

A TASTE OF SHAKESPEARE



Companion Guide to
ROMEO AND JULIET

The Video with Teacher's Guide

A TASTE OF SHAKESPEARE: ROMEO AND JULIET

A 43 minute video available for purchase or rental

Bullfrog Films

P.O. Box 149

Oley PA 19547

Phone: (610) 779-8226

Fax: (610) 370-1978

Email: video@bullfrogfilms.com

Website: www.bullfrogfilms.com

Key Production Personnel

Writer/Director/Producer - Eric Weinthal

Executive Producers - Ada Craniford, Doug Craniford

Director of Photography - Azusa Ohno

Music Created and Performed by Rusty McCarthy

Costume Design - Antoinette Squeo

Acknowledgments

A Taste of Shakespeare is produced through the continuing generosity of The Henry and Berenice Kaufmann Foundation.

We gratefully acknowledge the generous support of Royal Bank of Canada Charitable Foundation; and our new sponsors, The George Lunan Foundation, and J.P. Bickell Foundation (National Trust Company, Trustee).

© Copyright 1997, Eugenia Educational Foundation.

This work is copyrighted and may not be broadcast, copied, recast, transformed, or adapted in whole or in part without a licence from Eugenia Educational Foundation.

Teacher's Companion to ROMEO AND JULIET

Program Description

A Taste of Shakespeare is a series of videotapes intended for high school and college students. In each video, actors tell the story of a specific play, act out the key scenes, and comment on what is happening. The purpose of the series is to connect students to Shakespeare's characters; dissolve difficulties with Shakespeare's language; and create a forum for discussion. The videos range in length from 35 minutes to 55 minutes, and are intended as an introduction to the play being taught. The Teacher's Companion enclosed with each videotape suggests class activities, topics for discussion, and additional reading.

Production Notes for Romeo and Juliet

Romeo and Juliet is a story about teen-age love, marriage, and suicide. It is also about a family feud in which young men fight and kill each other without knowing what the feud is about. And it is about parents so self-involved that they ignore their daughter's desperation, and refuse to listen to her plea for time. Because of her parents' hard heartedness, Juliet follows a more dangerous path than she would otherwise have done: a path that leads indirectly to her death.

Romeo and Juliet, even while they are falling in love, have a foreboding sense of their own and each other's death; and at the end, when only one of them is truly dead, the other can think of no other plan than to follow.

Romeo and Juliet die not only because they cannot accept life without each other. They die because the Friar's complicated plan misfired, and at a crucial moment - when Juliet might have clutched his living hand and saved herself - the Friar's courage failed and he abandoned her to her fate. The lovers also die because this play is a Tragedy, and in a Tragedy everything that can possibly go wrong, will go wrong. Tragedies follow certain conventions; and although Shakespeare did not follow conventions slavishly, he did give them their due.

Conventions of Tragedy

In a Tragedy, bad decisions and bad luck combine to bring about an unhappy ending.

The hero and heroine - and those associated with them - contribute to this unhappy ending by one or more errors in judgment, crucial steps taken in blindness. The Greeks called this situation *Peripetia*: *a decision made in the belief that the outcome will be good; but because not all the facts are known, the outcome is catastrophic.* Romeo believed that Juliet was dead, but the report he received was wrong. Acting on this mistaken report, Romeo killed himself. Juliet believed that life

held no possibility of happiness after Romeo's death, and therefore ended her own life. But the experience of a thirteen year old girl is surely not sufficient to judge whether life still has anything to offer. So neither Romeo nor Juliet need have died so young; and they would not have died if all the facts were known. Finally, since we do not know what happens after death, killing oneself in the hope of spending eternity with one's love, is a risky business.

Potentially fatal errors in judgment are made because of some flaw or disproportion in a person's character - perhaps a good trait that he or she has in excess, which prevents the person from seeing the true situation and making a better choice. This fatal disproportion or imbalance is called *Hamartia*. Romeo was not a well-balanced young man. He staggered from despondent love over Rosaline to ecstatic love for Juliet, and cared for nothing in the world except his love. Juliet's love for Romeo was similarly excessive. She offered him "all [her]self" after no more than an evening's acquaintance.. This emotional generosity, while highly attractive, makes one fear for the person who displays it.

