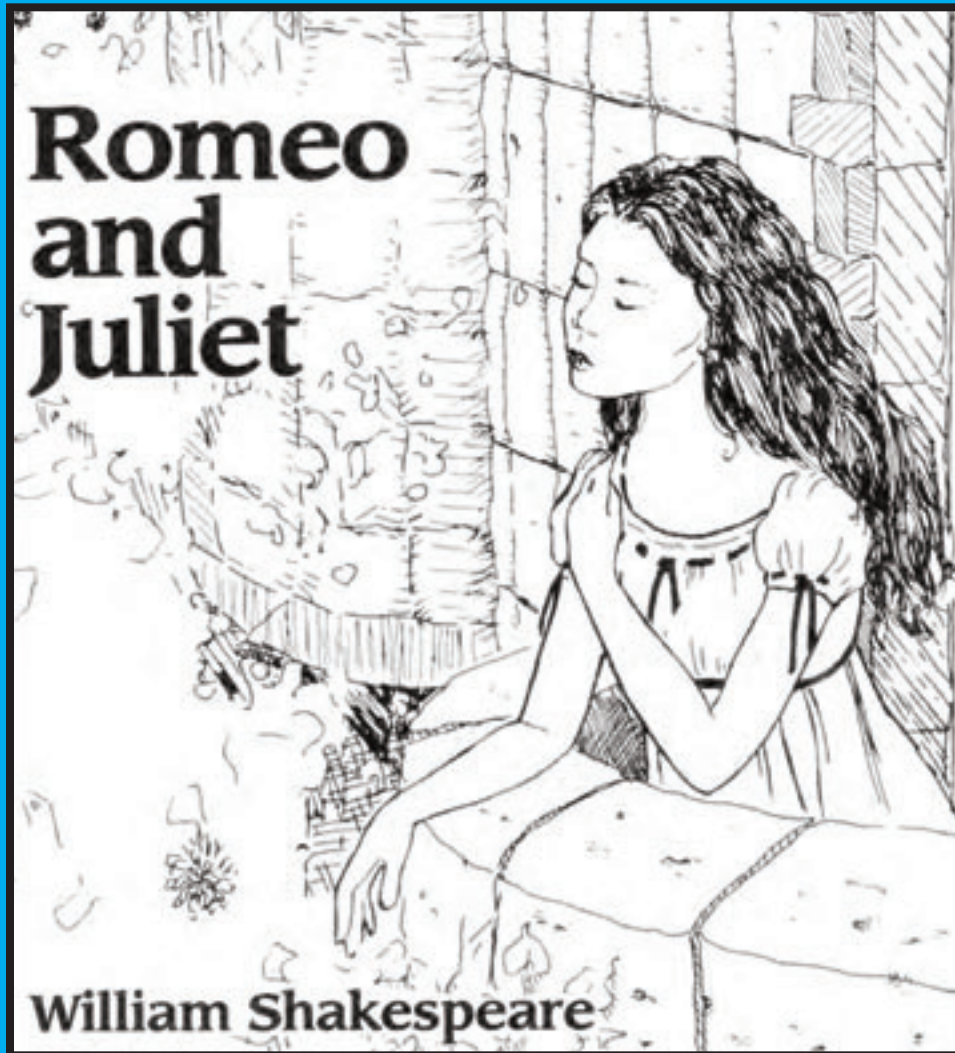


Novel·Ties



A Study Guide

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LEARNING LINKS

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For the Teacher

This reproducible study guide consists of lessons to use in conjunction with the play *Romeo and Juliet* which consists of material for guided reading. Written in act-by-act format, the guide contains a synopsis, pre-reading activities, vocabulary and comprehension exercises, as well as extension activities to be used as follow-up to the play.

NOVEL-TIES are either for whole class instruction using a single title or for group instruction where each group uses a different work appropriate to its reading level. Depending upon the amount of time allotted to it in the classroom, each title, with its guide and accompanying lessons, may be completed in two to four weeks.

The first step in using NOVEL-TIES is to distribute to each student a copy of the book and a folder containing all of the duplicated worksheets. Begin instruction by selecting several pre-reading activities in order to set the stage for the reading ahead. Vocabulary exercises for each act always precede the reading so that new words will be reinforced in the context of the material. Use the questions on the worksheets for class discussion or as written exercises.

