

The Play



Romeo and Juliet is one of William Shakespeare's best known plays. Shakespeare rarely invented new stories, he preferred to choose tales which had proven their popularity through time and make them his own. He would flesh out characters and develop existing ones, he would make the story even more interesting and he would tell it all in his own very special language. So, how did Shakespeare get the idea for the story of *Romeo and Juliet* and when did he write it?

Italian roots

Girolamo della Corte, an Italian author of the late 1500s, wrote in his *L'Istoria di Verona* (1594) that the story of the two young lovers was a time event dating back to 1303. The first written version of the story appeared in 1316 in *Il Romanzo* by Masuccio di Salerno and was set in Siena. In 1554, Matteo Bandello wrote a story about Romeo and Juliet in his *Novelle*, which was based on a previous work, Luigi da Porto's *Giulietta* (1530). It was da Porto who named the lovers Romeo and Giulietta and described the rivalry of their two Veronese families. Pierre Boistreau translated da Porto's story into French and entitled his work *Histoire de Deux Amants* (1559). The first English version was in a Latin poem by Arthur Brooke in 1562. At the beginning of his poem *The Tragical History of Romeo and Juliet*, Brooke says his source was Bandello. However, literary historians agree that the main inspiration came from Boistreau. The direct source of William Shakespeare's play is considered to be Arthur Brooke's poem.

Timing

Shakespeare is thought to have moved to London between 1585 and 1592. *Romeo and Juliet* was written in 1594, at the same time as he started writing his collection of sonnets. By this time, documents indicate that he was already a well-known and successful writer. The play was first published in 1597 in *The Most Excellent and Lamentable Tragedie of Romeo and Juliet* which subsequently became *The Tragedie of Romeo and Juliet*.

Did you know?

Women were not allowed to be professional actors in England until 1660. Until that time Juliet would have been played by a male actor.

Romeo and Juliet today

The story which Shakespeare borrowed and developed has become one of the greatest (and saddest) love stories of all time. It has been made into numerous films, including one in modern dress but with the original language, starring Leonardo di Caprio and Claire Danes (1995), and into a musical, *West Side Story* (1961), set in 1950s New York. The word 'Romeo' has entered the English language to refer to a man who is passionate or flirtatious. The town of Verona has become a place of pilgrimage for lovers and tourists keen to visit Juliet's tomb and see her balcony.

- 1 Read the text on pages 10 and 11.
Complete the table with information in chronological order.

	DATE	TITLE	AUTHOR	NOTES
1	1476			
2		<i>La Giulietta</i>		
3			Matteo Bandello	
4				A translation in French of da Porto's story
5				
6	1594			

- 2  Using the table and the following expressions, speak to a partner and retell the history of the different versions of *Romeo and Juliet*.

First - Then - Next - After that - Subsequently - Finally

PRODUCE


- 3 Now write a short paragraph using the same information and expressions.

.....


.....

.....

INDEPENDENT LEARNING

- 4  Find out more about Luigi da Porto's *La Giulietta*, Matteo Bandello's *Novelle* or Arthur Brooke's poem and report back to the class.

OR

-  Watch a modern version of *Romeo and Juliet* and report back to the class with your opinion.

The Main Characters

- 1 Look at the characters below and read the texts.
Highlight all the words which describe **relationships** and **positions**.
- 2 Which words can you find to describe the characters' **personalities**?
Make lists in your notebook, as in the example below.

Character

Prince Escalus

Relationships, Position

Head of the ruling family

Personality

Fair

The Ruling Family



Prince Escalus

is the prince of Verona and head of the ruling family. He is a fair ruler and tries to stop the fighting between the Montagues and Capulets.



Mercutio

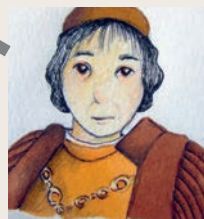
is a close relative of Prince Escalus and a good friend of Romeo's.



Paris

is related to the prince and is one of Juliet's admirers. Juliet's father would like to have him as his son-in-law.

The Montagues



Lord Montague

is the head of the Montague family and Romeo's father. He is highly respected.

The Capulets



Lord Capulet

is the head of the Capulet family, and like Lord Montague, he is well-respected. He is Juliet's father and he is fatherly and wise but also materialistic and easily angered at times.



Lady Capulet

is Juliet's mother and Lord Capulet's wife. She has a weak character and would like her daughter to marry Paris.



Juliet

is Lord and Lady Capulet's daughter. She is 13 and is beautiful, witty and intelligent. She is also passionate, determined and courageous.



Tybalt

is Juliet's cousin and hates the Montagues. He can be aggressive and violent and he is very sure of himself.

VOCABULARY

- 3 Are there any words you don't understand? Guess or find out what they mean and write synonyms, e.g. *fair* = *just*

PRODUCE

- 4 Use your notes to ask and answer questions about the main characters with a partner.



Lady Montague
is Lord Montague's wife and Romeo's mother. She is very attached to her son and when he is exiled from Verona, she dies of grief.



