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Plot/Play Synopsis

Romeo and Juliet takes place in Verona, Italy where two families, the houses of Capulet and Montague, have been feuding for generations. The play opens with a street brawl between their servants in which Lord Capulet and Lord Montague eventually take part. The Prince intervenes and warns the heads of both houses that further disturbances will be punished by death. Romeo, son and heir to Lord Montague, misses the fight and through his friend Benvolio we learn that Romeo is lovesick for **Rosaline. Paris**, a young nobleman, wants to marry Juliet, daughter and heir to Lord Capulet who encourages Paris to woo Juliet at a feast and masque to be held that evening. An illiterate servant is dispatched with invitations, but, unable to read the guest list, he asks the passing Romeo and Benvolio for help. They resolve to crash the party, Romeo hoping that Rosaline will be there. Lady Capulet talks with Juliet and her nurse about Paris's intentions and Juliet agrees to pay attention to Paris at the festivities. Romeo, with his friends Benvolio and Mercutio, joke on their way to the masque but once there, instead of finding Rosaline, Romeo falls immediately in love with Juliet and she with him. Tybalt recognises Romeo but is prevented from fighting him by Lord Capulet. Later that night Romeo, now lovesick for Juliet, avoids Benvolio and Mercutio and sneaks into the Capulet's orchard where he overhears Juliet's declaration of love for him. They resolve to wed secretly and Romeo visits Friar Lawrence who agrees to marry them because he wants to end the long-standing feud between their families. Juliet's nurse meets Romeo and though angry at being teased by Mercutio, she returns to Juliet to tell her about the marriage arrangements. Romeo and Juliet are secretly married. The next day Tybalt seeks out Romeo to challenge him for his insolence in attending the masque, but Romeo refuses to fight knowing that Tybalt is now his own cousin as well as Juliet's. Mercutio however steps in and Tybalt kills him, helped unwitting by Romeo who is trying to restrain his friend. Tybalt flees but returns and is killed by the now outraged Romeo. The Prince decrees that Romeo is to be banished to Mantua. Juliet (who hears the news from her nurse) and Romeo (who learns of it from Friar Lawrence) are in despair but Friar Lawrence urges Romeo to have hope. Lord and Lady Capulet, thinking that Juliet is distraught because of her cousin Tybalt's murder, decide that she should marry Paris in a few days time. Romeo and Juliet meet and spend the night together before he flees to Mantua. Juliet is informed about her impending marriage to

Paris and when she refuses to agree Lord Capulet falls into a rage. Paris and Friar Lawrence meet Juliet and once Paris leaves Friar Lawrence offers Juliet a solution to her dilemma. If she will take a potion that simulates death, she will surely be interred in the family vault by her grieving parents. There Romeo can join her and once she wakes they can flee together to Mantua. Resolving to follow the Friar's plan (but deciding to take a dagger with her in case things go wrong), Juliet informs her mother and father that she will obey them and marry Paris. The plan unfolds but tragically Romeo never receives the Friar's message informing him of it. Thinking Juliet is really dead, Romeo returns to Verona determined to break into the Capulet vault and die beside her. Confronted by Paris, they fight and Paris is killed. Romeo enters the tomb and poisons himself just before Juliet wakes up. Seeing Romeo dead she kisses his poisoned lips and then kills herself with the dagger. The commotion brings the Prince to the tomb and Friar Lawrence explains what has happened. The grieving families are reconciled and Romeo's father Lord Montague promises to raise a golden statue to Juliet.

Background and Historical Information

1. *The Theatre and The Globe*

When Queen Elizabeth died in 1603 there were no less than sixteen playhouses in London and its suburbs. The most famous was *The Globe* on the south bank of the Thames ("Bankside") where the Lord Chamberlain's men (so named because their patron Henry Carey, Lord Hunsdon held the office of Lord Chamberlain of the Queen's Household), Shakespeare's acting company performed. Most of *The Globe's* timbers came from a demolished playhouse, *The Theatre*, which had been built in 1576 just outside the northern walls of the City of London. It had been an excellent site for it was close enough to the City so that theatre-goers could reach it easily but was outside the legal jurisdiction of the City's authorities so that there would be less control (not so much over what happened on stage but over licenses to sell food and beer, building regulations and so on). *The Theatre's* landowner was proving troublesome and shortly after Christmas Day 1599 it was dismantled and moved across the Thames and reassembled as *The Globe* before anyone was the wiser. As with the original location, Bankside was outside the City's jurisdiction and it was an area well known for other recreations such as bull- and bear-baiting, drinking and the sex trade. Shakespeare's company performed his plays at *The Globe* until 1613 when cannon let off during a performance of *Henry VIII* set the thatched roof on fire. No one was hurt in the blaze although one playgoer doused the flaming clothes of another by pouring ale over him. Today visitors to London can see performances in a reconstructed *Globe*, situated not far from the original Bankside site (see <http://www.shakespeares-globe.org/>).

