

Romeo and Juliet

By William Shakespeare
Teacher Resource Guide
by Paul Michael Fontana

Welcome

To The Teacher:

Since its founding in 1972, **The Acting Company** has taken great pride in performing classic plays for student audiences. In the Company's effort to extend our educational outreach programming, we have created our one-hour workshop performance based on Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. By paring down the production to simple props and suggestions of costumes, we are celebrating Shakespeare's language and the Theater as a medium of artistic expression.

This **Teacher Resource Guide** has been designed to help you uncover elements of *Romeo and Juliet* that you want to teach. Some of the lessons are intended to prepare the students for seeing the play. They provide background material and vocabulary which will help the students more fully appreciate the performance. The other lessons can be used to expand the experience of having seen *Romeo and Juliet* once you get back to the classroom. Many of the activities can be applied to other subject matter and may be easily added to your teaching repertoire.

Richard Corley

Associate Producing Director

This **Teacher Resource Guide** for *Romeo and Juliet* has four parts:

Section One, **Getting Your Students Started**, has lesson plans for starting to read *Romeo and Juliet* with your students, including a four-week schedule for reading the play.

The second part focuses on reading and viewing *Romeo and Juliet*, and is entitled **The Play: Things to Look For**.

Section Three of the Guide is about **The Playwright: William Shakespeare**. You will find an outline of his life and career.

The fourth part focuses on **The Theater** and the people who create it.

Getting Your Students Started

Overall Objective:

- The students will make assumptions about William Shakespeare's play *Romeo and Juliet* before reading the entire text.

Reading Schedule for *Romeo and Juliet*

Week 1:	Day 1:	Prologue	
	Day 2:	1, 1, 1-94	The Brawl
	Day 3:	1, 1, 95-end	Romeo's sadness
	Day 4:	1, 2-3	The Capulets
	Day 5:	1, 4	Queen Mab
Week 2:	Day 1:	1, 5	The Party
	Day 2:	Prologue, 2, 1	After the Ball
	Day 3:	2, 2	The Balcony Scene
	Day 4:	2, 3	The Friar
	Day 5:	2, 4-6	The Wedding
Week 3:	Day 1:	3, 1	In the Square
	Day 2:	3, 1 (continued)	In the Square
	Day 3:	3, 2	Juliet's Mourning
	Day 4:	3, 3 - 5	The Aftermath
	Day 5:	4, 1 - 2	The Friar's Plan
Week 4:	Day 1:	4, 3	Juliet's Action
	Day 2:	4, 4 - 5	The Capulets' Mourning
	Day 3:	5, 1 - 2	Romeo's response
	Day 4:	5, 3	At Capulet's Tomb

Discussion: Judging a Book by its Cover

Objective:

- The students will discuss their expectations of *Romeo and Juliet* from looking at the words and images on the cover of the play script.
- The students will discuss the choices made by publishers and executives to put the images and words on the cover.

Exercise: Bring in copies of the script of *Romeo and Juliet*. Ask the students to look at the cover of their copy and the other copies in the room.

Ask them to share with the class images on the covers. What function do those images have? Note too the colors used on the cover. What do the colors mean and why were they chosen? Do these images help sell this edition?

What words did the publishers choose to put on the cover? In what font is the title of the play? Did they use an "and" or an "&" between "Romeo" and "Juliet?" What other words or phrases are on the cover? Do these words and phrases help sell this edition? Are you more likely to buy a book or magazine based on images or words? Are there images and words on the back cover?

Why did Shakespeare choose this title? Did he feel the title would help sell tickets to the play?

Post Performance follow up: Ask the students to create a poster or book cover for *Romeo and Juliet*. They can cut images out of magazines and newspapers or draw them. What words will they include and why?

Reading and Discussion: The Prologue to Romeo and Juliet

Objective:

- The students will know some reasons for having a prologue.
- The students will do a close reading of the prologue.
- The students will become familiar with an outline of the plot of *Romeo and Juliet*.
- The students will learn the literary term “sonnet.”

Chorus

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.

Facts: The prologue was a convention in Elizabethan plays. In Latin its name literally means “the talking that comes before.” Many plays had a Chorus throughout the play as well, describing the action, asking the audience to use their imaginations, and apologizing for the limitations of the performance. The performance of *Romeo and Juliet* by **The Acting Company** uses narration to focus audience attention on specific themes in the play.

Exercise: Ask the students to read the Prologue and answer the following questions on a piece of paper. Remind them to back up their answers with citations from the play.

- Who is the "Chorus" who speaks the prologue?
- Whom are we introduced to?
- Where is the play taking place?
- When does the play take place?
- How long is the play intended to be?

