

National Theatre Collection



Romeo and Juliet

Cross-Curricular Learning Guide

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Introduction to the Production

Recommended Age Group: Upper KS2

The National Theatre's abridged version of ***Romeo and Juliet*** guides the audience through this epic and tragic love story using a careful balance of traditional and modern elements. This production combines original Shakespearean text, modern and minimalistic staging, diverse cultures, and eclectic music and dance to ensure that young viewers are engaged and able to understand and empathise with events as they unfold.

One of Shakespeare's first pieces, ***Romeo and Juliet*** is possibly the greatest love story ever told. It cannot fail to leave an audience reeling with emotion and questioning the reason for the tragic ending and the actions that led up to it.

This production lends itself to a deep study of the text within English lessons but also offers a variety of cross-curricular learning opportunities.

Cross-curricular in-class learning opportunities include:

- English
- History
- Geography
- PSHE

This Cross-Curricular Learning Guide illustrates how primary school teachers can use this production to support teaching across curriculum subjects such as English, History, Geography and PSHE. This guide offers sequences of activities and suggested lesson structures.

Any activity highlighted in red can be found in the Creative Learning Activity Guide, a separate document found on the [National Theatre Collection](#) and [National Theatre Learning Hub](#). That guide offers step by step instructions on how to deliver the exercises.

Plot Synopsis with Timecodes

The Act and Scene in brackets indicate where the scene comes in Shakespeare's original play.

Prologue: Mercutio reads Shakespeare's famous prologue introducing the characters and the story.

Scenes 1 – 2 (Act I, Scene i) 0:01:13: Montagues and Capulets, two rival households in Verona, quarrel and fight in the street. Incensed by both families constantly disturbing the peace, the Prince of Verona decrees that the next person found fighting will be executed. Mercutio tries to cheer up Romeo Montague, who is lovesick for Rosaline.

Scene 3 (Act I, Scene ii) 0:07:09: Capulet announces they will hold a party at their house tonight and sends out invitations to everyone apart from Montagues. Mercutio tells Romeo that Rosaline will be at the party, so they plot to attend in disguise.

Scene 4 (Act I, Scene iii) 0:08:33: Capulet raises the prospect of marriage to his daughter Juliet, suggesting Count Paris would be an appropriate suitor. She says she has no desire to marry, but reluctantly agrees to talk to Paris at the party. The guests start to arrive.

Scene 5 (Act I, Scene v) 0:10:47: At the party Romeo (in disguise) spots Juliet and is immediately infatuated. Tybalt recognises Romeo as a Montague and is enraged, but Capulet stops him from doing anything as he does not want to spoil the party. Romeo and Juliet meet, dance and kiss. They then both realise the other is a member of the enemy family.

Scene 6 (Act II, Scene i) 0:17:51: Romeo hides from Mercutio, reluctant to leave without seeing Juliet again. Mercutio leaves without him.

Scene 7 (Act II, Scene ii) 0:19:30: The balcony scene, where Romeo and Juliet vow their love for one another, in spite of their families' rivalry. They agree to marry tomorrow as Juliet is ushered inside by her Nurse.

Scene 8 (Act II, Scenes iii - v) 0:25:06: The next day Romeo visits Sister Laurence and explains what happened. She agrees to marry them. Romeo relays this information to the Nurse, who in turn tells Juliet.

Scene 9 (Act II, Scene vi) 0:29:00: Romeo and Juliet are married.

Scene 10 (Act III, Scene i) 0:32:40: Tybalt challenges Mercutio for helping Romeo sneak into the party. Romeo enters but refuses to fight Tybalt (who is now, unbeknownst to Tybalt, Romeo's brother-in-law).

Tybalt and Mercutio fight as Romeo tries to break them up. During the scuffle Mercutio is mortally wounded and dies. Tybalt returns. Enraged and grief-stricken, Romeo fights and kills Tybalt. He flees. As news of the fighting gets out to the families, the Prince declares Romeo banished, and if he is seen in Verona again he will be killed.