BOX INSET: Shakespeare's *The Theatre* discovered! In 2008 archaeologists from the Museum of London began work on a site in Shoreditch which revealed the foundations of an Elizabethan theatre. Descriptions, maps and other information identify the site as being *The Theatre* built by James Burbage in 1576. Burbage's son Richard was a member of the Lord Chamberlain's men, the company that Shakespeare acted and wrote for and it was in *The Theatre* that *Romeo and Juliet* had its premiere with Richard as Romeo. The excavation will end shortly before our own production of the play opens but The Tower Theatre Company plans to open a new theatre on the same spot. You can watch a video about the excavation on youtube:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=savcpQFVu8w>.

Further information and updates can be found on the Museum of London Archaeology website:

<http://www.museumoflondonarchaeology.org.uk/English/> (“Excavations at Shakespeare’s Theatre”).

2. Staging *Romeo and Juliet*

As soon as you walk into the auditorium you will realize that we have abandoned the most familiar of theatrical stages which is known as a *proscenium* stage (*proscenium* means “in front of the scenery” in Latin). The audience sits facing the stage which is higher than the seats and a curtain opening and closing signals the beginning and end of the theatrical experience. We have chosen to revive the Elizabethan stage, known as a thrust stage, in which the actors move on a platform that juts out into the auditorium with the audience surrounding them on three sides. This is a more dynamic theatrical space which allows actors to be closer and more involved with the audience. The best known of these theatres was *The Globe*, an open air circular theatre (Shakespeare famously called it “this wooden O” in his play *Henry V*) featuring a courtyard where you could watch the play standing for a single penny surrounded by roofed galleries where a seat would cost **you much more**.

Our choice of an Elizabethan thrust stage is only one aspect of what, for this production, might be considered a “period” element. The play is set, as it was in Shakespeare’s day, in late medieval Italy but with a strong Elizabethan flavour in terms of costume, architectural elements and props. Yet in other significant ways our production differs from how *Romeo and Juliet* would have been performed in the 1590s. For one all the female roles in the play will be performed by female actors; in Shakespeare’s day they would have been performed by the boy actors of the company. Another key difference is that there was no Director in Elizabethan productions: the actors made decisions about movement, gesture, staging and interpretation that today are shaped by the Director with support from the Company Dramaturg. Also no plays were performed at night but were always in the afternoon during daylight. So, while today’s audience benefit from the ingenuity of lighting, sound and special effects professionals to help them experience the drama of the tomb scene, those watching the play in Shakespeare’s day only “knew” it was night-time because someone said so and the actors came on stage carrying torches!

3. Shakespeare and Italy

Shakespeare chose to set *Romeo and Juliet* in Italy, most of the action taking place in the little city state of Verona. In large part this is because his main source for the story was *The Tragicall Historye of Romeus and Juliet*, an English translation of a popular Italian story about the ill-fated love of these two 14th century Veronese. But we also know that Shakespeare, like so many of his contemporaries, was fascinated by Italy and Italians. Italy, after all, was a very different country; indeed, it wasn’t really a country yet. Whereas England was a nation-state, governed by a monarch and a central government, Italy largely consisted of a number of small city states each ruled by a prince belonging to a prominent family. These city states (Venice, Florence, Milan, Siena, Verona, Mantua to name but a few) jostled for power and influence, often fought wars against each other and competed economically; within each city state leading families (such as the famous Medici family in Florence) fought for supremacy. Italy was also warmer than England and its larger range of fruits and vegetables, herbs and spices, not to mention silks and other luxury goods imported from Asia, made it seem exotic to the English. Italians were thought to be more passionate and translations of Italian romantic novellas were popular reading in Shakespeare’s day. You can read more about Shakespeare and Italy **here [link to next section]**

