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Romeo and Juliet

William Shakespeare · *c. 1595 (published 1597) · original English text*

Two households in Verona keep a grudge hot enough to kill, and their children try to love across it. Shakespeare's tragedy is swift, lyrical and stern: the Friar's counsel to love moderately is true, the lovers' courage is real, and haste, pride and bad luck still carry the day to the tomb.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

Can a true love survive a house that will not make peace?

"These violent delights have violent ends, / And in their triumph die; like fire and powder, / Which as they kiss consume."

Friar Lawrence · Act II, Scene VI

The Prologue has already called them star-crossed, but the stars do not work alone. Capulet's haste, Tybalt's rage, a delayed letter and a sword drawn in a hot hour all do their part. The play honors the lovers' constancy and still shows what violent delight, and an inherited feud, can cost a city.

KEY CHARACTERS

Romeo
ardor, loyalty, fatal haste

Juliet
clear-eyed courage in love

Friar Lawrence
well-meant counsel and a risky plot

Mercutio
wit that will not leave a quarrel

Tybalt
the feud's sharpest edge

Nurse
comfort, then a failed counsel

Capulet
hospitality and a tyrannous haste

Prince Escalus
the city's late, just anger

Paris
a lawful suitor, unloved

A NAME, AND A WARNING

> *"What's in a name? That which we call a rose / By any other name would smell as sweet"*
>
> **Juliet** · Act II, Scene II

Grades 9–10
Read the full text free at classicslaunch.org.

01 The Feud

PROLOGUE AND ACT I

A street brawl, a mask, and a name that will matter.

- The Chorus names two households, alike in dignity, and a pair of star-crossed lovers
- A fight in the streets brings the Prince's warning: further blood will be paid with lives
- Romeo, heartsick for Rosaline, goes masked to the Capulet feast
- He and Juliet meet; each learns, too late in the evening, the other's name

02 The Garden

ACT II

A vow by moonlight, and a marriage in secret.

- Juliet, on the balcony, asks why the man she loves must be called Romeo
- They exchange vows of marriage; the haste is already in the language
- Friar Lawrence agrees to marry them, hoping to turn the feud to peace
- The marriage is made in his cell; he warns them as he blesses them

> *"O Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo? / Deny thy father and refuse thy name."*
>
> **Juliet** · Act II, Scene II

03 The Street and the Chamber

ACT III

A killing, a banishment, and a forced new marriage.

- Tybalt, looking for Romeo, quarrels with Mercutio; Mercutio is slain under Romeo's arm
- Romeo kills Tybalt and is banished by the Prince
- The lovers have one night together; dawn drives Romeo toward Mantua
- Capulet, to make peace in his own way, promises Juliet to Paris and will not be refused

04 The Potion

ACT IV

A desperate remedy, and a house in mourning for a sleep.

- Juliet refuses Paris and goes to the Friar, who gives her a sleeping potion
- She must wake in the tomb and be taken to Romeo, who is to be told by letter
- She drinks the potion after a night of fear
- The wedding morning finds her as if dead; the funeral replaces the marriage

05 The Monument

ACT V

A letter delayed, two deaths, and a late peace.

- The Friar's letter does not reach Romeo; he hears only that Juliet is dead
- He buys poison and comes to the Capulet tomb; he kills Paris at the door
- Finding Juliet still asleep, he dies beside her; she wakes, sees him, and will not live
- The fathers, faced with the bodies, end the feud; the Prince calls the price too high

> *"For never was a story of more woe / Than this of Juliet and her Romeo."*
>
> **Prince Escalus** · Act V, Scene III

Love & Haste | Feud & Pride | Loyalty | Counsel | Reconciliation | Fortune

What to watch for as you read

GRADES 9–10

1. The Prologue tells the end at the beginning. Why, then, does the play still feel like a set of choices and not only a fate?
2. Juliet's "wherefore art thou Romeo" is about the name, not a question of his whereabouts. What would it cost each of them to refuse the name?
3. The Friar's warning about violent delights is spoken on the wedding day. Track every later haste that proves him right.
4. Mercutio's death is the turn. Who could still have stopped the next sword, and who will not?
5. The delayed letter is chance, but it lands in a plot the Friar chose. Hold both the accident and the responsibility.
6. The peace at the tomb is real and very late. What has the city learned that the fathers would not learn in Act I?

Quotations are verbatim from the original English text, Project Gutenberg #1513, the public-domain text hosted at classicslaunch.org/works/romeo-and-juliet/. Citations give book and chapter (or canto and line) so every line can be checked.