



William Shakespeare

William Shakespeare was born in Stratford-Upon-Avon, England, in 1564. He is still known today as one of the most romantic of all playwrights and poets of all time. One of his most famous works is called, “Romeo and Juliet,” a tragic love story, set primarily in the town of Verona, Italy during the Renaissance period (14th and 15th centuries).

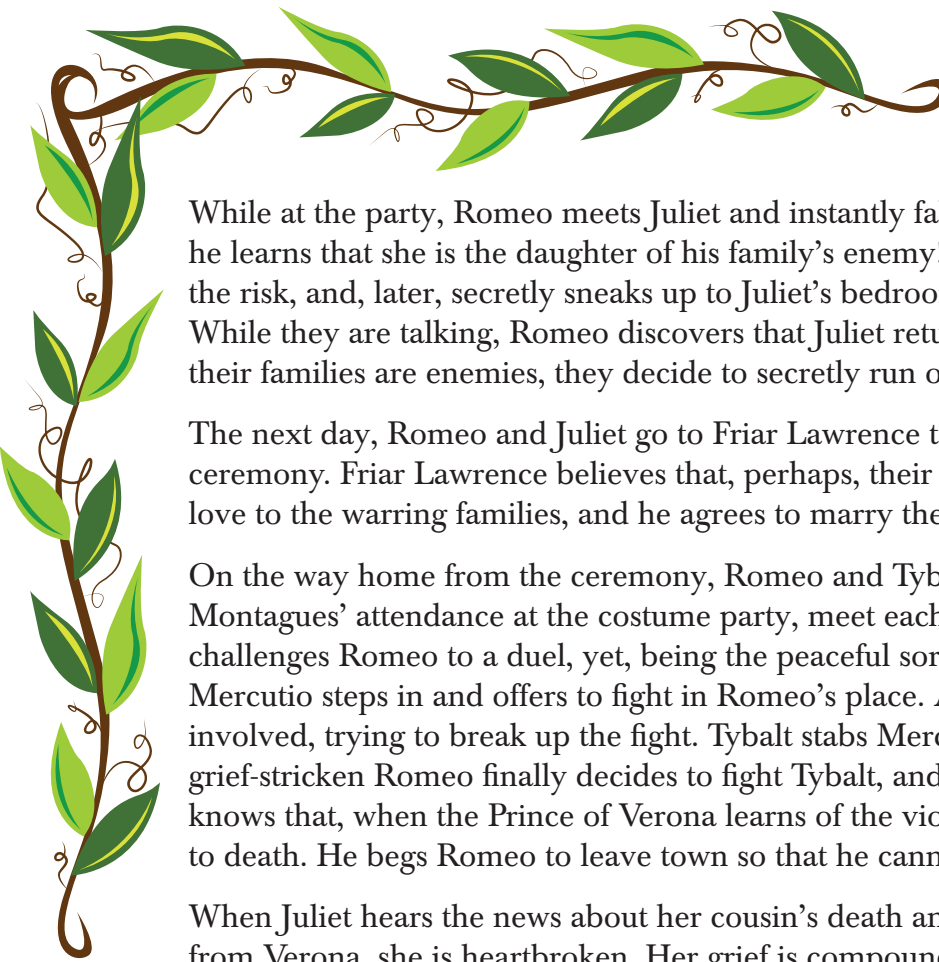


Read the adapted story of Romeo and Juliet below, and answer the comprehension questions that follow. Be sure to write your answers in complete sentences.

Our story begins in Verona, Italy, where two families – the Montagues and the Capulets – have been feuding for a rather long time. The Prince of Verona has declared that anyone who is caught fighting in the streets of town will be sentenced to death!

Romeo Montague, a young man more interested in love than fighting, has fallen madly in love with a young woman who does not love him back. He shares his heartbreak over the girl’s disinterest with his cousin, Benvolio, and his friend, Mercutio. Benvolio and Mercutio convince Romeo that he should try to forget about the girl for a while and come to a party with them that evening. The party is being hosted by the Capulets, which could be dangerous for them, as they are Montagues! However, the party is a costume party, and, being the young risk-takers that they are, they believe it will be fun and entertaining to attend the party in disguise.