Scene 11 (Act III, Scene ii) 0:39:50: The Nurse tells Juliet that Tybalt is dead and Romeo killed him. Juliet is emotionally torn over the death of her brother, but remains loyal to Romeo. She sends for Romeo so they can spend a final night together.

Scene 12 (Act III, Scene iii) 0:43:11: Sister Laurence helps Romeo prepare to leave for Mantua. Nurse tells him Juliet is grieving for Tybalt's death and Romeo's banishment.

Scene 13 (Act III, Scene iv) 0:44:59: Paris comes to woo Juliet, but she is grieving and won't come down. Capulet tells him to come back on Thursday when they will be married.

Scene 14 (Act III, Scene v) 0:45:55: The following morning Romeo and Juliet say goodbye to each other as he leaves Verona. Capulet enters and insults Juliet for her disobedience, demanding that she marry Paris on Thursday. This leaves Juliet distraught who resolves to kill herself if she is forced to marry Paris. She plans to go to Sister Laurence for advice.

Scene 15 (Act IV, Scene i) 0:51:55: Paris makes arrangements with Sister Laurence to marry Juliet on Thursday. Paris leaves, and Sister Laurence hatches a plan: she gives Juliet a potion that will put her in a death-like coma. Everyone will think she is dead and she can escape with Romeo. Sister Laurence sends a letter to Romeo to tell him the plan.

Scene 16 (Act IV, Scenes iii & v) 0:54:26: In her bedroom, Juliet takes the potion and falls asleep. The next morning, Nurse finds her apparently dead. Capulet and Sister Laurence take her body away to church, mourning.

Scenes 17 – 18 (Act V, Scene i) 0:57:27: The letter to Romeo failed to be delivered. Balthasar informs Romeo of Juliet's death. Romeo is beside himself with grief and vows to kill himself and die next to her. Juliet's funeral takes place. Romeo buys poison from a drug dealer.

Scene 19 (Act V, Scene iii) 1:00:45: In Juliet's tomb, Romeo drinks the poison. Sister Laurence's potion wears off and Juliet wakes up to find Romeo. They kiss and he dies. Juliet stabs herself and also dies. The other characters enter and discover what happened. Montague and Capulet see their hatred caused this and agree to put the rivalry aside, erecting statues to the memory of the dead couple.

The End



Cross-Curricular Learning

English

Key outcomes of the curriculum:

*Spoken Language: Physical; Linguistic; Cognitive; Social and Emotional
Oracy (Leading to high-quality written outcomes)*

- Whether using the play as part of an English unit of study or for the purposes of Foundation subject exploration (see Foundation subject learning suggestions), it is important to ensure that students have a full grasp of the narrative and are able to retell, discuss and question it with confidence.

The following activities can be used time and again for any narrative, ensuring your class possess a deep understanding of all events in the story:

WHY NOT:

- Follow a viewing of the production with a **Story Point Sequencing activity** (see Resources).
- Consolidate students' understanding of the narrative using the story points to guide your class through a **Whoosh** (see Creative Learning Activities).
- Use **And Then** (see Creative Learning Activities) to allow all students to participate in a whole class retelling of the narrative.
- Building on from And Then, invite students to use **Group Speeds** (see Creative Learning Activities), to form partners and to carry out **3-2-1** (see Creative Learning Activities).
- Gather outcomes from 3-2-1 and consolidate thinking by establishing a shared set of six story beats before inviting students to carry out **Six-Part Story Method** (see Creative Learning Activities).
- Invite students to work in small groups or with partners to carry out **Story Stones** (see Creative Learning Activities), illustrating stones they have gathered as part of home learning or a class trip to a local outdoor area.
- They will now be ready to carry out a written English activity with confidence and/or to apply their thinking to any of the following Foundation subject areas.

