



# **ROMEO & JULIET**

**By William Shakespeare**

**Adapted by Joshua Castille and John Langs**

**Directed by John Langs**

**American Players Theatre Study Guide**

# ROMEO & JULIET

Welcome to APT's Study Guide, created to accompany the Student Matinee performances of William Shakespeare's *Romeo & Juliet*. Use it however you see fit - before or after the performance - whatever is most valuable for your class.

In this packet, you'll find a number of resources designed to help your class better understand and engage with the play. Use them all, or select the sections that best suit your needs. We hope you enjoy APT's production of *Romeo & Juliet*! Find more information on the play and APT's education resources at [americanplayers.org](http://americanplayers.org).

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# ROMEO & JULIET

## Character Guide

A list of actors and accompanying photos to help your class follow the plot and introduce them to the characters in the play.

Welcome to Verona, Italy - home of Capulets and Montagues alike. Let's learn more about these sparring families, their allies and enemies and, of course, Juliet and her Romeo.



**Romeo** played by Joshua Castille  
Son of the Montague family, he starts the play distraught over Rosaline. A man of extreme passion, Romeo quickly moves on when he meets Juliet. In our production, Romeo is deaf and uses American Sign Language (ASL) to communicate with his friends, family and Juliet.



**Juliet** played by Isabelle Buschue  
The only living child to the Capulets, she is uninterested in marriage until she meets Romeo. In our production, Juliet is hearing and attempts learns some ASL to communicate with Romeo.



**Capulet** played by Jim DeVita  
The head of the Capulet household, he originally thinks Juliet is too young to marry Paris, but later has a change of heart.



**Lady Capulet** played by Sun Mee Chomet  
Wife to Capulet, she finds it difficult to communicate with her her teenage daughter, Juliet.



**Nurse** played by Colleen Madden  
Nurse to Juliet, she is adored and trusted by both Romeo and Juliet and serves as a go-between and messenger.



**Tybalt** played by Rasell Holt  
Nephew to Lady Capulet, he hates the Montagues and challenges Romeo to a duel.



**Sampson** played by Josh Krause  
A servant in the Capulet household. He accidentally invites Romeo and Benvolio to the Capulet ball.



**Gregory** played by Ronald Román-Meléndez & **Peter**  
played by Josh Krause  
Servants in the Capulet household.



**Montague** played by Gavin Lawrence  
The head of the Montague household and father to Romeo.



**Benvolio** played by Nathan Barlow  
Nephew to Montague and close friend to Romeo. He interprets for Romeo often.



**Mercutio** played by Daniel José Molina  
Kinsman to the prince and a friend to Romeo, he is quick with his words and his weapons.



**Balthasar** played by Andrew Oppmann  
A servant to Romeo and the Montague household.



**Friar Lawrence** played by Robert Schleifer  
A Franciscan friar and friend to Romeo, he marries Romeo and Juliet. In our production, Friar Lawrence is Deaf and uses ASL and an interpreter to communicate with others.



**Friar John** played by Lindsay Welliver  
A companion of Friar Lawrence and also his interpreter.



**Prince Escalus** played by Jamal James & **Paris's Page** played by Trevyn Wong  
The Prince of Verona, he forbids the Montagues and Capulets from brawling in the street on pain of death.



**Paris** played by Casey Hoekstra  
A young nobleman and kinsman to the Prince, he desires to marry Juliet.

**An Apothecary** played by Tim Gittings  
A man Romeo meets while in exile from Verona; he sells Romeo poison.



**Chorus** voiced by Nathan Barlow, Sun Mee Chomet, Jim DeVita, Rasell Holt, Naomi Zhanel Kalther, Gavin Lawrence, Colleen Madden and Lindsay Welliver

The chorus verbally interprets signed lines and acts as Fate, moving the story forward from scene to scene.

# ROMEO & JULIET

## Synopsis

A description of the play, from start to finish.



An ongoing feud between the Capulets and the Montagues breaks out again on the streets of Verona. Both sides are warned by Prince Escalus that they must not disturb the peace again, on pain of death.



Romeo, love-sick for Rosaline, is comforted by his friend Benvolio. Romeo and his friends learn of a party being held by the Capulets, and decide to go to it as masquers.



Meanwhile, Lord Capulet tells County Paris that he may not marry his daughter Juliet until she is older. Lady Capulet and Juliet's Nurse talk with Juliet about her interest in being married. She has no strong feelings on the matter.