- What does the prologue tell us about the story?

Exercise: Tell the students that the prologue is in the form of a sonnet. The sonnet was created in fifteenth-century Italy. In the 1590's a sonnet craze swept through Elizabethan England. Shakespeare wrote over 150 sonnets. A Shakespearean sonnet is (usually) a fourteen-line piece of verse in iambic Pentameter with an ABABCDCDEFEFGG rhyme scheme. The sonnet often has an abrupt thematic or tonal change after the eighth line or in the final couplet. Ask the students to compare the prologue to the traditional Shakespearean sonnet described. Where does the mood change? What is asked of the audience in the final couplet?

Here are some key words and phrases from the prologue:

Who?

"Two households"
 "parents"
 "children"
 "lovers"

When?

"ancient"
 "new"
 "two hours"

Where?

"In fair Verona"
 "our stage"

What?

"dignity"
 "grudge" (quarrel)
 "mutiny"(violence)
 "star-crossed" (fate)
 "take their life"
 "death-marked love"
 "rage"

Exercise: In act I scene v, Romeo has a ten-line sonnet beginning "O, she doth teach the torches to burn bright!" Ask the students to map out the rhyme scheme of the speech.

Exercise: The first exchange of lines between *Romeo and Juliet* in the play is in the form of a fourteen-line Sonnet. Ask the students to guess what Shakespeare is implying by placing their dialogue in this format?

Behind the Scenes: Playing the most famous lovers in literary history can be daunting. Corey Behnke and Grace Hsu, who play Romeo and Juliet in **The Acting Company** production of *Romeo and Juliet* welcomed the challenge of working on this famous story. Corey says, "You have to pretend that it's a totally new play that has never been done before. That allows us to think of things that are fresh and new." "Because Shakespeare is timeless," says Grace, "the ideas are always fresh even though the story is so well known."

Exercise: Is Verona a real place or a fictional one? Help the students to locate Verona on a map of modern Italy. Have them locate Mantua. Point out London, where William lived. Remind them that Shakespeare probably never visited Verona. How did Shakespeare learn enough about Verona to write about it? Did he make some details up? Is Verona a real place or a fictional one? A little bit of both.

Brainstorm why Shakespeare might have set the play in Verona and Mantua. Would the play be different if he had set it in China? or Denmark?

Characters in Romeo and Juliet

Objective:

- The students will be familiar with the characters in the play.
- The students will make assumptions about characters based on their names.
- The students will compare the characters in the play to the characters featured in **The Acting Company** production.

Behind the Scenes: Do the words of William Shakespeare come naturally to everyone? Todd Cerveris, Friar Laurence in The Acting Company production of *Romeo and Juliet* says, “I didn’t always like Shakespeare. Then I realized that he does something that few other playwrights do – he uses the rhythm of the words, the sounds of the words and the size of the ideas that his words talk about to tell really big stories. It’s not just what they mean, it’s how they sound. That’s why the plays can sound so odd when you read them on the page. On the other hand, when you see a production, the actors are making choices about the text to make the poetry clearer for you. These are plays, they’re meant to be performed, to come alive. That’s why it’s exciting to do *Romeo and Juliet* for student audiences!”

Exercise: Reproduce the following page for the class.

Approaching it as if we have never heard anything about these characters, discuss what each of the names makes us feel about them. What consonants are featured in their names? What vowels? Ask the students to play with ways of saying the names.

Why doesn’t the Nurse have a name? What is a Nurse? Is she a servant? If so, why does she keep a servant, Peter? What is a “House?” If their wives are “Ladies” what are the heads of the households? How powerful is a “Prince?” How powerful are his “kinsmen?” Look up “Apothecary” and define it for the class

Exercise: The characters with an * following their name are in **The Acting Company** production of *Romeo and Juliet*. As the students read the play, ask them to make assumptions about why some characters were left in and some left out of **The Acting Company**’s production.

The Characters in *Romeo and Juliet*

Chorus

The House of Capulet

Juliet*

Capulet, her father*

Lady Capulet, her mother

Tybalt, her cousin*

Nurse to Juliet*

Peter, the Nurse's servant

Cousin Capulet, Juliet's kinsman

Sampson, servant to Capulet

Gregory, servant to Capulet*

Clown, servant to Capulet

Petruchio, Tybalt's friend

The House of Montague

Romeo*

Montague, his father

Lady Montague, his mother

Benvolio, his friend*

Balthasar, his servant

Abraham, servant to Montague*

The Court

Escalus, Prince of Verona*

Mercutio, his kinsman, Romeo's friend*

Paris, his kinsman, suitor to Juliet

Page to Paris

The Church

Friar Lawrence, Franciscan priest*

Friar John, Franciscan priest

The City of Verona

Musicians, Gentlemen and Gentlewomen, Maskers, Torch-bearers,
Citizens and Officers of the Watch, Captain of the Watch

Mantua

An Apothecary

The Play: Things to Look For

- **Overall Objective:** The students will learn a variety of ways to analyze Shakespearean texts.