Reading

Key outcomes of the curriculum:

- *Continuing to read and discuss an increasingly wide range of fiction, poetry, plays, non-fiction and reference books or textbooks.*
- *Checking that the book makes sense to them, discussing their understanding and exploring the meaning of words in context.*
- *Asking questions to improve their understanding, drawing inferences such as inferring characters' feelings, thoughts and motives from their actions, and justifying inferences with evidence.*
- *Predicting what might happen from details stated and implied.*
- *Summarising the main ideas drawn from more than one paragraph, identifying key details that support the main ideas.*
- *Identifying how language, structure and presentation contribute to meaning.*
- To fully understand the narrative, **Story Points** (see Resources) followed by an activity such as **Freeze Frames** (see activities) can be used to great effect, enabling students to question and interpret language, use inference to establish understanding around characters' thoughts, feelings and motives.
- When exploring a Shakespearean text, it is important to ensure students understand the language, that they have an opportunity to engage with the use of metaphors, similes and personification at key moments in the narrative. Why did Shakespeare use them? What effect do they have?

WHY NOT:

- Use **Value Continuum** (see Creative Learning Activities) for Assessment for Learning to establish student confidence in the narrative for mixed ability group work or to allow students to express opinions to events and characters.
- Follow a Story Point sequencing activity (see Resources) with **Freeze Frames with Reporter** (see Creative Learning Activities), questioning students as to who, what and where they are, what has happened, what is happening now and what they think will happen next.

- Use outcomes from the Freeze Frame activity to create a list of characters. Carry out **Role on the Wall with Freeze Frames and Thought Tapping** (see Creative Learning Activities) to establish character thoughts around a key issue. For example, who was responsible for the deaths of Romeo and Juliet.
- Use thoughts gathered from Role of the Wall as the basis for a trial, prosecuting or defending characters for the tragic ending. Carry out **Paired Hot-Seating** (see Creative Learning Activities) to question characters using Open-Ended Questions (see Resources). Use Balanced Argument Sentence Starters (see Resources) for opening and closing arguments.
- Refer to the narrative and events to create a list of locations in the play. Use **World of the Story Mind Maps** and **Dioramas** (see Creative Learning Activities) to add detail to the minimalistic staging in the National Theatre's production. What was the Capulet house like? Which rooms feature in the play? Which outdoor spaces are most crucial to the scene? Build out the locations of the ballroom, Juliet's bedroom and the orchard to create fantastic displays.
- Interrogate the use of grammar in two key moments of the play: the balcony scene; the final scene – *Romeo and Juliet*: **Exploring the Language: One and Two** (see Resources). Highlight metaphors, similes and personification used. Divide up the scenes, giving small groups a selection of lines and guide them through **One Word Add** (see Creative Learning Activities). Once lines are embedded, use **Speaking with Animation** (see Creative Learning Activities) to create powerful moments of line delivery. Invite groups to create actions for any metaphors, similes or personification in their section and allow time for them to practise. Now gather all students together for an in-class sharing/performance. Why do we think Shakespeare selected these language tools? How do they affect our understanding as an audience?

Writing

Key outcomes of the curriculum:

Planning; drafting; evaluating; proofreading

- Each of the activities listed for Spoken Language, Oracy and Reading will produce strong foundations from which to create written outcomes that are rich in detail and language.

WHY NOT:

- Use outcomes from **World of the Story Mind Maps** to create setting descriptions that can be used as part of either a fiction or non-fiction written outcome.
- Use **Role on the Wall** with **Statues and Thought Tapping** as the basis to write a diary entry as a character from the play.
- Gather answers from **Paired Hot-Seating** to write up an interview in script format.
- Create a news report using the setting descriptions and interview answers.
- Publish the opening and closing statements used for the trial over the tragic deaths of Romeo and Juliet.

History

Key outcomes of the curriculum:

13th century Italy; the Renaissance period: Elizabethan England, circa 1594

- Shakespeare is thought to have created *Romeo and Juliet* in the early stages of his career, during the Renaissance period. England underwent significant changes during Queen Elizabeth I's reign. Religion, politics, economics, education, science, language and arts were all in flux. *What was life during the 1590s like? What might have inspired Shakespeare to write Romeo and Juliet? How would audiences have received it?*
- *Romeo and Juliet* is set in Italy and within the same time period, the Renaissance. *Why might Shakespeare have selected Italy as the location for his greatest and most tragic love story?*
- The patriarchy within the play leads Juliet to act rashly and to marry in secret. *What was life for women like in the 1590s in England? Did it differ in Italy?*
- Many audiences have questioned whether *Romeo and Juliet* was based on a real-life love story and a feud between two families in Italy during the 13th century. Is this possible? Both the Capulet and Montague family names do in fact link to names from this era: Capeletti and Montecchi. *Who were they? How might exploration of this part of Italian history help us to understand the unexplained family feud that lies at the heart of this tragic love story?*

