

Romeo and Juliet

The Montagues and the Capulets are two different families and they have hated each other for years. The street fights they have are legendary but they are warned if it continues the Heads of each family will pay the price – with their lives.

Romeo Montague is the teenage son of one household and his cousin Benvolio and best friend Mercutio are a similar age. Juliet Capulet is the teenage daughter of the other household and she has an elderly Nurse who cares for her. Juliet's cousin is Tybalt.

Her mother is keen to marry her off to a man called Paris and her father throws a party to give them time together. Romeo, Benvolio and Mercutio disguise themselves and attend the party where Romeo and Juliet fall in love. Afterwards she realises who he is but despite his family she loves him. The Nurse becomes a messenger between them while Romeo tells the local priest that he wants to marry Juliet and he agrees to the secret ceremony. But then a further street fight sees Tybalt stab Mercutio and Romeo revenges his best friend's murder by killing Tybalt. Romeo is told he must leave the city or die.

They share one night together before he runs away. Juliet's parents then decide she should be married off to Paris and she asks the priest for help. He gets her a potion to drink which will make it appear that she is dead -allowing her to avoid the wedding. The plan is that she will be placed in her family's tomb and the priest will write to Romeo to explain the situation so he can come and find her and they can escape together.

She drinks the potion and things go to plan except that Romeo does not get the letter and instead thinks she is really dead – he returns to Verona. Paris had been keeping watch outside the tomb and he refuses Romeo entry so they fight and Paris is killed. When Romeo finds Juliet in the tomb seemingly dead he drinks poison. He dies just as she awakes and in despair she ends her life with his dagger.

After their deaths their families put their past hatred aside but it has taken the lives of four young people to end the fighting.

*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.
From forth the fatal loins of these two foes
A pair of star-cross'd lovers take their life;
Whose misadventur'd piteous overthrows
Doth with their death bury their parents' strife.
The fearful passage of their death-mark'd love,
And the continuance of their parents' rage,
Which, but their children's end, nought could remove,
Is now the two hours' traffic of our stage;
The which if you with patient ears attend,
What here shall miss, our toil shall strive to mend.*

These are the first lines of the play – telling the audience the outline of the story. How would you rewrite these into modern words?

TYBALT

*What, drawn and talk of peace? I hate the word
As I hate hell, all Montagues, and you.
Have at you, coward!*

As the street fight happens in the opening scene Benvolio tries to use his sword to stop the fighting but Tybalt mocks him for it.

What do you imagine the conversation between Tybalt and Benvolio as the first wants to stir up hatred while the second is trying to calm things down?

ROMEO

Is she a Capulet?

O dear account! My life is my foe's debt.

Romeo falls instantly in love with Juliet and is distraught to find out she is a Capulet – the very family his own family hate.

Imagine Romeo returns home after the party and is messaging a friend who wasn't there. What would he say about Juliet and the difficult situation they are now in?

What advice would this friend give him – would he encourage him or tell him to keep away from her?

JULIET

*O Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo?
Deny thy father and refuse thy name;
Or, if thou wilt not, be but sworn my love,
And I'll no longer be a Capulet.
'Tis but thy name that is my enemy;
Thou art thyself, though not a Montague.
What's Montague? It is nor hand nor foot,
Nor arm nor face, nor any other part
Belonging to a man. O, be some other name!
What's in a name? That which we call a rose
By any other word would smell as sweet;
So Romeo would, were he not Romeo call'd,
Retain that dear perfection which he owes
Without that title. Romeo, doff thy name,
And for thy name, which is no part of thee,
Take all myself.*

Juliet wishes Romeo was not a Montague or that she wasn't a Capulet but decides that their names mean nothing.

Imagine you are one of these two – how do you feel about falling in love with someone your family hates?

FRIAR LAWRENCE

*These violent delights have violent ends,
And in their triumph die, like fire and powder,
Which as they kiss consume. The sweetest honey
Is loathsome in his own deliciousness,
And in the taste confounds the appetite.
Therefore love moderately: long love doth so;
Too swift arrives as tardy as too slow.*

The Priest gives them advice about not rushing things but still agrees to marry them.

Why does the priest agree to marry them when he knows it is forbidden given the hatred between the families and he fears they barely know each other?

MERCUTIO

I am hurt.

A plague on both houses! I am sped.

Is he gone and has nothing?

Straight after their wedding there is another fight and Romeo's best friend is killed by Tybalt, as he takes his last breath he curses both families and Romeo is so angry he finds Tybalt and kills him.

What would Romeo say right now if he was talking to his friends? How does he feel about Mercutio's death? How does he feel about Tybalt (his wife's cousin who killed Mercutio)?

JULIET

O, think'st thou we shall ever meet again?

ROMEO

*I doubt it not, and all these woes shall serve
For sweet discourses in our times to come.*

After their wedding night Romeo must run away before he is caught and put to death. He reassures her that they will meet again and it will all be worth it.

Once he is safely away Romeo decides to write to Juliet, what does his letter say?

Ah, dear Juliet,

ROMEO

*Why are you yet so fair? Shall I believe
That unsubstantial Death is amorous,
And that the lean abhorred monster keeps
You here in dark to be his paramour?
For fear of that, I still will stay with you,
And never from this palace of dim night
Depart again. Here, here will I remain
With worms that are your chambermaids; O, here
Will I set up my everlasting rest.*

When Romeo finds Juliet apparently dead he cannot bear to live and so he decides he will stay with her forever, in death if not in life. He drinks poison to commit suicide.

If, before he dies, he wrote a note for his family what would he write? Would he explain why he loved Juliet and why he killed Tybalt? Would he be angry or sad or want the fighting to end? What would he wish for his family?

PRINCE OF VERONA

*Where be these enemies? Capulet! Montague!
See what a scourge is laid upon your hate,
That heaven finds means to kill your joys with love.
And I for winking at your discords too
Have lost a brace of kinsmen. All are punished.
For never was a story of more woe
Than this of Juliet and her Romeo.*

The Prince of Verona makes it clear that the hatred between the two families have caused these deaths and none have benefitted from the long running feud.

Imagine you are reporting the story of this for a newspaper, what would your article say?