Benvolio
is Romeo's cousin and Lord Montague's nephew. He is a good friend of Romeo.



Romeo
is the son and heir of Lord and Lady Montague. He is about 16 and even though his family is obsessed with fighting, his main interest is love. He is sensitive and idealistic but also reckless, passionate, daring and handsome.

Characters



The nurse
is Juliet's faithful nurse. She is sentimental and at times she can be quite loud and vulgar.



Friar Lawrence
is a kind Franciscan friar who helps both Romeo and Juliet. He marries the couple in secret.



Rosaline
is the girl that Romeo thinks he is in love with at the beginning of the play.

English in Shakespeare's Time

Renaissance English was surprisingly similar to the English we speak today, although some words and aspects of grammar were different.

RENAISSANCE GRAMMAR

Rule 1


If you are speaking to a person you know:

Use

Thou - Thee - Thy - Thine - Thyself

Don't use

You - Your - Yours - Yourself

- 1  Read these sentences. What is the difference between *thy* and *thine*? And between *thou* and *thee*? Tell a friend.

"Thine eyes are like stars and thy lips are like roses."

"Thou art more beautiful than the sun and I love thee."

Rule 2

If you are using *thou* as a subject, use:

art and *wert*

instead of

are and *were*

hast and *hadst*

instead of

have and *had*

canst and *couldest*

instead of

can and *could*

dost and *didst*

instead of

do and *did*

- 2 Read these quotations from *Romeo and Juliet* and rewrite them in modern English.

"Art thou not Romeo?"

.....

"What hast thou there?"

.....

"What dost thou wear?"

.....

Rule 3

If you are using *he* or *it* as a subject, use third person *-th* or *-eth*

(*has* or *speaketh*) instead of third person *-s* (*has*, *speaks*).

- 3 Write the Shakespearean equivalent of the following verb forms:

he gives


she loves


it can

she does

RENAISSANCE VOCABULARY

4 Look at these common expressions from Shakespeare's writings.

 Discuss with a partner which of the alternatives is the best explanation for the word or words in *italics*.

 Listen and check.

a Ay, I will.

- 1 ☐ Eye
- 2 ☐ Hey
- 3 ☐ Yes

b I would *fair* see him again.

- 1 ☐ prefer not
- 2 ☐ not mind seeing
- 3 ☐ happy

c *Methinks* it time to go.

- 1 ☐ Do you think ... ?
- 2 ☐ I think
- 3 ☐ It seems

d Do not say

- 1 ☐ never
- 2 ☐ no-one
- 3 ☐ anything

e Swear you will never leave me.

- 1 ☐ Promise
- 2 ☐ Say
- 3 ☐ Shout

f He *pronounced* my name.

- 1 ☐ said
- 2 ☐ called
- 3 ☐ emphasised

g I know not who *twas*.

- 1 ☐ it was
- 2 ☐ ate it
- 3 ☐ wore it

h He went *hither and thither*.

- 1 ☐ home and away
- 2 ☐ high and low
- 3 ☐ here and there

i *Wherefore* art thou Romeo?

- 1 ☐ Where ... ?
- 2 ☐ Why ... ?
- 3 ☐ When ... ?

j *Perchance* I will.

- 1 ☐ Luckily
- 2 ☐ Perhaps
- 3 ☐ Unfortunately

VOCABULARY

5 Shakespeare invented many words and phrases. 'A wild-geese chase' is used for the first time in *Romeo and Juliet*. However, it is not a chase for wild geese. Tick the correct meaning below.

- a ☐ a chase for something rare
- b ☐ a chase for something impossible
- c ☐ a chase for something useless

PRODUCE

6 Write your own message in Shakespearean English for your classmates to translate into modern English.



PROLOGUE

In a tragedy, the introduction sets the scene and presents the characters and their story. In the case of *Romeo and Juliet*, the introduction begins with a speech called the Prologue which is delivered by the chorus.

- 1 Before you read, predict. What might the prologue tell you about the story and its setting?



- 2 Read the text. Use the notes on the right.

PROLOGUE

Enter Chorus.

- 1 Two households, both alike in dignity
(In fair Verona, where we lay our scene)
From ancient grudge break to new mutiny,
Where civil blood makes civil hands unclean.
 - 5 From forth the fatal loins of these two foes
A pair of star-crossed lovers take their life;
Whose misadventured piteous overthrows
Doth with their death bury their parents' strife.
The fearful passage of their death-marked love
 - 10 And the continuing hate of their parents' rage,
Which, but their children's end, naught
could remove, is now the hot traffic of our stage;
The which, if you with patient ears attend,
What here shall miss, our toil shall strive to mend.
- Chorus exits.*

Two noble families of Verona, where the play is set, have been enemies for a long time. Now they have started fighting again.

Both families have children, destined to become lovers and to kill themselves. Their tragic story and their deaths will finally bring peace between the two families.

Their story of tragic love, and of their parents' terrible feud, which ends with the death of the two children, is the subject of this two-hour long play.

If you listen carefully, we will act out the full story.