WHY NOT:

- Use ICT, non-fiction and other research materials to explore the Renaissance period, in particular the 1590s, and use **Soft Start** (see Creative Learning Activities) to create a complete overview of life at that time: travel, lifestyle, politics, religion, art, education.
- Use research to identify a spectrum of society during the 1590s and use **Role on the Wall with Statues** and **Thought Tapping** (see Creative Learning Activities) to bring them to life and to gather thoughts about life in the 1590s times.
- Invite character groups from the **Role on the Wall** activity to make a list of activities they might do every day and use **Stop/Go with Actions** to see Elizabethan life in action.

- Research the roles of men and women during the Elizabethan era. As England was governed by a powerful female queen, encourage the children to understand patriarchy and traditional gendered roles within this context. Invite students to adopt roles of either gender and carry out **Paired Hot Seating** (see Creative Learning Activities) to gather insights into thoughts and feelings. How do students feel about their findings? Have roles changed today? Do any cultures still adhere to the same cultural traditions?
- Become history detectives and, with a focus on Italian history, start an investigation into the origination of *Romeo and Juliet*.



Geography

Key outcomes of the curriculum:

Location Knowledge; Place Knowledge; Physical and Human Geography; Geographical Skills

To fully understand any narrative and to achieve the deserved cultural currency from the experience, it is imperative that all students understand the world of the story. This is particularly important when the world of the story exists in a country other than their own and/or a location that some but certainly not all students might be familiar with. There are many questions you might explore with your class, such as:

- **Romeo and Juliet is set in Verona, during the 16th century.** *Where is it located? What is the weather like? What are the human and physical features? Are any features from 16th century Verona still in situ? How have features changed over time and why?*
- **Romeo is banished, sent to live in exile in Mantua.** *Where is Mantua? How far is it from Verona? What might Romeo's journey have been like? What human and physical features would he have passed on his way? He was 16 at the time of making the journey, was it a safe journey to make?*
- **Shakespeare chose to set his play in Verona rather than England.** *Many audience members in the 16th century would not have visited Italy. Would they have found settings and locations to be familiar? What were the geographical and physical similarities and differences between London (where the play was first staged at the Globe Theatre in 1595) and Verona in the 1590s?*

WHY NOT:

- Use ICT, maps, atlases, globes and non-fiction texts to find and research Verona, both in the 16th century and today. Use **Soft Start** (see Creative Learning Activities) to create a vibrant class display, showcasing all facts sourced.
- Use **World of the Story Mind Maps** (see Creative Learning Activities) to develop a multi-sensory overview of Verona and London in the 1590s and use these to compare the two locations.

- Use ICT, maps, atlases, globes and non-fiction materials to research Mantua and to plot the best route from Verona to Romeo's destination –if he's being sent to live in exile, perhaps your students could plot the easiest/most scenic/least dangerous route to make the journey more bearable? Use **Masking Tape World** (see Creative Learning Activities) to bring the route to life, including all features Romeo might have seen or might need to navigate along the way, both human and physical.
- Build on previous work using **Masking Tape World** to map out the area of Mantua in the same way, to include the three artificial lakes fed by the River Mincio and other human and physical features of interest. Where do students think the infamous apothecary might have been located?
- Create a guide to Verona and Mantua, citing interesting facts, places to visit and including maps to help guide a reader around the areas.



PSHE

Key outcomes of the curriculum:

Health and Wellbeing; Relationships; Living in the Wider World

- The play starts with a brawl between two warring families. Mercutio, Romeo's best friend, is killed in a later disagreement that escalates quickly. Romeo, who has sworn to love Juliet's cousin Tybalt, forgets everything upon the death of his friend and immediately retaliates, resulting in the death of Tybalt.

What would have happened if all parties had used words over swords? Could their conflict have been resolved without bloodshed?