The benefits of using NOVEL-TIES are numerous. Students read good literature in the original, rather than in abridged or edited form. The good reading habits formed by practice in focusing on interpretive comprehension and literary techniques will be transferred to the books students read independently. Passive readers become active, avid readers.

THE ELIZABETHAN THEATRE

Although Shakespearean plays have been performed in every language, on every type of stage, and have been made into films, Shakespeare wrote the plays for a particular theatre and a particular audience. To understand Shakespeare's genius, it is necessary to understand the constraints under which he had to work, as well as the conventions of the theatre of his day.

The basic structure of the Elizabethan stage is derived from the bull and bear baiting arenas and from the English inn. It had a thrust stage elevated from the ground to allow for trap doors used as entrances and exits for certain plays. Most of the people who came to the theatre stood; they paid the admission price of a penny which was placed in a box at the entrance of the theatre, giving us our term "box office." There were provisions in the gallery at an additional penny for those gentlemen who wished to sit; women rarely attended the theatre. The people who stood in the pit were referred to as "groundlings." They were often loud, crude, and disruptive, but still understood the plays and the allusions to classical mythology sufficiently to be critical of plays and performances. It is estimated that the Globe Theatre could hold as many as five thousand people.

The Globe was an open-air theatre as was The Swan. The theatres were on the unfashionable south side of the Thames River. A banner flew to announce that there would be a play that afternoon. Performances were cancelled because of inclement weather or during times of plague, when there were too many burials on that side of town.

The plays were owned by the acting companies. Popular plays were performed often and new plays were added to the repertory as they were written. There was a problem with piracy of the plays so that an actor received only his own part of the script. Still, members of other companies copied lines or otherwise pirated texts which, in part, explains the number of "contaminated" texts in the Shakespeare canon. The first folio edition of 1623 rectified much of this textual corruption.

The plays had no written stage directions, nor were they divided by act or scene. They were played without intermission. There was no actual scenery: the dialogue indicated night, dawn, or a change of place. They did have costumes and simple stage props. There were sometimes elaborate stage "effects" such as fanfares and cannon salutes. A misfiring cannon caused the burning of the Globe during a performance of Shakespeare's *Henry VIII*.

PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

1. The story of *Romeo and Juliet* has become so much a part of popular culture that you may know a great deal about Shakespeare's play before you begin reading. Brainstorm with your classmates to find out whether anyone has seen a production of the play, or a film version, or whether anyone knows the story of the two young lovers in the title. Record these preconceptions and return to them after you have completed the play to correct any misconceptions.
2. **Social Studies Connection:** Research the political life of the cities of Renaissance Italy to learn how the feuding families of Renaissance Italy and those of Elizabethan England resembled each other. In Shakespeare's England, play-goers knew about the Wars of the Roses, pitting the Dukes of York against those of Lancaster. Like the Prince in *Romeo and Juliet*, Henry VII from the Tudor line of Elizabeth, the reigning Queen, settled the feud. Similar, too, was the fact that dueling was against the law. These parallels made it easy for the play-goer to relate to the period depicted in the play.
3. Read about the Elizabethan theater on page three of this study guide and look at the diagram on page four. How do you think the construction of the Globe influenced the way plays were written. How did the Globe differ from today's theaters?
4. In this play the argument of the parents causes their children to suffer. Can you think of a time when members of your family or another family that you know have been involved in a dispute that adversely affected the lives of the children?
5. Work with a partner to find contemporary examples of feuding families or nations whose ongoing conflicts have led to violence and death. Compare and discuss your findings with those of your classmates.
6. Consider the literary forms of comedy and tragedy:
 - **Comedy** a play which treats its subject in a light or satirical manner. The plot has a happy ending. Shakespeare's comedies usually end in a marriage which symbolizes fruitfulness and optimism.
 - **Tragedy** a serious play dealing with a conflict between the main character and a larger or stronger force, having a disastrous conclusion, evoking fear and pity in the audience.

Use one of the following topics to describe briefly two different plots—one a comedy and the other a tragedy.

- a young couple have a baby
 - a striving athlete signs a contract with a major league team
 - two students miss their flight for vacation
7. With your classmates, discuss the role of fate in your lives. Do you think that fate or determination accounts for the life you lead?