Tableaux: Paradox

Objective:

- The students will identify and trace the themes of love and hate in the play.
- The students will explore the use of **paradox** and **oxymoron** as literary devices
- The students will do a close reading of Romeo's speech.
- The students will create tableaux of passages from Romeo's speech.
- The students will look for paradox and oxymorons in lyrics from popular music.

Romeo

O me! What fray was here?
Here's much to do with hate, but more with love:
Why then, O brawling love, O loving hate,
O any thing of nothing first create!
O heavy lightness, serious vanity,
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.
(I, I, 106ff)

Facts: A **Paradox** is a statement or situation containing apparently contradictory or incompatible elements, a figure of speech in which an apparently self-contradictory statement is nevertheless found to be true.

An **Oxymoron** is a literary device employing **paradox**, a seeming contradiction reduced to two words, usually an adjective-noun ("plastic silverware") or adverb-adjective ("breathtakingly dull"). It is used for effect, complexity, emphasis, or wit. Oxymorons are used when things have gone contrary to expectation, belief, desire, or assertion, or when your position is opposite to another's which you are discussing.

Other oxymorons, as more or less true paradoxes, show the complexity of a situation where two apparently opposite things are true simultaneously, as in this passage from *Romeo and Juliet*. Some examples other writers have used are these: scandalously nice, sublimely bad, darkness visible, cheerful pessimist, sad joy, wise fool, tender cruelty, despairing hope, freezing fire.

Shakespeare and other writers also combine opposites and paradoxes in longer phrases. In *Romeo and Juliet*, act three, scene two, Juliet describes Romeo saying, "O serpent heart hid with flow'ring face..." She uses many more paradoxical phrases in the speech that follows.

Exercise: In pairs have the students look for and make a list of the oxymorons in Romeo's speech above (or Juliet's speech in act three, scene two).

Because the relationship between love and hate is a central theme in *Romeo and Juliet*, you may wish to explore these paradoxes further. Ask the pairs to choose one

oxymoron from their list and create a tableau, a frozen silent physical picture with their bodies, based on their choice. After a three- or four-minute preparation time, ask volunteers to show their tableaux. Ask the class to count with you: “One-two-three, Freeze,” to signal the group to freeze into their tableau. Ask the class to determine which section from the speech the volunteers are illustrating. Have each group show theirs to the whole class.

Exercise: As the class reads the play, remember to point out the references to love and hate throughout the text. Remind the students to listen for references to love and hate in the performance. In what ways did the actors physicalize “love” and “hate?”

Exercise: Ask the students to look for oxymorons and opposites in the lyrics from popular songs. For example, in Ricky Martin’s song *She Bangs* he sings, “she looks like a flower but she stings like a bee.” Ask each student to bring in one example and share them with the class or create a bulletin board with them. Students can also illustrate the paradoxes for display in the classroom.

Text Analysis: Juliet’s Personality

Objective:

- The students will evaluate Juliet’s personality from her words and actions in act one, scene three.
- The students will make assumptions about Juliet based on this scene.
- The students will trace the changes in Juliet’s personality through the course of the play.

Fact: Unlike other narrative literary forms like the novel, a play reveals the nature of its characters more through their actions and words and less through description. The actor (along with the designers and the director) takes the words of the script and brings them to life in a fully realized character. They start, however, with the basic framework the playwright has given them.

Behind the Scenes: Grace Hsu, the actor playing Juliet, says that the first scene is important for introducing the audience to the character of Juliet. “In Act one, scene 3,” she explains, “we meet a girl who is obedient and follows her parents’ wishes. As the play progresses, she comes into her own. She questions authority and follows her own heart.”

Exercise: Juliet says very little in act one, scene three. Have the class look at all her lines in the scene, perhaps have one person read them all aloud (without the lines of the Nurse and Lady Capulet). Discuss their impressions of her from those lines. Write their impressions on a piece of newsprint.

As they read the rest of the play and see **The Acting Company’s** performance, they can use the list of their impressions to notice the changes in Juliet’s personality through the course of the play. For example, compare her relationship with her parents in this scene to the same relationship in act three, scene five, which takes place only a few days later.

Text Analysis: Puns and Insults

Objective:

- The students will explore the use of **puns** as a literary device.
- The students will learn about the Elizabethan fondness for wordplay.
- The students will insult one another in Elizabethan style.