Meanwhile, in the Capulet household, they are preparing for the festivities to begin. The older Capulet is planning for the party to be a romantic setting to encourage his sweet daughter, Juliet, to fall in love with the esteemed Count Paris. When the party begins, Capulet’s nephew, Tybalt, informs him that there are Montagues at the party, Capulet does not want to spoil the party’s atmosphere. He commands Tybalt to leave the Montagues alone to enjoy the party.



While at the party, Romeo meets Juliet and instantly falls in love. He is saddened when he learns that she is the daughter of his family's enemy! He decides that Juliet is worth the risk, and, later, secretly sneaks up to Juliet's bedroom window to tell her of his feelings. While they are talking, Romeo discovers that Juliet returns his feelings of love. Even though their families are enemies, they decide to secretly run off together and marry.

The next day, Romeo and Juliet go to Friar Lawrence to ask him to conduct their wedding ceremony. Friar Lawrence believes that, perhaps, their marriage will finally bring peace and love to the warring families, and he agrees to marry them.

On the way home from the ceremony, Romeo and Tybalt, who is still upset about the Montagues' attendance at the costume party, meet each other in the street. Tybalt angrily challenges Romeo to a duel, yet, being the peaceful sort, Romeo refuses to fight him. Mercutio steps in and offers to fight in Romeo's place. A fight ensues, and Romeo gets involved, trying to break up the fight. Tybalt stabs Mercutio and kills him. A horrified and grief-stricken Romeo finally decides to fight Tybalt, and ultimately kills Tybalt. Benvolio knows that, when the Prince of Verona learns of the violence, Romeo will be sentenced to death. He begs Romeo to leave town so that he cannot be caught and sentenced.

When Juliet hears the news about her cousin's death and Romeo's imminent departure from Verona, she is heartbroken. Her grief is compounded by the fact that her father is now forcing her to marry Count Paris. She seeks counsel from Friar Lawrence, who devises a plan to help her and Romeo be together. He gives Juliet a special kind of poison that will make her appear dead, although she will actually only be in a deep, deep sleep. Friar Lawrence plans to send a message to Romeo to tell him to come back for Juliet once everyone thinks she is dead. Romeo is to find Juliet in her family's tomb and take her away as soon as she awakes.

Juliet follows her part of the plan. However, Friar Lawrence's message never gets to Romeo. Instead, Romeo hears the news of Juliet's "death," and is so stricken with grief, he returns to Verona with a deadly poison of his own. He goes to Juliet in the Capulets' tomb and drinks the poison. He dies next to Juliet's sleeping body. When Juliet awakes from her sleep, she finds Romeo, laying next to her, dead. She is so saddened that she takes a dagger and kills herself.

Shakespeare's story of Romeo and Juliet is called a tragedy because the ending is not a happy one, but heartbreaking and sad. One positive result came out of Romeo and Juliet's deaths. When the Capulets and the Montagues learned of the events that led to the deaths of their two children, they finally agreed to end their many years of fighting. In the end, the Prince of Verona expresses his hope that the tragic love story of Romeo and Juliet will help keep peace in Verona.

The End





Romeo and Juliet: Comprehension Questions

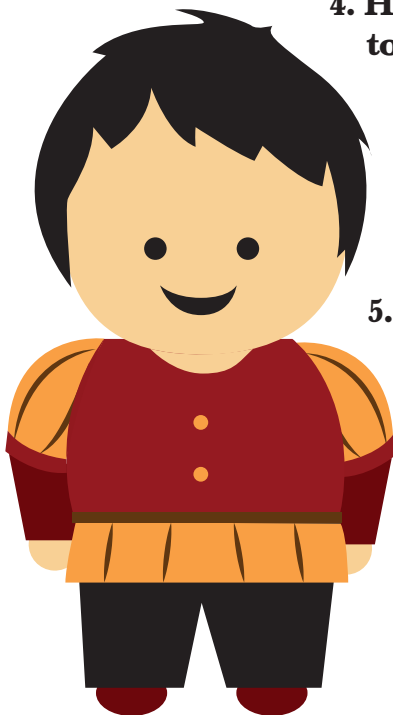
1. Why do you think Mr. Capulet tells Tybalt to leave the Montagues alone to enjoy the party, instead of having Tybalt throw them out?