The hero and heroine of a Tragedy will also at some point in the action defy authority, including the authority of the gods. This state of mind—an exalted sort of pride—is called *Hubris*, and creates in the audience a thrill of admiration mixed with concern. When Romeo shouts: "Then I defy you stars!" he is well on his hubristic way. Juliet only defies the authority of her parents, which in this case perhaps needs to be

done, but nevertheless brings danger to all concerned.

In a Tragedy, the hero or heroine often realizes, too late, how he or she has contributed to the fatal outcome. This acknowledgment is called *Anagnorisis*. Sometimes this moment of insight comes to a character other than the hero or heroine, and sometimes it comes only to the audience, which finally sees where all the pieces fit in. In *Romeo and Juliet*, it is the Friar who accepts and publicly acknowledges his part in the tragic outcome. He meant well by marrying Romeo to Juliet, but most certainly exceeded his authority when he performed this ceremony for a thirteen year old girl without her parents' knowledge and consent. His deception of Juliet's parents continued when he gave Juliet a dangerous drug that mimicked death. And at the very end, when he might have stayed with Juliet in the tomb until she was persuaded to leave with him, he lost his nerve and fled.

While watching a Tragedy, the audience feels apprehension, pity and fear. Apprehension is for the characters as they unknowingly rush towards their doom; pity is for the hero and heroine's increasing isolation and pain; and a shudder of fear is for ourselves as we bear witness to the fragility of happiness and the ease with which disaster might come even to us. However, at the end of a Tragedy, when the worst has happened, and the hero and heroine have accepted their fate, the audience is drained of all emotion and feels calm. This emptying of painful emotion - including

the fears and anxieties the audience brought into the theatre - is called *Catharsis*, and explains why the ancient Greeks considered Tragedy to be a kind of therapy, beneficial to the audience's mental health.

Characters and cast in order of importance

Juliet . a protected, care-free, thirteen year old girl who is abruptly told that she must "think of marriage now" - *Katherine Ellis*

Romeo, a teen-age boy, very melancholy, who (until he meets Juliet) fancies himself in love with the elusive Rosaline - *Michael Tolfo*

Friar Lawrence, a man of religious orders, lower than a priest, but able to perform certain priestly functions. A good man with a philosophical nature and a knowledge of herbs and potions. He is friend and confidante to Romeo and religious advisor to Juliet - *Brian Tree*

Juliet's Nurse a boisterous, kindly woman who appears to be Juliet's only friend, closer to the girl than her mother - *Royce Herron*

Lady Capulet, Juliet's mother, who says that she had Juliet at the same early age as she is asking her daughter to think of marriage. It appears that she and Juliet never bonded and that she is aware of and troubled by Juliet's obvious preference for the Nurse - *Gale Van Cott*

Lord Capulet, a genial, blustering man who loves his daughter; but is prevented by pride and self-regard from listening to her when her wishes oppose his own - *David Markey*

Mercutio, Romeo's best friend, a witty, worldly young man who cannot resist a fight - *Joel Jordan*.

Tybalt, Juliet's cousin and fierce upholder of the Capulet name - *Eric Methuen*.

Benvolio, a peace-loving young man and Romeo's friend. (In our production he is also given some of the lines of Balthazar, Romeo's servant. In particular, he gives Romeo the (false) news of Juliet's death) - *Stephen Bolinger*

Lord and Lady Montague, Romeo's parents, worried about their son, but unable to help since he will not confide in them - *Harry Young and Carol Strong*

Paris, an wealthy aristocrat who wants to marry Juliet - *Mark Fernandez*

Gregory, a servant of the Capulets (whom we use as an example of the aggressive, unthinking young men who die in the service of the family feud. He is seen dead in the fountain after the opening confrontation of the play) - *Marc Daniel*

Off-Camera Narrator - *Don Francks*

Key Scenes Presented in the Videotape

Scenes edited to fit a 40 minute format.