Facts: In the time of Queen Elizabeth I, verbal eloquence was honored above all other accomplishments. The Elizabethans were amused and fascinated by language especially by puns. They also loved insults. To have a friend yell “Roundly answered!” after a well turned phrase was a tremendous compliment!

A **Pun** is play on words based on the similarity of sound between two different words with different meanings. Puns are as common a source of jokes today as they were when Shakespeare wrote *Romeo and Juliet*.

Romeo and Juliet contains many puns. Mercutio is a master of puns.

Exercise: Have the students keep a running list of the puns they notice as they read *Romeo and Juliet* and who said them. What do the subject of the puns they use tell us about the characters who say them?

Exercise: Present the students with the following list of insults from Shakespeare. In pairs, ask the students to take turns insulting one another with phrases from the list. Provide a dictionary to the students who may be unsure of the meanings of some words or phrases.

After allowing a four or five minute period to exchange insults, discuss the phrases with the whole group. Which were their favorite phrases? Why? Were there words that they didn’t know before? Were there words they felt the meaning of while saying them? Which *sounds* felt the most insulting? How might an actor intensify those sounds when saying that line on stage? (For example, an actor might wish to stress the hissing quality of the repeated “s” in the line “You remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindless villain.”)

What are the hardest-hitting insults today? Are any of these similar in tone or subject matter? Some of the students may be familiar with the term “Snaps,” which is a form of insult competition.

After the discussion, you can ask two volunteers to take turns insulting one another with phrases from the list. This time the rest of the class will observe the effectiveness of each phrase.

Shakespearean Insults

You puppet
You cold porridge
You living dead man
You untutored churl
You painted Maypole
You cream-faced loon
You worshiper of idiots
You dwarf, you minimus
You bloody, bawdy villain
You injurious, tedious wasp
You base, fawning spaniel
You infectious pestilence
You botcher's apprentice
You ugly, venomous toad
You base, ignoble wretch
You old, withered crab tree
You lunatic, lean-witted fool
You filching, pilfering snatcher
You tiresome, wrangling pedant
You impudent, tattered prodigal
You whoreson, clap-eared knave
You dull and muddy mettled rascal
You gross lout, you mindless slave
You base, vile thing, you petty scrap
You dull, unfeeling barren ignorance
You rank weed, ready to be rooted out
You irksome, brawling, scolding pestilence
You brawling, blasphemous, uncharitable dog
You ignorant, long-tongued, babbling gossip
You smiling, smooth, detested pestilence
You mangled work of nature, you scurvy knave
You caterpillar of the commonwealth, you politician
You juggler, you canker-blossom, you thief of love
You decrepit wrangling miser, you base ignoble wretch
You remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindless villain

Adapted from a list in Robert Barton, *Style for Actors*

Behind the Scenes: One of the most famous and puzzling speeches in *Romeo and Juliet* is Mercutio's "Queen Mab" speech. "Queen Mab brings people what they desire," says Evan Robertson, who plays Mercutio in **The Acting Company's** production, "she is a prophet in dreams of things to come. She turns boys and maids into men and women -- and with that comes the promise of death."

Improv and Writing: Names

Objective:

- The students will investigate the power of names.
- The students will do a close reading of a section of act two, scene two.
- The students will write an essay about their first name.
- The students will investigate prejudices in modern society.

Exercise: Give students copies of the selection from *Romeo and Juliet* below. How many references to names are there in the selection? Ask two students to read the scene aloud (a male student does not have to be Romeo, nor a female student, Juliet). When they come to one of the words referring to names (in **bold** in the handout) the rest of the class should echo the word.

Exercise: Why do we call a rose a rose? Ask the students, in teams of three or four, to create a scene showing what would happen if everyone started calling things by different names (For example, try calling "school" "restaurant" or "breakfast" "Kleenex."). Have the small groups work together for five minutes, and then present the scenes to the class.

After the scenes are shown, discuss the exercise. Where do names come from? How important is a name in establishing an identity? How are product names chosen and why? Does the class agree or disagree with Juliet when she says: "That which we call a rose / By any other name would smell as sweet."

Exercise: Ask each student to write a one-page essay on his or her first name. Where did the name come from? Do they like their name? Why or why not? If they could change it, what would they change it to and why?

Exercise: Juliet says "'Tis but thy name that is my enemy." Facilitate a discussion of prejudice based on names and family heritage. Interesting information on this and other violence prevention topics can be found at The National Campaign Against Youth Violence. NCAYV is a national effort to reduce youth violence conceived at the White House Summit on Youth Violence in 1999. Their web address is **www.noviolence.net**.

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**.

ROMEO

[Aside] Shall I hear more, or shall I speak at this?