A Short Essay on Shakespeare and Italy

Our play begins with a battle in the streets of Verona between the servants of two feuding families. Such feuds were not unknown in England. Shakespeare knew of one such feud personally: that between the Danvers and Long families. In 1594, which is around the time *Romeo and Juliet* was written, Shakespeare's friend and patron, the Earl of Southampton protected Charles and Henry Danvers after they had allegedly murdered Henry Long and there were warrants out for their arrest (they fled abroad). North of the border in Scotland, blood-feuds were still common, especially in the Highlands where the clan system flourished. Shakespeare, however, rejected these closer locales and chose to set his story in Italy. In large part this is because his main source was an English translation of the popular Italian story of Romeo and Juliet, the two fated lovers in 14th century Verona, but in part it was also because Elizabethans were fascinated by all things Italian. Elizabeth and several of her courtiers spoke Italian fluently and Italian novellas, poems and histories were popular. Italy was an important destination for gentleman travelers who soaked up Italy's classical Roman ruins and its art, music and architecture. Some English students studied medicine and law at the ancient universities in Padua and Bologna while English merchants lived in ports such as Venice and Genoa and commercial and banking centres such as Florence and Milan. Some English Catholics, who opposed the new Protestant regime that came with the accession of Queen Elizabeth in 1558, lived at the Papal Court in Rome. Shakespeare always had his eye on what would appeal to his audience and nearly a third of his plays are set in Italy, notably *The Merchant of Venice*, *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *Much Ado About Nothing* (Messina, Sicily), *All's Well That Ends Well* (Florence), *The Taming of the Shrew* (Padua) and of course *Romeo and Juliet* (Verona and Mantua).

Italy meant different things to different people. For some it was a place of culture, learning and civilization, for others the hotbed of intrigue and espionage against Protestantism (indeed an Italian, Roberto Ridolfi, was executed for plotting in 1570 to assassinate Elizabeth and replace her with the Catholic Mary, Queen of Scots). To judge from the plays written by Shakespeare and later playwrights who set their tales of murder and intrigue in Italy (known as the revenge tragedies), English men and women of the time thought of Italians as passionate people often motivated by greed and desire and prone to violence. *Romeo and Juliet* offers us a more complicated picture of course. Romeo and Juliet may be motivated by love - and love at first sight for that matter - and certainly Tybalt fits the character of the typical hot-headed Italian youth out for revenge and Mercutio one possessing charisma, charm and wit, but few (if any) characters in this play are driven purely by base motives. Paris truly loves Juliet, and her father, if attracted to the higher station in life Juliet will gain if she marries Paris, is not simply motivated by greed and ambition but also by a desire to see her well settled. The Prince shows mercy, not vindictiveness, when he banishes Romeo rather than sentencing him to death.

Yet Verona's Prince finds it difficult to control the feuding families. This is a place where outbursts of violence can happen at any time, where private disagreements can spill out from the magnificent palaces of the leading families onto the streets and piazzas of the city. However we don't actually get much detail about this tumultuous place and only one specific landmark, the name of the Prince's fortress, is mentioned. All we know is that the play takes place in "fair Verona", that there are high walls protecting the Capulet's orchard, some imposing stone buildings (Juliet's house), city walls, gardens and a graveyard with impressive family vaults. In other words, in asking his Elizabethan audience to imagine Verona Shakespeare knew that they would be putting together the stories they had heard or read with their experience of their own

city, London, which also had walled orchards and gardens, extensive fields, meadows and forests outside the city walls, imposing houses and palaces belonging to the nobility and wealthy merchants within. London was infamous for its riotous and unruly apprentices and for some watching a performance of the play the street brawls of Verona would have seemed perfectly familiar. Italy is a mirror of, even a metaphor for, England. Furthermore, given the censorship of plays and other writings, Shakespeare could get away with social, political and religious commentary and criticism which might have been less possible if he'd chosen to set the play in England.

However general his description of Verona is, there are occasions in the play where something distinctively Italian is revealed. The most significant is the setting for most of Act Five - the churchyard and family burial vault of the Capulets. English noble families buried their dead in the local parish church, often erecting an elaborate monument or memorial to them with an effigy and a plaque extolling their virtues. One English visitor to Italy, Fynes Moryson, thought his readers would be fascinated by the very different customs there: "through all Italy, they are not buried in several (individual) graves dug for that purpose, as commonly with us, but in caves or vaults either private to their families or common to the people. And they are buried in their apparel and have their faces covered with linen...". So the play's final scenes happen in a place that Elizabethans would have found exotic, mysterious and dangerous.

