

Plot:

- ACT 1**
 - Street brawl between Montagues and Capulets
 - Romeo experiences Rosaline's unrequited love
 - Romeo and Juliet meet at the ball. It is love at first sight
- ACT 2**
 - The balcony scene: Romeo and Juliet plan to marry.
 - Friar Lawrence marries Romeo and Juliet.
- ACT 3**
 - The big fight. Tybalt kills Mercutio, and Romeo kills Tybalt.
 - Romeo and Juliet spend the night together before his exile to Mantua.
 - Capulet threatens to disown Juliet if she refuses to marry Paris.
- ACT 4**
 - Juliet and Friar Lawrence devise a plan: the sleeping potion.
 - Wedding preparations begin for Juliet and Paris.
 - Juliet takes the potion and is found by the Nurse, who believes she is dead.
- ACT 5**
 - Romeo learns that Juliet is 'dead' and takes a poison to kill himself.
 - Juliet awakens to find Romeo dead and stabs herself with a dagger.
 - Both families learn of their children's death and finally end the feud.



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Context:

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Elizabethan era: Written around 1595 during Elizabeth I's reign. Higher taxes and lack of food led to many riots and protests. This influenced Shakespeare in his depiction of public chaos and fighting in the streets. Theatre was one of the only forms of entertainment. Rude comedy and sexual innuendos appealed to the less refined members of society.

Patriarchy: Both England and Verona were patriarchal societies. Men held power in all aspects of life. Fathers would arrange their young daughters to marry older men who had made their fortunes, whereas young men were seemed to have more freedom than females. Men were also known to express their power and dominance through duelling and violence to uphold family honour.

Religion: In Shakespeare's time, religion influenced everyday life and was often deemed more important than law. Marriage was seen as sacred and required the blessing of God. Confession was also important in order to obtain divine forgiveness.

Gender: A woman's place in society was to marry and provide children. They would often be found indoors and would be expected to obey their husbands. Young girls were seen as their father's property, until they were found a suitor.

Characters:

Romeo – Son of the Montagues. Romeo is a sensitive but very impulsive character which is his hamartia.

Juliet – Daughter of the Capulets. Juliet is young, beautiful and passionate. She eventually rebels against the patriarchy.

Mercutio – Romeo's closest friend and a comedic character.

Tybalt – Juliet's cousin. He represents the hostility between the two families.

Friar Lawrence – Franciscan priest and Romeo's confidant. Friar Lawrence marries Romeo and Juliet. He is also used to represent the role of the Church in Verona.

Nurse – Juliet's nurse and greatest confidant

Capulet – Juliet's father, who arranges her marriage to Paris.

Lady Capulet – Juliet's mother, who wishes Juliet to marry Paris and provide children.

Lord and Lady Montague – Romeo's parents who are enemies of the Capulets.

Prince Escalus – Prince of Verona and symbol of justice.

Benvolio – Romeo's friend who acts as a peacekeeper.

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Paris – Juliet's suitor, who is later killed by Romeo.

Themes and Ideas:

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Fate: A widespread belief in the Elizabethan era was that one's life was predetermined and that the stars can reveal the future. Romeo and Juliet's are described as 'star-cross'd lovers' who have been brought together by fate. Fate and fortune are also referred to throughout the play as the tragedy unfolds.

Love: Romeo and Juliet fall in love at first sight. It is seen as young love that is both genuine and passionate, however it is also destructive. Romeo's infatuation with Rosaline followed traditions of courtly love and contrasts to his love for Juliet.

Conflict and Honour: Shakespeare conveys the importance of family honour in the opening street brawl and the fatal fight in Act 3. The characters duel to defend their honour and convey their masculinity. It is the family feud that drives the events of the play.

Family: In the 16th century, rich people married for status and power rather than for love. Fathers dictated who their daughters married and saw the pairing as a business deal. Men ruled both society and the household, whereas women were subservient and powerless.

Key Quotations:

'a pair of star-cross'd lovers' – Prologue

'Rebellious subjects, enemies to peace' – A1S1

'My lips, two blushing pilgrims' – A1S5

'Juliet is the sun' – A2S2

'To turn your households' rancour to pure love' – A2S3

'These violent delights have violent ends' – A2S6

'A plague a'both your houses!' – A3S1

'O, I am fortune's fool' – A3S1

'Hang thee, young baggage, disobedient wretch!' – A3S5

'Here's drink – I drink to thee' – A4S3

'Death is my son-in-law, Death is my heir' – A4S5

'I defy you stars!' – A5S1

'Death, that sucked the honey of thy breath/Hath had no power yet upon thy beauty' – A5S3

'O happy dagger' – A5S3

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Romeo & Juliet

Key Terminology:

Elizabethan – during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I

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Tragedy – a play dealing with tragic events and concerns the downfall of the main character

Hamartia – the tragic hero's fatal flaw

Catharsis – the release of the audience's emotions through empathy with the characters

Patriarchy – a social system where men hold primary power

Fate – the idea that the events in someone's life is predetermined by a higher power

Prologue – an opening to a story that establishes the context and gives background details

Sonnet – 14-line poem, usually 10 syllables that explores love

Soliloquy – a speech given alone on stage (or away from other characters) to reveal a character's thoughts

Iambic Pentameter – a line of verse with five metrical feet, consisting of one unstressed syllable followed by one stressed syllable

Writer's Methods:

Dramatic Irony: Used to add suspense and tragedy to the plan as the characters remain unaware of their fate.

Light and Religious Imagery: Used to symbolise Romeo and Juliet's love for each other. Romeo uses light imagery to describe Juliet's beauty and impact on him. Images of darkness signify their doomed relationship. Religious references show their love is innocent and approved by God.

Antithesis and Oxymoron: Used to intensify the sense of conflict, moral dilemmas, and good and evil.

Foreshadowing: Used to create suspense and highlight Romeo and Juliet's demise. This heightens the audiences' emotions throughout the play.

Sonnets: Shakespeare uses this form of poetry to reflect the theme of love and romance within the play, i.e., the chorus in Act 1, and Romeo and Juliet's first meeting in Act 1.

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