JULIET

'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 **name** would smell as sweet;
So **Romeo** would, were he not **Romeo** called,
Retain that dear perfection which he owes
Without that **title**. **Romeo**, doff thy **name**,
And for that **name**, which is no part of thee,
Take all myself.

ROMEO

I take thee at thy word:
Call me but love, and I'll be new **baptized**;
Henceforth I never will be **Romeo**.

JULIET

What man art thou that thus bescreend in night
So stumblest on my counsel?

ROMEO

By a **name**
I know not how to tell thee who I am.
My **name**, dear saint, is hateful to myself,
Because **it** is an enemy to thee;
Had I **it** written, I would tear the **word**.

JULIET

My ears have not yet drunk a hundred words
Of that tongue's uttering, yet I know the sound.
Art thou not **Romeo**, and a **Montague**?

ROMEO

Neither, fair maid, if **either** thee dislike.

Literary Allusions

Objective:

- The students will investigate Shakespeare's use of **allusions**.
- The students will find allusions in *Romeo and Juliet*.

Facts: An *allusion* is a brief reference to some person, place, or thing in history, in other literature, or in actuality. In Shakespeare's plays, he makes many references to Greek and Roman mythology, which was a very popular area of study in Elizabethan England. In *Romeo and Juliet*, he refers to the goddess of the hunt Diana and the god Cupid.

Exercise: Ask the students to look for references to the Greek and Roman gods and to other historical and literary sources as they read *Romeo and Juliet*. As they see **The Acting Company's** production of the play, ask them to watch for these references.

Behind the Scenes: Corey Behnke who plays Romeo in **The Acting Company** production of *Romeo and Juliet* says that when he is preparing to work on a play by Shakespeare, he looks up the unfamiliar words and allusions. "Sometimes it's like learning a new language," he says, "the more you study it, the easier understanding becomes. You need to be open to the words and have a vivid imagination."

Verse and Prose

Objective:

- The students will discover the differences between **verse** and **prose** in *Romeo and Juliet*.
- The students will learn the literary terms **iambic Pentameter**, **Blank Verse**, and **Rhyming Couplet**.
- The students will examine the character of Mercutio and the styles of language he employs in *Romeo and Juliet*.

Facts: Some of what Shakespeare wrote is in verse. Some of the verse is in iambic Pentameter. Pentameter is a line of poetry having five metrical feet ("Penta-" is the prefix meaning five; as in Pentagon). An iamb is a metrical foot having two syllables, the first one short, and the second long. So, iambic Pentameter feels like a heartbeat: Short, **Long**; Short, **Long**; Short, **Long**; Short, **Long**; Short, **Long**.

One example from the play:

Romeo:

"But **soft**, what **light** through **yonder window breaks**?" (Act two, scene 2)

Some of the verse is in **Rhyming Couplets**, pairs of lines of iambic Pentameter that rhyme. The rhyming couplet is often used at the end of scenes to indicate to the audience, the other actors, and the crew, that the scene is over.

Much of the verse in Shakespeare's plays rhymes, however **Blank Verse** is a kind of poetry that does not rhyme, and is written in iambic Pentameter.

Some of the characters in Shakespeare speak in **Prose**. Prose is common

language that does not necessarily have an underlying rhythmical sound to it. Usually servants or the lower classes speak prose in Shakespeare's plays.

Exercise: Ask the students to look at the script of *Romeo and Juliet*. Point out the groups of lines that are indented on the left margin and are rough on the right margin. These are the lines of verse. Some of them rhyme, and some do not. As they examine Act two, they will notice that all the scenes except scene four are written in verse.

Throughout the play, Romeo's best friend, Mercutio, shifts between verse and prose. Discuss what, if anything, Shakespeare is telling us about his character through this.

Behind the Scenes: Doug Mercer, the director of **The Acting Company** production of *Romeo and Juliet* says, "As a director, I see Mercutio's switching between verse and prose as a sign of his instability as a character. He is unpredictable and loves to play: play with words; play with minds; play with everything!" Evan Robertson, who plays Mercutio, agrees, "He loves keeping things off-balance because he feels that is where real experiences happen -- when you're not in a comfortable situation."