Another difference between England and Italy was that Italy was not a unified single country in Shakespeare's day (unification happened in the 19th century), but a number of independent city states ruled by a Prince, himself the head of a leading 'noble' family. This gave a particular flavour to Italian politics and society which Elizabethans found exciting. No wonder then that Shakespeare thought it appropriate to set so many of his plays there. In fact, some scholars have suggested that Shakespeare must have visited Italy himself during the "lost" years between 1578 and 1592 when we have no conclusive evidence as to his whereabouts or what he was up to. For more information on Shakespeare's life see our study guide: http://www.nac-cna.ca/pdf/eth/shakespeare_an_overview.pdf

Principle Characters

House of Capulet:

Juliet, daughter to Lord and Lady Capulet, falls in love with Romeo and agrees to marry him secretly. With Friar Lawrence, hatches a plot to keep her and Romeo together and when it fails she dies at his side in the tomb

Lord Capulet, head of the family and Juliet's father, concerned with his family's honour, he prevents Tybalt from fighting Romeo at the masque and later decides that Juliet should marry Paris

Lady Capulet, wife to Lord Capulet and Juliet's mother, supports her husband's decision that Juliet should marry Paris

Tybalt, nephew to Lady Capulet and Juliet's cousin, determined to defend the Capulet's honour when Romeo attends the masque disguised and challenges him the next day; killed by Romeo in revenge for Mercutio's murder

Nurse, Juliet's nurse from birth and now her servant and confidant

House of Montague:

Romeo, son to Lord and Lady Montague, in love with Rosaline but falls for Juliet at the masque and dies with her in the tomb; his intervention between Tybalt and Mercutio inadvertently leads to Mercutio's death and Romeo kills Tybalt in revenge

<i>Lord Montague</i> , head of the family and Romeo's father	} both are concerned about Romeo's
<i>Lady Montague</i> , wife to Lord Montague and Romeo's mother	} love-sickness, first for Rosaline and then for Juliet

Benvolio, Lord Montague's nephew and Romeo's friend. His name references someone who wishes well for everyone.

Others:

Prince Escalus, ruler of Verona, seeking ways to bring peace to the city state which he governs

Count Paris, a kinsman to the Prince and suitor to Juliet, confronts Romeo at the tomb and is killed by him

Mercutio, a kinsman to the Prince and Romeo's friend. Intervenes when Romeo refuses to fight Tybalt and is killed. His name references his mercurial character, quick-witted and high spirited.

Friar Lawrence, a Franciscan friar who is knowledgeable about herbs and medicines, counsellor to Romeo and later to Juliet, he agrees to marry them hoping it will heal the feud between the two families

Lesser Characters

House of Capulet:

Petruchio, follower of Tybalt

Peter, servant to the Nurse

Sampson, Gregory and Clown, servants to the Capulets

Cousin Capulet, a kinsman of Lord Capulet

House of Montague:

Abram, servant to the Montagues

Balthasar, Romeo's servant

Others:

Apothecary, a pharmacist of Mantua who supplies poison to Romeo*

Page, servant to Paris

Friar John, a Franciscan friar who is unable to deliver Friar Lawrence's letter telling Romeo of the plot he has hatched with Juliet*

Captain and officers of the watch

Servants, musicians and torchbearers

*scenes omitted in our production

Themes

1. Love and Marriage in Shakespeare's England

In 1600 Henry Swinburne published a treatise about marriage. At the heart of a successful marriage he argued was "perfect consent" and although this usually happened in a church ceremony attended by friends and family, an exchange of vows might happen in private and they made the marriage legal. Indeed, historians know a lot about courtships and relationships from the many cases that appeared before the judges of the church courts usually because one partner accused another of forsaking their vows. For the majority of young men and women in Shakespeare's day, their choice of partner was their own to make especially because most had left their family home as late teens or in their early twenties to serve apprenticeships or to work. So when they decided to marry, most were in their mid-twenties. Shakespeare himself married on the young side (he was 18), but his wife, Anne Hathaway, was 26.

