

Act 1. In Verona, a fight breaks out between Capulet and Montague servants. Benvolio tries to stop the fight, but he is attacked by Tybalt. The Prince threatens the death penalty if either family disturbs the peace again. Meanwhile, Romeo is distraught knowing that his infatuation with Rosaline is not reciprocated. Benvolio consoles him and assures him that he will meet another, more beautiful woman soon. At the Capulets' home, Count Paris asks Lord Capulet for his permission to marry Juliet. Capulet says she is too young, but he encourages Paris to woo her. That evening the Capulets' host a lavish feast. Romeo, Benvolio and Mercutio decide to sneak in wearing masks. Tybalt recognises Romeo, but Lord Capulet asks him to not make a scene as it would ruin the feast. Tybalt stifles his anger and plots revenge. Romeo sees Juliet and instantly falls in love with her. They kiss, but later learn that they belong to rival families.

Act 2. Romeo sneaks back to the Capulets' house and hides under Juliet's window. She declares her love for him and calls for them to disown their families. Romeo emerges, and they confess their love for each other. However, Juliet is uneasy about the suddenness of their love and says it needs time to grow. She asks Romeo to arrange their marriage if his love is true. The next day, Romeo goes to Friar Lawrence and asks him to marry them. The Friar agrees to perform the marriage ceremony because he thinks it will end the feud between the two families, although he does warn Romeo about the dangers of sudden love. Romeo instructs the Nurse to pass on details about the lovers' secret marriage. Tybalt challenges Romeo to a duel.

Act 3. Tybalt tells Benvolio and Mercutio that he is looking for Romeo. When Romeo appears, he refuses to engage in combat. On his behalf, Mercutio challenges Tybalt to a duel. Mercutio is fatally wounded and dies. In retaliation, Romeo fights with Tybalt and kills him. The Prince banishes Romeo from Verona. Distraught, Romeo visits Friar Lawrence and exclaims that he would rather be dead than be kept away from Juliet. When Juliet learns that Romeo has killed her cousin Tybalt, she feels conflicted. However, as she will soon be Romeo's wife, she has deeper

ties to the Montagues now. Romeo climbs into Juliet's bedroom and spends the night with her. The next day, he uses the rope-ladder left by the Nurse and heads to Mantua. Lord Capulet gives permission for Paris to marry Juliet. When Juliet refuses, Lord Capulet is furious and threatens to disown her. Juliet goes to confession so she can see Friar Lawrence and appeal for help.

Act 4. When Juliet arrives at Friar Lawrence's cell, Paris is there. He has been discussing wedding plans. Juliet feels helpless. She says that if the Friar cannot help her, she will kill herself. The Friar gives her a vial (a small bottle) containing a potion which will make her appear dead for forty-two hours. Her family will think she has died. When she wakes up in the family tomb, she'll be able to leave for Mantua to be with Romeo. Juliet returns home and apologises to her father, and plans are made for her wedding to Paris. The next morning, the Nurse finds Juliet "dead". The grieving family arrange for Juliet's body to be moved to the family tomb.

Act 5. Romeo's servant brings the news that Juliet is dead. Romeo decides he must join Juliet in death by poisoning himself. In Verona, Friar John informs Friar Lawrence that he was unable to deliver his important letter to Romeo. Horrified, Friar Lawrence realises he must break into the tomb. Juliet is due to wake up and Romeo will not be there as planned. At the Capulets' tomb, Romeo is caught by Paris. They fight, and Paris is killed. Romeo finds Juliet's body. He drinks the poison, kisses her, and then collapses. Friar Lawrence arrives, but he is too late. Juliet awakens. Realising what has happened, she takes Romeo's dagger and kills herself. Watchmen summon the Prince, who in turn summons the Capulet and Montague households. Lord Montague arrives with the news that Lady Montague has died from a broken heart due to Romeo's exile. When Lord Montague and Lord Capulet learn what has happened, they agree to end their feud and erect golden statues of Romeo and Juliet. The Prince celebrates the end of the conflict but laments the two young lives that had to end to establish peace.

Key characters

Romeo is impulsive, immature and passionate. He is not interested in the violence and conflict that surrounds him.

Juliet is obedient and slightly naive at the start of the play, but she quickly matures and develops wisdom.

Friar Lawrence secretly marries Romeo and Juliet. He wants the warring families to end their feud.

Roseline is unseen in the play, but her role is important: she does not return Romeo's affections, which causes him to find love elsewhere.

Mercutio is a close friend of Romeo. He is witty and sarcastic. He is killed by Tybalt in a duel.

Benvolio is Romeo's cousin who tries to keep the peace.

Tybalt is Juliet's cousin. He spots Romeo at the Capulet feast and vows revenge. He is later killed by Romeo.

Count Paris is a wealthy, respectable nobleman who wants to marry Juliet, eventually winning permission from her father.

The Nurse is Juliet's confidant and mother figure. She provides comic relief, and plays a key role in uniting the lovers.

Lord Capulet loves his daughter and is convinced he knows what is best for her. His wife, **Lady Capulet**, thinks her daughter should marry Paris. She also married young.

Prince Escalus is Prince of Verona. He wants to keep order between the warring families.

Key themes

Love
Fate
Violence & conflict
Language & wordplay
Marriage
Family
Romantic love
Gender
Pride
Mortality
Youth
Exile
Honour

Historical context

Romeo and Juliet was not entirely Shakespeare's invention: the story was brought to an English-speaking audience by the poet Arthur Brooks. Shakespeare often appropriated stories from earlier works.

Act 2, Scene 2 is well-known as the 'balcony scene', but the balcony itself wasn't added until many years later during a revival. In fact, the word 'balcony' didn't appear in the English language until 1618 – two years after Shakespeare's death.

Some people thought the feud between the two families was an allegory for the unrest between Catholics and Protestants. England was a Protestant country at the time, but the play is set in Catholic Italy. How might an Elizabethan audience have viewed Friar Lawrence and his actions?

Add your own examples here:

Stylistic features and relevant terms

Aside
Blank verse
Comic relief
Chorus
Dramatic irony
Figurative language
Foreshadowing
Iambic pentameter
Metaphor
Meter
Monologue
Oxymoron
Personification
Pun
Rhyming couplet
Simile
Soliloquy
Sonnet