so jealous...
- C. Invisibility. Imagine being able to go wherever you wanted without anyone else knowing!
- D. Precognition - being able to foresee the future.
- E. You know how Darth Vader can choke people from a distance? That.

IF YOU ANSWERED MOSTLY:

- A. You are JULIET
- B. You are MERCUTIO
- C. You are ROMEO
- D. You are FRIAR LAURENCE
- E. You are TYBALT



TABLE WORK: UNPACKING SHAKESPEARE'S LANGUAGE

IS THIS REALLY WRITTEN IN ENGLISH? Yes, it is! But it's also poetry. Elizabethans used poetry for the same reason we still use it today: to express heightened states of emotion. So the language may be more densely packed with all those great rhetorical devices you learned in English class—metaphors, alliteration, irony—but it's definitely still English.

DID PEOPLE IN SHAKESPEARE'S DAY SPEAK IN VERSE? No, no more than we speak in rap today. But people both then and now enjoy the rhythm and rhyme of verse. It helps us tune in more immediately, more completely to the feelings and choices of the characters.

IS SHAKESPEARE HARDER FOR ACTORS TO PERFORM THAN REGULAR PLAYS? Actually, for most actors, Shakespeare is easier! The rhythm of the language makes it easy to memorize. (You know how song lyrics get stuck in your head, or how you can remember silly little rhymes from when you were a kid? It's like that.) And all those rhetorical devices act as clues to tell the actors how their character feels.

To find those clues, a company will begin their rehearsal process with table work.

Shakespeare invented many words and phrases that we use on a regular basis today. Below are some examples.



Verse or Prose?

All of Shakespeare's language falls into one of two categories: verse or prose. Prose is what we think of as everyday speech, without specific rules regarding rhyme or rhythm. Verse, then, can be defined as giving order or form to the random stress patterns of prose. For actors, verse is often easier to memorize because of the rhythm. It's almost like memorizing lyrics to a song.

Prose

A quick way to tell verse from prose: lines of verse begin with capital letters, while prose will appear in paragraph form.

Blank Verse

Blank Verse is the standard poetic form Shakespeare uses in his plays. It can also be defined as unrhymed iambic pentameter—that is, a line of poetry containing five ("penta" from the Greek prefix meaning five) iambic feet, not rhyming with any adjacent line. That's ten syllables all together. The pattern flows easily for speakers of English, because the stresses match the human heart beat:

ta DUM, ta DUM, ta DUM, ta DUM, ta DUM

or, a good way to remember the word "iamb" is to think of it as:

i AM, i AM, i AM, i AM, i AM

If you say, "The Yankees and the Mets are famous teams." with natural inflection, you will have spoken a line of iambic pentameter.

The YANK | ees AND | the METS | are FA | mous TEAMS

Here are two more:

I TAKE | the SUB | way EV | ery DAY | to SCHOOL

I CAN'T | go OUT | be CAUSE | my HOME | work's LATE

Now say a line from ROMEO & JULIET:

ROMEO

But soft! What light through yonder window breaks?

but SOFT | what LIGHT | through YON | der WIN | dow BREAKS

A repeating combination of stressed and unstressed syllables is known as a foot, which is the basic unit of verse.

An iamb is a foot of poetry containing two syllables, with an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable: ta DUM.

Prose is the everyday language used then and now. Since verse was the conventional method of writing in Elizabethan England, Shakespeare was actually pushing the literary boundaries by including prose in his plays.

At first glance, it may seem that Shakespeare used verse and prose to indicate a character's status (rich, powerful, educated characters speak in verse; poor, common, fools speak in prose) but upon closer look, you'll find that many characters go back and forth between verse and prose, and they do so at very specific moments in the play.

Actors pay close attention to when characters speak in verse and when they speak in prose because Shakespeare made these choices on purpose, and it can tell the actor a lot about how their character thinks and feels. For example, the Nurse is likely to speak in prose when she is teasing Juliet:



NURSE

Well, you have made a simple choice. You know not how to choose a man. Romeo? No, not he. Though his face be better than any man's, yet his leg excels all men's; and for a hand and a foot, and a body, though they be not to be talked on, yet they are past compare. He is not the flower of courtesy, but, I'll warrant him, as gentle as a lamb.

But she switches to verse when the conversation becomes more serious:

NURSE

Then hie you hence to Friar Laurence' cell.
There stays a husband to make you a wife.

Irregular Verse

Shakespeare doesn't always write verse in perfect iambic pentameter. The rhythmic patterns change, and so do the number of syllables. This was pretty innovative stuff in Shakespeare's day. He was one of the first writers to break form. Just like a change from prose to verse is a clue for the actor, so is a variation in the verse pattern.

The Nurse is not the only character in ROMEO & JULIET to speak in both verse and prose.
What other characters do this, and why might they choose to do so?

Feminine Endings and Extra Syllables

A "feminine ending" is a line of verse that ends with an unstressed extra syllable. The result is that the rhythm of the verse is thrown off just enough to indicate that the characters feel unsettled about something. Here's an example, spoken by Juliet when she finds out that she must marry Paris:

JULIET

O God – O Nurse, how shall this be prevented?
My husband is on earth, my faith in heaven.

o GOD | o NURSE | how SHALL | this BE | pre VENT | ed
my HUS | band IS | on EARTH | my FAITH | in HEA | ven

Shared Lines & Split Lines

Shakespeare sometimes splits a line of verse, so that two characters share the ten syllables. This is called a shared line or a split line, and it helps to show quick thinking or strong emotion, as well as creating a sense of accelerated action. Thus we have both the effect of poetry AND of natural speech. Have a look at these lines shared by Romeo and his good friend Mercutio:

ROMEO

I dreamt a dream tonight.