(R15-R17, PSHE Programme of study, PSHE Association)

- The victims (Romeo and Juliet) in our tragedy are aged only 16 and 13. They are vulnerable young adults who should have had the support of their adults, have had a trusted adult to speak to, and an adult who could have supported them through the emotional challenges they faced. These two young people did seek the support and guidance of adults but chose wrongly, selecting a Nurse and Friar (Sister in the National Theatre's adaptation), who failed to counsel them correctly, resulting in their tragic deaths.

What would have happened if Nurse and Friar (Sister) had given different advice or had spoken with the parents of the two children? Could anyone have done anything differently? If they had, would the ending still have been the same?

(H15-H23, PSHE Programme of study, PSHE Association)

- Romeo purchases poison and is told that the drugs he seeks are illegal to be bought and sold.

If they are illegal, how is it possible he purchased them? Friar (Sister) gives Juliet a potion to make her appear dead – is that potion illegal? Should the punishment for distribution be the same as for the apothecary?

(H47, PSHE Programme of study, PSHE Association)

WHY NOT:

- Use Balanced Argument Sentence Starters (see Resources) and guide students through **Conscience Alleys** (see Creative Learning Activities), addressing key characters at key moments with a view to changing the outcomes in the narrative.
- Revisit the Story Points (see Resources) and identify the area of narrative you have just changed. What is the narrative now? Create new story points and use **Freeze frame with Reporter** (see Creative Learning Activities) to explore this new version of the renowned love story.
- Use **Web of Trust** (see Creative Learning Activities) to encourage open conversation and sharing of thoughts around the areas.
- Use ICT to research laws around illegal drugs to decide whether Friar (Sister) Lawrence should be prosecuted.



Reading Corner Themes

WHY NOT:

Encourage students to explore versions of *Romeo and Juliet*, other Shakespearean texts or texts linked to the narrative by creating a reading corner themed on one of the locations from the play, such as Juliet's garden or bedroom. You could use activities such as the World of the [Story Mindmap](#) or [Dioramas](#) as the basis for your class's creation.



Linked Texts

Whether you are studying *Romeo and Juliet* as your core text and wish to allow students to explore a variety of text styles and narrative versions of the play, or want to provide access to range of Shakespeare's plays, plays by other playwrights or other text styles that link to the narrative, there is a wealth of options available. All would make great additions to guided reading sessions, recommendations for home reading or to populate your reading corner. Some options include:

Versions of Romeo and Juliet

Romeo and Juliet: A Shakespeare Story by Andrew Matthews and William Shakespeare

Penguin Readers Starter Level: Romeo and Juliet by William Shakespeare

Romeo and Juliet: A Shakespeare Children's Story (Easy Classics) by Macaw Books

Shakespeare Tales: Romeo and Juliet (Terry Deary's Historical Tales) by Terry Deary

Shakespeare's Works

Bravo, Mr William Shakespeare! by Marcia Williams

A Shakespeare Story Collection by Andrew Matthews and William Shakespeare

A Midsummer Night's Dream by Georghia Ellinas and Jane Ray

Mr William Shakespeare's Plays by Marcia Williams

A Stage Full of Shakespeare Stories by Angela McAllister and Alice Lindstrom

Stories from Shakespeare by Geraldine McCaughrean

Michael Morpurgo's Tales from Shakespeare by Michael Morpurgo

Terry Deary's Best Ever Shakespeare Tales by Terry Deary, Mike Phillips, Michael Tickner

The Shakespeare Stories by Andrew Matthews

What's So Special About Shakespeare? by Michael Rosen and Sarah Naylor

Shakespeare for Everyone by Emma Roberts and Sarah Tanat Jones

Books About Shakespeare

William Shakespeare: scenes from the life of the world's greatest writer by Mick Manning and Brita Granstrom

Ira Aldridge: The Shakespearean Actor by Judy Hepburn and Ben Whitehouse

Shakespeare for Every Day of the Year edited by Allie Esiri

British Museum: Find Tom in Time: Shakespeare's London by Fatti Burke

The Boy and the Globe by Tony Bradman

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