Vocabulary

- Apothecary** – druggist, one who sells the ingredients for medicine
Banishment – exile
Battlement – wall around a city
Bawd – a madam in a “house of ill repute”
Beshrew – put a curse on
Cell – small living quarters of a monk, friar or nun
Churl – brute
Coil – fuss
Conceit – thought
Conjure – raise ghostly spirits as a magician or medium
Consort – (verb) interact with, (noun) small band of renaissance musicians
Dian – chaste Roman hunting goddess Diana (called Artemis in Greek mythology)
Dish-clout – dish cloth
Endart – pierce like a dart
Engrossing – owning everything
Forfeit – exchange
Hie – go quickly
Inauspicious – unlucky, connected with bad omens
Jaunce, Jaunt – exhausting, bumpy journey
Jove – The Roman king of the gods, Jupiter (called Zeus in Greek mythology)
Lammas Eve – ancient festival on August 1, in Christian tradition called “Lady Mass”
Maidenhead – virginity, girlhood
Nurse – nanny, servant who helps raise the children
Mandrake – plants that were believed to grow beneath gallows and to shriek when they were pulled up.
Palmer – pilgrim to the tomb of a saint
Paramour – beloved
Poultice – comforting treatment for an ailment
Procure – get, provide
Rapier – long, slender two-edged sword
Respective Lenity – respectful mildness
Scurvy Knave – person who acts like a jerk
Shrift – confession of sins to a priest in hopes of absolution
Shroud – burial cloth for a dead body
Vestal Liveries – robes of the Vestal Virgins, ancient priestesses
Wherefore – why
Woo – seek someone’s love or hand in marriage, to court
‘Zounds – oath swearing by the wounds of Christ, literally a “God’s Wounds”

The Playwright: William Shakespeare

- **Overall Objective:** The students will know the facts of the life and career of William Shakespeare and his continuing impact.

William Shakespeare's Life

Objective:

- The students will learn about Shakespeare's life
- The students will write an essay about writing.
- The students will assess what makes a good story and a good play.
- The students will write a will based on Shakespeare's will.

Facts: The most famous playwright of the English-speaking world was born in Stratford-on-Avon, a small town in England on or about April 23, 1564. His father was a prominent citizen or "gentleman," who made gloves for a living. As a student, William seems to have read everything available in print: he read the Greek and Latin classics, French and Italian plays, legends, folk plays, mythology, historical chronicles, and the Bible. Shakespeare married Anne Hathaway and had three children -- Susanna, and the twins Hamnet and Judith. He lived in London for many years, but returned to Stratford late in his life and died there on his birthday in 1616.

When Shakespeare lived in London in the late 1500's, England was a rich and powerful nation under the leadership of Queen Elizabeth I. Moreover, the Theater was thriving! Shakespeare joined a theater company called the Lord Chamberlain's Men (which was later known as the King's Men when King James I took the throne) and was successful as an actor, poet and a playwright. He wrote 37 plays. In writing his plays, he would often use a plot he already knew or read about, convert it, add to it, and make it his own. Seven years after his death, his friends John Hemings and Henry Condell published a book containing 36 of Shakespeare's plays, called the "First Folio." His work covered many subjects and styles, including comedies, tragedies, romances, and historical plays. Shakespeare was a well-loved writer in his lifetime; and now, 400 years later, he is the most produced playwright in the world.

Exercise: Each of us knows many stories. In writing his plays, Shakespeare adapted plots he already knew or had read. Which stories are the students' favorites? Ask them to choose one story that they have read and write a one-page paper telling why it would make a good play or film. In a discussion after the assignment, ask the class to assess what makes a good story and what makes a good performance piece. What elements from their list are in *Romeo and Juliet*?

Exercise: In Shakespeare's last will and testament, he left his house and lands to his eldest daughter, Susanna. To his wife Anne he left his "second-best bed." He left his youngest daughter, Judith a silver bowl (her twin brother Hamnet having died in childhood). He left enough money for each of his fellow actors to buy a ring to wear in his memory. Discuss Shakespeare's will with the class. Why did he leave these items to those people? Ask the students to write a will for themselves, based on Shakespeare's.

Behind the Scenes: The Acting Company's production of *Romeo and Juliet* is performed with only simple costumes and props. Director Doug Mercer says, "We felt it was important to strip the play down to its bare essentials. If we drastically minimized the sets, lights, and costumes, the focus of the play is the language. We thereby ask the audience to listen better and use our imaginations as Shakespeare intended."

Theater in the Time of William Shakespeare

Objectives:

- The students will compare modern theatrical convention with theater in the time of Shakespeare

Exercise: Review the list below with the students. After **The Acting Company's** production of *Romeo and Juliet*, ask the students to compare the conventions of the theater in Shakespeare's day to the performance they have just seen. For example, as in Shakespeare's time, **The Acting Company's** production used no scenery.