At the party, Tybalt sees Romeo, but is prevented from fighting him by Capulet. Romeo meets Juliet, and they instantly fall in love.



After leaving the party, Romeo eludes his friends, returns to meet Juliet, and they exchange vows of love. Juliet agrees to send her Nurse to Romeo the next day.





Romeo tells Friar Lawrence what has happened and he consents to marry them.



Benvolio tells Mercutio that Tybalt has sent Romeo a challenge. Romeo joins them, and is visited by the Nurse, who is told the marriage plan.



She tells Juliet, who then goes to Friar Lawrence's cell, and the lovers are married.



Tybalt, looking for Romeo, finds Benvolio and Mercutio. Romeo returns, and is challenged by Tybalt, but refuses to fight. Mercutio draws on Tybalt and is fatally wounded.



Tybalt then fights with Romeo, and is killed. Romeo flees, and Benvolio reports what has happened to the Prince, who banishes Romeo.



The Nurse tells Juliet of Romeo's banishment and promises to bring him to her. Friar Lawrence tells a distraught Romeo he is banished, but advises him to visit Juliet secretly, then to leave for Mantua.



Capulet tells Paris he may marry Juliet in three days, and Lady Capulet brings the news to Juliet, who has just bid Romeo a hasty farewell. Juliet refuses to marry Paris, persisting in the face of her father's anger.



She goes to the Friar for help, and finds Paris there arranging the marriage. After he leaves, the Friar devises a plan: he will give her a drink that will make her appear dead and thus avoid the marriage, and will write to Romeo to tell him; they can then elope to Mantua.



Juliet tells her father she will now marry Paris, and Capulet brings the wedding forward to the next day. Juliet retires, and drinks the liquid. When her 'body' is discovered, all mourn, and she is taken to the family crypt.



In Mantua, Benvolio tells Romeo that Juliet is dead. He vows to lie dead next to her that night, and obtains a poison from an apothecary. Friar John tells Friar Lawrence that he was unable to deliver Lawrence's letter to Romeo. Realizing the danger, Lawrence leaves to tell Juliet what has happened.



Paris goes to Juliet's tomb to mourn her, and encounters Romeo. They fight, and Romeo strikes Paris. Romeo then drinks the poison and dies by Juliet.



Friar Lawrence arrives to see Romeo dead and Juliet waking. She refuses to leave, and kills herself with Romeo's dagger. Officers arrive, and rouse the families and the Prince. Friar Lawrence explains what has happened. Montague and Capulet agree to make peace with each other.

# ROMEO & JULIET

## About the Production

Learn more about this production of *Romeo & Juliet*.



## Written by Assistant Director Marie Helsler

### CONTEXT OF *ROMEO & JULIET*

Welcome to fair Verona, where we lay our scene. This beautiful Italian city is home to Montagues, Capulets, and the ancient feud that divides them. Romeo and Juliet, despite being the only children of each respective family, fall in love. Their friendship, wit, and chemistry is written in the stars. This story follows their journey of discovering their love in such a dangerous place.

### THEMES OF *ROMEO & JULIET*: FATE

An outstanding theme of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* is fate- how two lovers are destined to be together against all forces that push them apart. Within the world of the play, director John Langs has built an ensemble of actors who represent both their respective characters and "Fate" as a collective. They do this by floating through scenes as narrators, voicing for actors who use American Sign Language, and moving the set's large gates. The large, golden gates are integral to the world of Verona. Both literally and metaphorically they represent the barriers between the Montagues and Capulets, predominantly between Romeo and Juliet. The Fates fluidly place these fences in various different configurations to take us through the story. In APT's production, characters Romeo and Friar Lawrence are deaf and use American Sign Language (ASL). Chorus members representing Fate will often voice the ASL lines. Working as the voices of those who sign on stage, the audience enjoys this classic tale from a different perspective.