However, for sons and daughters of the wealthier sort, particularly the aristocracy, parents often made the decision as a good marriage was a crucial means to ensuring financial well-being, dynastic security and improved social status for the family. Parents negotiated marriages and there were dowries (property and goods brought into the marriage by the wife for her husband's use) and dowers (property and goods that would be the wife's to use should her husband die and their children inherit his property), and other arrangements to make.

Romeo and Juliet is a play that would have seen both familiar and foreign to Elizabethans. Most in attendance would have been very struck by how unusually young these two marriage partners

were (Juliet's Nurse tells us is around fourteen, Romeo probably only a few years older) and perhaps thought of this as an “Italian” feature. The man who marries them, Friar Lawrence, was also distinctly Italian since all of England’s friaries had been dissolved by Henry VIII in the 1530s and 1540s. On the other hand they knew that Juliet was breaking the rules by being “too quickly won” (Act Two, Scene One, line 145) and agreed that perhaps she should prolong the wooing because according to the marriage advice books of the time, courtships should be long affairs in which go-betweens would be used to convey messages, promises, assignations and gifts, particularly those such as rings which signified an exchange of vows before witnesses. Such formal exchanges of vows were thus a serious matter and for many couples they marked the beginning of their sexual relationship. This might explain why historians have found that a third of brides were pregnant at the time of their church ceremony – they thought it only right to start enjoying each other as soon as they’d exchanged vows anticipating the church wedding to come. Shakespeare himself married Anne Hathaway when she was pregnant with their daughter Susanna.

At the time Shakespeare wrote *Romeo and Juliet* times were hard and those young men and women standing in the courtyard of the playhouse must have wondered if they could ever afford to be married. Records tell us that perhaps as many as 20% of them never did.

BOX INSET: Interview with the two men and two women playing Romeo and Juliet in our production focusing on issues of love and courtship, yesterday and today.

2. The Natural World

Shakespeare often referenced gardens and gardening, plants and animals in his plays. In *Richard II*, for example, the garden becomes a metaphor for the kingdom – Richard has failed to prune and manage it carefully leading it to wrack and ruin. Gardens yielded herbs which could heal if used properly or harm if used incorrectly or with evil intent. This doubling or double-edginess comes up time and time again in *Romeo and Juliet*. We see it for example when Juliet struggles with the knowledge that Romeo, her good husband has killed her cousin Tybalt in Act Three, Scene Two, beginning line 75:

Juliet O serpent heart, hid with a flow’ring face!
 Did ever dragon keep so fair a cave?
 Beautiful tyrant, fiend angelical,
 Dove-feathered raven, wolvis-ravens lamb
 Depisèd substance of divinest show!
 Just **opposite** to what though justly seem’st,
 A damnèd saint, an honourable villain!

How can villains be honourable? Saints damned? How can ravens be doves and lambs, wolves? Can dragons really sleep in beautiful lairs and serpents have attractive faces? In fact, we’ve already learned in the play that the natural world has its mysteries. Act Two Scene Two opens with Friar Lawrence “alone with his basket” musing to himself as he gathers herbs at daybreak.

He celebrates all that mother nature has given humanity (beginning line 15):

O, mickle [great] is the powerful grace that lies
In plants, herbs, stones, and their true qualities:
For nought so vile that on the earth doth live
But to the earth some special good doth give,
Nor aught so good but strained from that fair use
Revolts from true birth, stumbling on abuse.
Virtue itself turns vice, being misapplied,
And vice sometime by action dignified.

Friar Lawrence tells us that even the vilest creature or element does some good for the world and even something with the best qualities can be turned into something harmful and this is true of human virtues and vices too.

The natural world features hugely in the play and it is especially interesting that Shakespeare chose to give this evocative speech to a Catholic friar, a figure who in real life no Elizabethan would have met and whose form of faith was outlawed in Shakespeare's day. We've already encountered Juliet's reference to serpents, dragons, doves, ravens, wolves and lambs. Elsewhere in the play we learn that plantain leaves are good for injured shins and that wormwood oil spread on a wet nurse's nipples encourages babies to stop taking milk. We encounter references to mice, crows, worms, grubs, horses, grasshoppers, spiders, toads, nightingales, larks, cockerels, squirrels and even the tithe pig, given by parishioners to a new clergyman on taking up his job in their community.