Theater in the Time of William Shakespeare

- The theater building was open air.
- Performances started at 2:00 to make the most of daylight.
- The stage was usually bare.
- Elizabethan theaters held 1500 - 3000 people
- There was a balcony, called the "inner above" to be used if needed, but most of the action took place downstage.
- When Shakespeare moved to London, he met with actor/manager Richard Burbage and became a prompter, then he became an actor, and later he became Burbage's star writer.
- Richard and Cuthbert Burbage opened "The Globe Theatre" in 1599.
- Shakespeare produced most of his plays in The Globe and became part owner.
- After the death of Queen Elizabeth I in 1603, Shakespeare had to write plays that would please the new King James I who had come from Scotland (one of these is *Macbeth*).
- The Globe burned down in 1613 during a production of Shakespeare's *Henry VIII*, but then was rebuilt in 1614.
- Characters usually tell us where they are and what time of day it is in their lines.
- Acting was not a well-respected profession at this time.
- Women were not allowed to perform on stage, so boys would perform all female parts, including Juliet and the Nurse in *Romeo and Juliet*. Boys were apprenticed to the acting companies between the ages of 6 and 14.
- Actors would have to learn many parts of a play, since up to three different plays would be performed in the same week by a company.
- Actors usually wore their own clothes unless they were portraying someone evil, royal, or female.

We are all unwitting Shakespeare quoters, sometimes **"without rhyme or reason."** If you are **"in a pickle"** because you have been **"eaten out of house and home"** and even your **"salad days"** have **"vanished into thin air,"** you are quoting Shakespeare. You've been **"hoodwinked"** and **"more sinned against than sinning."** No wonder you're not **"playing fast and loose"** and haven't **"slept a wink"** and are probably **"breathing your last."** It's **"cold comfort"** that you are quoting Shakespeare. If you **"point your finger"** at me, **"bid me good riddance"** when you **"send me packing"** and call me a **"laughing-stock,"** **"the devil incarnate,"** a **"sorry sight,"** **"eyesore,"** and a **"stone-hearted,"** **"bloody-minded"** **"blinking idiot"** and wish I were **"dead as a door-nail,"** then I would say that you possess neither a **"heart of gold"** nor **"the milk of human kindness,"** especially considering that we are **"flesh and blood."** Now that we have gone **"full circle"** and you are still waiting with **"bated breath"** since I have not been able to make you **"budge an inch,"** it is **"fair play"** for me to quit this sermon since Shakespeare himself taught me that **"brevity is the soul of wit."** After all, it is a **"foregone conclusion"** that we all speak Shakespeare's language!

adapted from
Take My Words:
A Wordaholic's Guide to the English Language
by Howard Richler

Behind the Scenes: Michele Tauber, who plays Juliet's Nurse, has been on tour with **The Acting Company** before. She says, "I love the diversity of the audiences across the country. I found it interesting to perform in all different kinds of theatrical spaces. One of the most rewarding parts of touring the country is talking with our audiences and getting to hear from them what in the play affects them, changes them, moves them."

The Theater

Overall Objective: The students will have a stronger understanding of the art of the Theatre.

Brainstorm: Creating a Theatrical Production

Objective:

- The students will identify careers in the theater.
- The students will know the collaborative nature of theater.

Exercise: Ask the students to name some of the people who work to put a theatrical production like *Romeo and Juliet* on stage. Write their answers on the board. As the brainstorm continues, present information about the various professions.

Producer or Producing Organization

The producers raise the money needed to produce the play - the money allows the Creative Team to build its vision of the play. Producers oversee all aspects of the production and make sure that the play sticks to their artistic standards. They often put together the package of Script, Director, Designers, and Cast. **The Acting Company** is a not-for-profit organization, which means that money to produce the plays comes from fund-raising through grants and donations rather than from investors.

The Playwright

A "wright" is a type of artisan who makes things that people can use. A wheelwright makes wheels. A playwright makes plays. Plays are of use to other artists - Actors, Directors, Designers - who use the script to make their own artistic statement.

The Director

After reading the playwright's script, the director decides on an overall vision for the production. The director meets with the Creative Team to assemble a unified look for the sets, costumes, lighting, and other elements. The director oversees the actors in rehearsal, often with the help of Assistant Directors and Stage Managers.

The Actor

The Cast is the group of men, women, and children who perform the play. Many people now call all the performers "actors," since this is the professional term that applies to people of both genders. The members of the cast may be seasoned actors or new to the stage. They may have trained at different theater schools that teach acting in various ways. They draw on their own experiences and understanding of life to create believable characters.

Actors usually audition for the parts they play. This means that they had to work on the part and read, sing, or dance for the director and producers before they were given the role. All of the actors had to memorize their lines and attend many rehearsals, including some with costumes and props, before opening night.

The Voice Coach

The plays of William Shakespeare are very complex. Often a Voice Coach acts as an advisor to the actors and director on the play. She is an expert on the text, the meanings and nuances of the words, and their pronunciation. She can assist the actors with the verse. She is an expert in the period style of the script and helps the actors approach the text from a unified angle.