## **THEMES OF *ROMEO & JULIET*: COMMUNICATION**

In *Romeo and Juliet*, playwright William Shakespeare provides many conflicts in his language that divide Verona: Montagues and Capulets, love and hate, light and dark, grace and rude will, youth and authority. In this adaptation with deaf characters, another layer of contradiction is spoken versus signed language. To make sign language's role in this production accessible to hearing audiences, chorus members will often voice for dialogue delivered in ASL. From a rehearsal standpoint, this is no simple feat. To assist in matching the delivery of both languages simultaneously, the **DASL team (Directors of ASL)** worked to find sign anchors and visual cues in the language. An example of a sign anchor can be found in Romeo's line in Act 1, Scene 1; "Feather of lead, bright smoke, cold fear..." which is voiced by chorus member Sun Mee Chomet. To ensure that she knows when Joshua starts signing this line, Sun Mee has memorized Joshua's first few signs that she uses as her cue to begin voicing the line.

## **DEAF CULTURE IN *ROMEO & JULIET*:**

APT's *Romeo & Juliet* (adapted by Joshua Castille and John Langs) is a collaboration with deaf artists that uses both spoken English and American Sign Language. APT made great efforts to welcome actors Joshua Castille (Romeo), Alex Olson (Romeo/Friar understudy), and Robert Schleifer (Friar Lawrence) into a joyful and accessible environment. American Sign Language (ASL) and Deaf culture are important factors to both the production of *Romeo & Juliet* and the rehearsal process. In performance, many characters communicate using American Sign Language and exhibit deaf-friendly behaviors such as waving/stomping to get attention, lip reading, and using name signs. It is important to state that while this production includes deaf representation, deafness is a spectrum. The communication modes used by deaf characters in the show are not used universally. Every deaf/hard of hearing person has their own journey, preferences, and identities. If you are interested in learning more about Deaf culture or American Sign Language, seek out deaf/hard of hearing individuals and certified teachers.

## **IN THE REHEARSAL ROOM ON *ROMEO & JULIET*:**

To keep our rehearsal process accessible to everyone in the room, we have 2-3 professional ASL interpreters at all times. Full time interpreters Caden Marshall and Havalah Teaman have backgrounds in theater which help directions to be relayed with the same nuance and passion as they are given. Besides the interpreters and deaf actors, there are many people in the rehearsal room with experience in ASL or who are currently learning. This environment is special and allows space for everyone to fall forward, make mistakes, and learn from them.

# **ROMEO & JULIET**

## **Classroom Activities**

Start a discussion about *Romeo & Juliet*.



**CHECK OUT THE “WHERE DO YOU STAND?” ACTIVITY GUIDE FOR MORE INFORMATION ON BRINGING THESE QUESTIONS TO LIFE IN YOUR CLASSROOM**

- 1) A family’s job is to look out for each other.
- 2) Family is more important than anything.
- 3) A parent’s job is to make things better for their children.
- 4) Children owe obedience to their parents until they move out.
- 5) I can make major life decisions when I’m in high school.
- 6) A friend lets you know when you are making a mistake.
- 7) A friend would do anything they can to stop you from making a major mistake.
- 8) Never sacrifice your dreams for anything or anyone.
- 9) Love conquers all.
- 10) Family loyalty should always come first.
- 11) A crush in your youth is different from genuine love.
- 12) Fate controls our lives more than our own choices do.
- 13) The consequences of impulsive decisions are often severe.
- 14) Parental guidance is essential in matters of love.
- 15) Loyalty to friends is more important than loyalty to family.
- 16) Social status *should* not determine who we can love.
- 17) Social status does not determine who we love.
- 18) Forbidden love is more appealing.
- 19) Revenge only makes things worse.
- 20) Authority figures are often out of touch with the younger generation.

# **ROMEO & JULIET**

## **Classroom Activities**



- 21) The intensity of love can blind individuals to reality.
- 22) True love requires sacrifice and compromise.
- 23) Society's needs are more important than a family's needs.
- 24) A family's needs are more important than and individual's needs.
- 25) The individual's needs are more important than anything.
- 26) The influence of friends can shape our decisions.
- 27) Loyalty to tradition can hinder progress and happiness.
- 28) Secrecy leads to tragedy.
- 29) I have been talked into things that I knew were wrong.



# ROMEO & JULIET

## News & Multimedia

Immerse yourself in the story of *Romeo & Juliet*.



## DIRECTOR'S NOTES

Program notes from *Romeo & Juliet* director, John Langs

I'm not sure how it happened but I have been in a long-term relationship with this story since I saw my first production 37 years ago.

The production had swagger, leather pants and great sword fights. I was able to meet the actor playing Mercutio who coached me in my first Shakespearian monologue. It was an experience that opened me up to the world of theatre.