Line numbering from the New Folger Library Shakespeare

- | | |
|-------------|---|
| 1.1.5-27 | “I strike quickly being moved....” |
| 1.1.216-17 | “She'll not be hit with Cupid's arrow.” |
| 1.3.1-102 | “Nurse, where's my daughter?” |
| 1.4.11-28 | “Give me a torch.” |
| 1.4.113-120 | “My mind misgives some consequence....” |
| 1.5.18-28 | “Welcome Gentlemen....” |

1.5.51-85	“O she doth teach the torches to burn bright.”
1.5.104-160	“If I profane with this unworthiest hand....”
2.1.9-46	“Romeo!”
2.2.1-201	“He jests at scars that never felt a wound.”
2.5.18-76	“O God, she comes!”
2.6.1-14	“So smile the heavens upon this holy act....”
3.1.61-142	“Romeo, the love I bear thee can afford....”
3.2.21-156	“Come gentle night....”
3.3.17-158	“Be patient, for the world is broad and wide.”
3.5.1-24	“Wilt thou be gone?”
3.5.125-235	“I pray you tell my lord and father....”
4.1.67-71	“Be not so long to speak....”
4.3.22-60	“What if this mixture do not work at all?”
5/1/1-39	“If I may trust the flattering truth of sleep....”
5.3.91-119	“O my love, my wife....”
5.3.156-175	“Lady, come from that nest....”
5.3.301-303	“Capulet, Montague....”

Classroom Activities

A. What would you do under the following circumstances:

I. You are thirteen or fourteen years old, and your parents say it is time to get married.

2. You are strongly attracted to someone your family would not consider a suitable partner.
3. Your best friend has just been killed and it is partially your fault.
4. You are secretly married and your parents insist you must marry someone they have chosen, and it must be done immediately.
5. The person you love is dead; and you cannot imagine any possibility of happiness without him or her.
6. Your daughter refuses to marry the man you have promised her to.
7. You are a priest and two teen-agers come to you, asking to be married.

B. Write out the definitions of *Peripetæia*, *Hubris*, *Hamartia*, *Anagnorisis*, in your own words, and apply them to any two characters in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. Write out the definition of *Catharsis* in your own words. Do you feel *Catharsis* at the end of *Romeo and Juliet*? What do you feel at the end of this play?

C. Check the text for scenes presented in the *Taste of Shakespeare* videotape, then do prepared readings of the scenes in their entirety. Be sure that you understand what is happening in each scene, and explain it in writing, or as an oral presentation to the class. Discuss what is gained by not editing the scene as we have done; discuss what is gained by shortening the speeches and presenting the play in 40 minutes.

D. Research marriage customs in the sixteenth century, especially in regard to the age of brides, the

prevalence of individual choice, and the extent of the father's authority. Compare sixteenth century marriage customs with those of today - in our culture and in cultures of other lands. What advantages or disadvantages do you see in marriage customs different from our own?

E. Individually, or in groups, note the many passages in the text of the play where Romeo and Juliet speak of death and especially of self-inflicted death. Besides this being an example of foreshadowing, it also tells us something important about these two teen-agers. What do you think it tells us about them? If you had a friend who frequently talked about death, what would you do?

Recommended Text, Extra Reading, and Film

In Print:

The New Folger Library Shakespeare edition of *Romeo and Juliet*, edited by Barbara Mowat and Paul Werstein (1992).

Introduction and essays in The Signet Classic edition of *Romeo and Juliet*, edited by J.A.

Bryant, Jr. (1964)

Peter Laslett, *The World We Have Lost - Further Explored*, London, Methuen, 1983

Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500-1800*, New York: Harper and Row, 1977.

Film and Video:

Zeffirelli's *Romeo and Juliet*

A TASTE OF SHAKESPEARE

The Video Series

HAMLET

37 minutes

THE MERCHANT OF VENICE

51 min

ROMEO AND JULIET

43 minutes

BULLFROG FILMS

P.O. Box 149, Oley PA 19547

(800) 543-FROG