The Costume Designer

Costumes in a play must help the actors as they create the characters. The costumes should not restrict the movement of the performers. The costume designer and her staff work within the vision of the director for each character.

The Fight Choreographer

In the script of *Romeo and Juliet*, Shakespeare refers to characters fighting. As the Director stages the play, he calls on an expert in Stage Combat to help organize the fight scenes. Each fight is choreographed, like a dance. Actors are educated in Stage Combat as part of their actor training.

The Staff and The Crew

The theatre staff - house manager, ushers, box office people, and others - assist the audience in many ways and support each performance. Backstage the Stage Managers and the running crew run the lighting equipment, move the scenery and make sure the technical aspects of the performance are perfect. In the office, Marketing people work to make sure people know about the performances and the Development staff makes sure the producers have money to put on the play.

Behind the Scenes: What draws actors and readers to the works of William Shakespeare? Elliot Dash who plays Lord Capulet in **The Acting Company** production of *Romeo and Juliet* says, "It's the language more than anything that lures me to his works. It's nectar to the lips."

Performance: The Open Scene

Objective:

- The students will create a scene based on a neutral text.
- The students will endow the words with meaning and convey that meaning through their body and voice.

Exercise: Present the students with the following exchange of dialogue. Ask them, in pairs to work on them. They should create characters. They should choose a location and a topic of conversation. Why is the conversation important to the characters? Remind the students to use their voice and body to create the characters, the location, and the meaning of the scene. Give them five or six minutes to work on the scene, then a one-minute warning to run through it once more. Invite pairs of students to present the scene to the class. After all groups have presented, discuss the variety of scenes the students created from the script.

A: I do implore that thou will hear my plea.
B: I do refuse, because I choose it so.
A: Why do you feel that you must take this course?
B: I am intent to do the thing I must.
A: I ask of thee that thou will hear my words.
B: What canst thou say that I do not now know?

Fact: The script of a play is a starting point for the actor. They look for clues in the text about the person they are playing and from that develop their character. An actor has many different methods of creating characters.

Behind the Scenes: In The Acting Company production of *Romeo and Juliet*, six actors play all the roles. Some have to play more than one character. Todd Cerveris who plays both the violent Tybalt and the caring Friar Laurence says, “The hardest thing is keeping Tybalt and the Friar different from each other. Actors use their body and voice to convey age, authority, attitude and status.” Elliot Dash, who plays Lord Capulet and Benvolio agrees, “As we switch from role to role quickly, we have to remember how each one speaks, moves and how that reflects how he approaches life.”

Types of Theatre

Objective:

- The students will be able to identify different types of theatres.
- The students will weigh the benefits of each type of performance space.

Discussion: In which types of theatres have the students seen plays, concerts, or other live performances? In what type of theatre was **The Acting Company’s** production of *Romeo and Juliet* performed? What might be the benefits of each type of performance space? What might be the drawbacks of each?

Facts:

There are three different types of performance space that are most common in the theatre:

- **The Proscenium Stage** is the most common. The play is performed within a frame. The frame is called a proscenium arch; the audience looks through this frame as if the performance was a picture.
- **The Thrust Stage** extends into the audience. Spectators sit on three sides.
- **Theatre-in-the-Round** has the audience sitting all around the stage. The action takes place on a platform in the center of the room. Another name for a Theatre-in-the-Round is an Arena Stage because it is similar to a sports arena.

Theatre Etiquette

Objective:

- The students will know standard rules of behavior in the theatre.

Note: This exercise is intended to be used **before** seeing *Romeo and Juliet* .

To make the theatre-going experience more enjoyable for everyone, a code of behavior has been established. When attending theatrical performances, remember these simple rules of conduct.

- ❖ Be on time for the performance.
- ❖ Eat and drink only in the theatre lobby.
- ❖ Turn off all cellular phones and pagers.
- ❖ Talk before and after the performance or during the intermissions only. Remember that the people near you and on stage can hear you.
- ❖ Appropriate responses to the performances, such as laughing and applauding, are appreciated.
- ❖ Act with maturity during romantic scenes.
- ❖ Keep your feet off chairs around you.
- ❖ Personal hygiene (e.g., combing hair, applying make-up, etc.) should be attended to in the restrooms.
- ❖ Once you are seated and the play has begun, stay in your seat. If you see empty seats ahead of you, ask the usher during the intermission if you can move to them.
- ❖ Never leave before the curtain call. After the final curtain, relax and take your time leaving.
- ❖ Open your eyes, ears, and mind to the entire theatrical experience!

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