Then I found the Franco Zeffirelli's movie which I watched over and over repeatedly. The Italy of it all, the incredible moonlit romance, the husky voice of Olivia Hussey, all of it shaped my taste for what a beautiful production could be.

The first real play I was asked to direct was *Romeo and Juliet*. It was a rambunctious, playful warm-hearted production but what to do when the clouds rolled in... I was out of my depth. Then life happened. I fell in love. The kind of bone deep love that hurts to think about and is almost impossible to live through. The kind of love that gives you an exquisite appreciation for a poet who can name the feelings that feel indescribable to anyone except a poet. I was asked to direct the play again and this time I could hear it in my mind's ear. Although imperfect, this production gave me a glimpse of what an artist could accomplish if they brought their vulnerability to a story and if they were brave enough to dig deep.

A bit later in life I had another chance to work on this story again. This time I had loved and lost many times and lived through the tragic experience of someone very close to me taking their own life. From this new lens the vividness of how greater obstacles, both inside and out, carve and dictate our fate found it way into the telling of the story. The blood was real now, the language personal the play had so many more secrets to reveal. There was now a familiarity and with and deep affection for the beautifully flawed incredible characters who populate Williams Verona particularly the young woman Juliet who has become so dear to me. Then 10 years later sitting in rehearsal on another project I saw an actor who communicated in American sign language in a performance that was so immediate and soulful that I was struck like a thunderbolt with the idea that this was the Romeo I had always wanted to see. Against impossible odds we made a production that brought the play to life in a completely unexpected way and planted the seeds for the show you are about to see tonight. I am indebted to so many people with whom I have worked to understand this play. Josh Castile, Brenda DeVita, Lindsay Welliver, Reggie Jackson. What incredible partners I have had on this journey. I hope that this production reveals some of the extraordinary love I have come to feel for this play and these characters. And that tonight you can see this timeless story from a whole new perspective.

**John Langs, Director of *Romeo & Juliet***

# PORTABLE PROLOGUES PODCAST

Host Orange Schroeder talks to the directors and actors to bring you background information that will make you appreciate each APT performance even more! Listen on Apple Podcast or Spotify! Produced by Buzz Kemper, Audio for the Arts.

**EPISODE DESCRIPTION:** Director John Langs joins actors Joshua Castille, who plays Romeo, and Isabelle Bushue, who plays Juliet, in discussing the 2023 production of William Shakespeare's *Romeo & Juliet* at American Players Theater in Spring Green, Wisconsin. Enhance your experience and appreciation by listening to this lively interview before or after your theater visit.

**FIND THIS PODCAST ON THE APT WEBSITE OR ON APPLE PODCASTS AND SPOTIFY!**

## VIDEO

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# SEASON SELECTS: ROMEO & JULIET

An APT blog series for more info about upcoming productions

FAST FACTS ON ROMEO & JULIET AT APT

**Playing: Hill Theatre | August 11 - October 7**

**Featuring: Nathan Barlow, Joshua Castille, Sun Mee Chomet, Jim DeVita, Tim Gittings, Kailey Azure Green, Casey Hoekstra, Rasell Holt, Jamal James, Josh Krause, Gavin Lawrence, Colleen Madden, Daniel José Molina, Ronald Román-Meléndez, Robert Schleifer, Lindsay Welliver**

**Genre: Shakespeare Tragedy/ Romance**

**Last Seen at APT: 2014**

**Go If You Liked: *Hamlet* (2022), *Cymbeline* (2021), *Cyrano de Bergerac* (2017)**

Chances are you probably already know the story. Even Shakespeare spoils the ending before the real action of the play begins.

“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 misadventured piteous overthrows  
Do with their death bury their parents' strife.”

Since the original (but unauthorized) version was published in the First Quarto in 1597, countless adaptations of the story have been shared onstage, on the screen, and in popular culture in general. Some productions have taken their own liberties and given the two star-crossed lovers an alternate ending, while others have transported us from far-away Verona to new and exciting locations, most famously New York City's west side.

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# STUDY GUIDE CREDITS

ABOUT THE PRODUCTION BY MARIE HELSER  
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS PROVIDED BY DAVID DANIEL  
PHOTOS BY LIZ LAUREN  
STUDY GUIDE DESIGNED BY ERIN MILLEVILLE