As the Friar points out, herbs, plants, minerals and animals were the main sources of Elizabethan medicine. In a scene we've had to make cuts to (Act Five, Scene One) Romeo on hearing of Juliet's death visits an apothecary in Mantua to buy poison. Apothecaries were like today's pharmacists although their wares more resembled today's traditional and natural Chinese medicines than the artificial productions of the pharmaceutical industry. Romeo offers a very evocative description (lines 44-46) of the shop and the sources of its medicines: "a tortoise hung, / An alligator stuffed, and other skins / Of ill-shaped fishes", "Green earthen pots, bladders and musty seeds, / Remnants of packthread and old cakes of roses." Here again we have the doubling of meaning: to the distraught Romeo his purchase is "cordial and not poison" and, of course, Juliet hopes the Friar's "distilling liquor", though invoking the semblance of death, will give the lovers a long life together.

For Elizabethans there were intimate connections between the natural world and the spiritual world, the world of the living and the world of the dead. In one of the most powerful scenes in Shakespeare, (Act Four, Scene Three) Juliet sits alone facing her future. She lets her imagination run riot so that she can stare even the worse-case scenario in the face and in doing so shows far more courage than Romeo. What if the Friar's potion fails to work and she wakes up to be married to Paris? What if the Friar, to hide the fact that he secretly married Romeo and Juliet has

given her poison to silence her? What if she wakes before Romeo arrives and dies of suffocation? Or, worse, what if she has to face “the terror of the place”, suffering a living death in the vault of her ancestors? (lines 43-53):

Where bloody Tybalt, yet but green in earth,
Lies fest'ring in his shroud, where, as they say,
At some hours in the night spirits resort --
Alack, alack, is it not like that I,
So early waking what with loathsome smells,
And shrieks like mandrakes torn out of the earth,
That living mortals, hearing them, run mad --
O, if I wake, shall I not be distraught,
Environèd with all these hideous fears?

Elizabethans believed that the mandrake root held special properties for in appearance it strongly resembled the human body. Some thought it shrieked as it was ripped out of the earth and anyone hearing it might die but John Gerard poured scorn on such ideas in his *Herball, General History of Plants* which was first published in 1597 shortly after *Romeo and Juliet* was written. As Friar Lawrence knew, the mandrake root might be an aid to a good night's sleep or a cure for jaundice, but misused it could also be deadly. The mandrake root was a very appropriate symbol of the choices facing Juliet and she, alone in the play, seems to have had some inkling of how things might turn out.

3. Queen Mab and the World of Dreams

In Act One, Scene Four, Romeo and Mercutio joke on their way to the masque. Their friendship is based on trust, wit, common experience and a shared joy in mixing it up with words. Here is an example, beginning with line 49:

ROMEO And we mean well in going to this masque,
 But 'tis no wit to go.
MERCUTIO Why, may one ask?
ROMEO I dreamt a dream tonight.
MERCUTIO And so did I.
ROMEO Well, what was yours?
MERCUTIO That dreamers often lie.
ROMEO In bed asleep, while they do dream things true.

Mercutio then offers one of the longest speeches in the play, a witty and imaginative account of Queen Mab, Queen of the Fairies, describing in detail how she encourages all sorts of humans to dream: lovers dream of love, lawyers of fees, courtiers of suits (petitions), parsons of benefices (church livings), soldiers of cutting throats **in what amounts to a savage criticism of these pillars of his society.** Romeo interrupts him:

ROMEO Peace, peace Mercutio, peace!

Thou talk'st of nothing.

MERCUTIO True, I talk of dreams,

Which are the children of an idle brain,

Begot of nothing but vain fantasy,

Which is as thin of substance as the air

And more inconstant than the wind...

Elizabethans knew that a good night's sleep was essential for a healthy body (on the other hand they frowned upon daytime naps for these were surely a sign of laziness or sloth). Those having trouble sleeping were encouraged to make sure their bedrooms were well aired, that their bed linen was clean and fresh or to take sleep-encouraging herbal drinks featuring soaked lettuce or poppy seeds. For those suffering from too much sleep, taking something hot like mustard seeds were recommended.