MERCUTIO

And so did I.

ROMEO

Well, what was yours?

MERCUTIO

That dreamers often lie.

They scan as:

i DREAMT | a DREAM | to NIGHT | and SO | did I
well WHAT | was YOURS | that DREAM | ers OFT | en LIE

Four short, simplistic sentences become a rhyming couplet. The actors playing these roles can discover a lot about their characters' relationship from an exchange like this one!

A rhyming couplet is a pair of lines of the same length whose end words rhyme. Shakespeare often uses these to signal the end of a scene, or to foreshadow something yet to come. Where do you see these techniques at work in ROMEO & JULIET?



Rhyme

Even though most of Shakespeare's plays are written in blank verse, he still makes frequent use of rhyme – especially when he wants to call your attention to something. Words that rhyme really stand out when we hear them spoken aloud, so these words are of particular importance to the actors.

In ROMEO & JULIET, you will notice rhyme everywhere – but not always where you might expect it. Sure, it's there when people are in love:

ROMEO

Did my heart love till now? Forswear it, sight!
For I ne'er saw true beauty till this night.

But it's also there for an entire scene. (Act 2 Scene 3, between Friar Laurence and Romeo) and there's even a hidden sonnet (Act 1 Scene 5, when Romeo and Juliet speak for the first time!)

Try speaking a speech or a scene with lots of rhyme out loud. Why do you think Shakespeare chose to use so much rhyme in this play? What can that tell the actors, and how might it affect their performance? How might it affect the audience?

Where do we still see rhyme in use today, and does it have the same effect?

Rhetorical Device

A rhetorical device is a technique that an author or speaker uses to have an effect on its audience. They go beyond the literal meaning of the words, making use of the sounds and the imagery to create imaginative new ways for an audience to connect with the author's ideas. Shakespeare would have studied and known how to make use of a very, very long list of rhetorical devices – but the more common examples are things that you've probably encountered in English class, such as metaphor, simile, and alliteration.

Rhetoric is the art of speaking or writing effectively.

Antithesis

One rhetorical device that appears frequently in ROMEO & JULIET is antithesis – a contrast of ideas or words, typically balanced or parallel in how they are constructed within a phrase. Take for example Romeo's reaction to the brawl that opens the play:

ROMEO

Here's much to do with hate, but more with love.
Why then, O brawling love, O loving hate,
O anything of nothing first create,
O heavy lightness, serious vanity,
Misshapen chaos of well-seeming forms,
Feather of lead, bright smoke, cold fire, sick health,
Still waking sleep that is not what it is.
This love feel I that feel no love in this.

Love v. hate isn't the only antithetical theme in ROMEO & JULIET – there's also light v. dark, and life v. death. What can these extreme contrasts tell you about the world of the play and the people who inhabit it?



WHAT TO WATCH FOR...

QUESTIONS AND THEMES TO CONSIDER

Generational Differences

How are the adults of the play set apart from the young people? Pay attention to the opening scene, when Capulet and Montague confront each other. How is their behavior different from the rage of Tybalt, or the servants? In Act II, Juliet says that “old folks” are “unwieldy, slow, heavy, and pale as lead”. Where do you see evidence for this in the play?

Family Feud

Are the Capulets and the Montagues different from one another, and if so, how? Where and when might this version of Verona be situated? Do you think that these directorial decisions are effective?

Humor in the Play

Many scholars have commented that Romeo and Juliet seems like it could be a comedy up until Act III Scene 1, when Mercutio is killed. It is certainly true that the first half of this play has many opportunities for humor. Which scene or character did you find the funniest, and why? Why do you think that Shakespeare included funny moments in his tragedy?

Fate and Death

Were Romeo and Juliet really “star-crossed” and fated to die, or could their deaths have been prevented? Do you think that their loss will be a wake-up call to their families and end the violence, or did they die entirely in vain?

Trusted Adults

What do you think of the actions of Friar Laurence and the Nurse, Romeo and Juliet’s closest advisors? Were they more hurtful, or more helpful to the young couple? What could they have done differently to help? Do they deserve any blame for what happened?

Love and Poetry

Listen closely to the play’s love scenes: when Romeo and Juliet meet at the ball, declare their love on the balcony, and part at daybreak. Is their love for one another reflected in the way they use language? Can you tell that they are attracted to one another by how they speak?



PART THREE:

SOURCES

SOURCES

TEACHING SHAKESPEARE

by Rex Gibson

SHAKESPEARE FOR DUMMIES

by John Doyle (Artistic Director, CSC) and
Ray Lischner

THE FRIENDLY SHAKESPEARE

by Norrie Epstein

THE GENIUS OF SHAKESPEARE

by Jonathan Bate

BRUSH UP YOUR SHAKESPEARE!

by Michael Macrone

ESSENTIAL SHAKESPEARE HANDBOOK

by Leslie Dunton-Downer and Alan Riding

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE AND THE GLOBE

written and illustrated by Alik

EYEWITNESS SHAKESPEARE

written by Peter Chrisp, photographed by
Steve Teague

SHAKESPEARE AFTER ALL

by Marjorie Garber

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Classic Stage Company (CSC) is the award-winning Off-Broadway theater committed to re-imagining the classical repertory for contemporary audiences. Founded in 1967, CSC uses works of the past as a way to engage in the issues of today. Highly respected and widely regarded as a major force in American theater, it has become the home to New York's finest established and emerging artists, the place where they gather to grapple with the great works of the world's repertory.



The National Endowment for the Arts in partnership with Arts Midwest presents *Shakespeare in American Communities*. CSC is one of 40 professional theater companies selected to participate in bringing the finest productions of Shakespeare to middle- and high-school students in communities across the United States. This is the twelfth year of this national program, the largest tour of Shakespeare in American history.



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