Baker Street Readers

Great reads for all ages

What could be worse than falling in love with your enemy?

Romeo, son of the Montagues, thinks he's in love until he meets Juliet, the daughter of the Capulets, and discovers what true love really feels like. But their two families are bitter rivals, and no one must know about their passion and secret marriage.

When Romeo kills Juliet's cousin in a revenge-fuelled sword-fight, their dream of happiness seems doomed.

Can the two families ever be reconciled so Romeo and Juliet can have a life together, or will their plans bring even more tragedy?

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- BBC R4, Open Book

ROMEO AND JULIET
WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

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TEACHER'S EDITION ONLY

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Retold by Helen Street
Illustrated by Charly Cheung

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THE CHARACTERS



The Capulets and the Montagues

These two families have been at war with each other since anyone can remember. What will it take for them to end their feud?



Juliet

The only daughter of the Capulets, Juliet is about to fall in love for the first time. What desperate measures must she take to stay true to her love?



Juliet's Nurse

Her nurse has cared for Juliet since she was a baby. Nurse loves Juliet, but will she always be on her side?

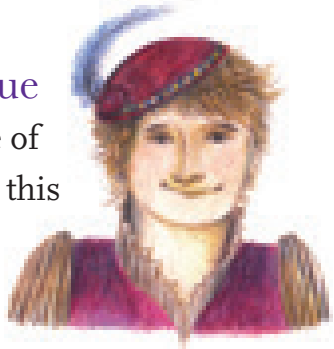


Tybalt

Capulet's fiery nephew. His challenge to Romeo will end in bloodshed, but whose blood will it be?

Romeo Montague

When Romeo meets the love of his life, everything changes for this romantic youth. But will his happiness be short-lived?





Benvolio and Mercutio

Romeo's friends. Gentle Benvolio doesn't like trouble, unlike the fearless Mercutio who goes looking for it.

Friar Laurence

Friar Laurence wants to make peace between the feuding families. But where will his plans lead the two young lovers?



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ROMEO AND JULIET

Chorus
Two households, both alike in dignity,
In fair Verona, where we lay our scene,
From ancient grudge create new rivalry
That leads two star-crossed lovers to their deaths.
See now, two servants from opposing sides
Begin a brawl that will ignite this tale.

ACT ONE, SCENE ONE
A STREET IN VERONA

A Capulet servant bites his thumb
as a Montague servant goes by.

Montague servant
Do you bite your thumb at me?

Capulet servant
I do bite my thumb, sir.

Montague servant
But do you bite your thumb at *me*, sir?

Capulet servant
And if I do, sir?

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Montague servant
Then you insult me, sir.

Capulet servant
And so?

Montague servant
Then draw your sword!

Capulet servant
Gladly! You dog of Montague!

Benvolio enters.

Benvolio
Put up your swords! You know not what you do!

Tybalt enters.

Tybalt
What? Fighting with servants, Benvolio?
Coward, you'll find a better foe in me!

They fight. Capulet and Montague, the heads of their respective families, arrive on the scene.

Capulet
Fetch me a sword.
My enemies are drawn against me.

Montague
You villain, Capulet!

There is a general fight. The Prince enters.

Prince
Enough! Throw down your weapons.
Hold, I say!
If ever you disturb our streets again,
Your Prince condemns you to be put to death.
Away! And leave the city streets in peace.
You, Capulet, shall go along with me,
And Montague, come you this afternoon
To hear what else I have to say.

Everyone leaves except Montague and Benvolio.

Montague
Who stirred up our old quarrel once again?

Benvolio
I came upon your servant fighting with
The servant of your enemy, my lord.
I drew my sword to part them but alas,
The fiery Tybalt with his own sword drawn
Came on the scene to urge them on.
I had to fight to save myself from him.
Came more and more to fight on either side
Until the Prince arrived and parted us.

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Back in time

William Shakespeare was born in 1564 in Stratford-upon-Avon, and later went to London, where he became an actor and playwright. He was very popular in his own lifetime. He wrote thirty-seven plays that we know of, and many sonnets.

The very first theatres were built around the time that Shakespeare was growing up. Until then, plays had been performed in rooms at the back of inns or pubs. The Elizabethans loved going to watch entertainments such as bear-baiting and cock-fighting as well as plays. They also liked to watch public executions, and some of the plays written at this time were quite gruesome.

The Globe, where Shakespeare's company acted, was a round wooden building that was open to the sky in the middle. 'Groundlings' paid a penny to stand around the stage in the central yard. They risked getting wet if it rained. Wealthier people could have a seat in the covered galleries around the edge of the space. Some very important people even had a seat on the stage itself. Unlike today's theatre-goers, Elizabethan audiences were noisy, and sometimes fighting broke out.

There were no sets or scene changes in these plays. It was up to the playwright's skill with words to create thunderstorms or forests or Egyptian queens in the imagination of the audience.

Shakespeare wrote mostly in blank verse, in unrhymed lines of ten syllables with a *te-tum te-tum* rhythm. But unlike most writers of his time he tried to make his actors' lines closer to the rhythms of everyday speech, in order to make it sound more naturalistic. He used poetic imagery, and even invented words that we still use today.

His plays are mostly based on stories or old plays that he improved. *Romeo and Juliet* was probably based on a long poem called *The Tragical History of Romeus and Julietta*, written by Arthur Brooke in 1562, but the story is also found in a fifteenth-century book from Italy.

Finding out more

We recommend the following books and websites to gain a greater understanding of William Shakespeare and Elizabethan England:

Books

- Marcia Williams, *Mr William Shakespeare's Plays*, Walker Books, 2009.
- Toby Forward and Juan Wijngaard, *Shakespeare's Globe: A Pop-Up Theatre*, Walker Books, 2005.
- Alan Durband, *Shakespeare Made Easy: Romeo and Juliet*, Nelson Thornes, 1989.

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