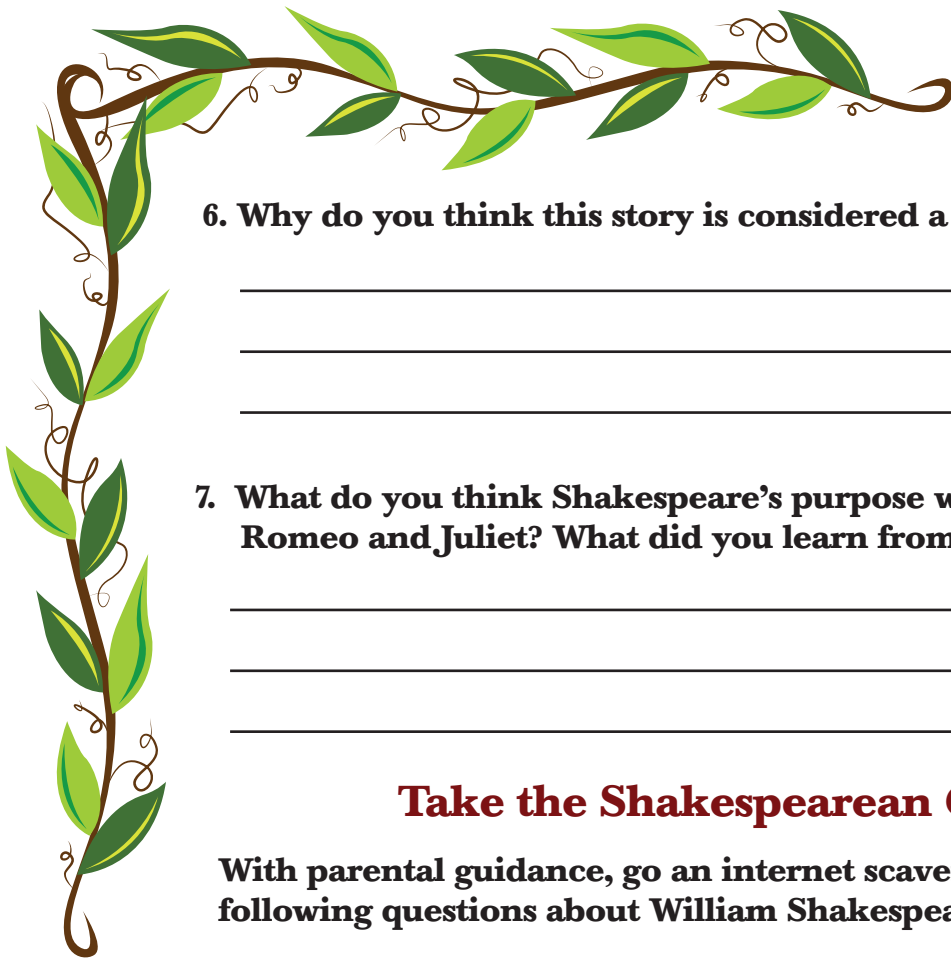
2. What does it mean when the story describes Romeo as “a peaceful sort?” Give an example of how Romeo demonstrates this characterization.

3. Why does Friar Lawrence agree to marry Romeo and Juliet in secret?

4. How and why does Juliet find herself asleep in her family’s tomb?

5. What makes this story not simply sad, but tragic? Explain.





6. Why do you think this story is considered a romantic love story?

7. What do you think Shakespeare's purpose was in writing the story of Romeo and Juliet? What did you learn from their story?

Take the Shakespearean Challenge!

With parental guidance, go an internet scavenger hunt and answer the following questions about William Shakespeare and his life. Good luck!

1. How old was William Shakespeare when he married Anne Hathaway?

2. How many children did William have? _____

3. During his lifetime, how many plays and sonnets did Shakespeare write?

plays _____ sonnets _____

4. What was the name of Shakespeare's first play?

5. Which play does the quote, "A pair of star-cross'd lovers take their life," come from?

6. In which play was it asked, "What angel wakes me from my flowery bed?"

7. Which play was influenced by the Gunpowder Plot of 1605?

8. How old was Shakespeare when he died? _____