In Shakespeare's time there were different views on what dreams were and some of these we still share today. Eating and drinking late, for example, was thought to encourage dreams, though, unlike today perhaps, Elizabethans associated particular foods and beverages with certain types of dream. Thomas Hill, the most popular writer on the subject, thought our minds continued working as we slept and that dreams could help solve life's problems. Many believed that the dream world was another world, one influenced by God and the angels or perhaps the devil and his demons. Others held that dreams foretold the future. However, Thomas Nashe, whose book *The Terrors of the Night* appeared in 1594 and certainly influenced Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, thought all of this was nonsense. "A dream", he wrote, "is nothing else but a bubbling scum or froth of the fancy, which the day hath left undigested; or an afterfeast made of the fragments of idle imaginations." Mercutio echoes his words: dreams are "the children of an idle brain / Begot of nothing but vain fantasy". Romeo, on the other hand, is not so sure. He eventually tires of Mercutio's sounding off about Queen Mab and humanities silly dreams of fortune and success – "Thou talk'st of nothing" he tells Mercutio – and he hopes his dream of love will prove to be true. Mercutio starts everything by saying his own dream was "That dreamers often lie". Romeo picks up on the pun - "In bed asleep, while they do dream things true" - but Mercutio is having none of it!

Activities

1. Cutting Shakespeare

Several months before rehearsals began Director Peter Hinton, Assistant Director Diane

D'Aquila, Dramaturg Paula Danckert and Company Historian David Dean worked through *Romeo and Juliet* line by line, scene by scene, act by act comparing the various versions from his time. Our task: to shave some 600 lines to meet production requirements while keeping the plot, themes and characters as deep and as rich as if we could put on the play in its entirety. **We came close to cutting the scene** where Friar John reports to Friar Lawrence that he wasn't able to deliver the message to Romeo because he was put into quarantine due to the fear of plague (Act Five, Scene Two) **and we cut much from** the previous scene where Romeo buys his poison. These were hard choices. Your activity is to find a way to perform *Romeo and Juliet* in FIVE minutes and less! In groups of five, discuss what you think are the most essential moments in the play while keeping true to the story, convey the action and reveal something about the characters. Then put the play into your own words in a five minute scene. For an extra challenge, then reduce your play to a three minute scene and then a one minute scene! Once you've completed this task you might enjoy looking at the Reduced Shakespeare Company website: <http://www.reducedshakespeare.com/>

2. Music in Shakespeare

In *Twelfth Night*, Duke Orsino says "If music be the food of love, play on..." Music is also important in *Romeo and Juliet* and for our production we've been inspired not only by Renaissance music but also forms of music from Mediterranean cultures. If you were to make a 2010 soundtrack for *Romeo and Juliet*, what would you include to capture the turnings in the plot and the feelings of the characters? Would The Clash's *Should I Stay or Should I Go?* (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V1Gn0e7kvTA>) work for the scene in which Juliet says "parting is such sweet sorrow?" (Act Two, Scene Two)? Would Arcade Fire's *My Body is a Cage?* be suitable for her death scene (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mxrhghtQf_s)? Even if you haven't seen our production, discuss with others which three scenes in the play you think would be especially enhanced by music and explain why.

3. Can Love Heal Divisions?

Shakespeare thought so – the deaths of Romeo and Juliet reconciled the two feuding families. Watch the documentary *Romeo and Juliet in Sarajevo* (dir. John Zaritsky, NFB, 1994) about the mid-twenties couple Bosko Brkic (a Christian Bosnian Serb) and Admira Ismic (a Muslim Bosniak) who were killed fleeing the city during the civil war in the former Yugoslavia. You can find out more about the film on the NFB website: <http://www.onf-nfb.gc.ca/eng/collection/film/?id=32791>

4. The Environment and Us

Under **Themes** we learned that Shakespeare tells us quite a lot about the importance of the natural world and mother nature in *Romeo and Juliet*. Our attitudes to the natural world have changed enormously since his day but while we have certainly exploited the world's resources in ways he could never have imagined, in recent years we have been turning back to the natural world with protection and preservation on our minds. Indeed, there has even been a movement towards the sorts of healing Friar Lawrence would have valued. We now look more and more for herbal medicines (St. John's Wort for depression, aloe vera for sunburn) and "herbal" or

“natural” ingredients in the cosmetics and hair products we buy. Visit your local pharmacist to see what natural ingredients are being advertised and promoted in medicines and cosmetics. Think about your own choices and why you make them. Do some investigations into homeopathic and naturopathic medicine (begin with the website of The Canadian Association of Naturopathic Doctors (<http://www.cand.ca/index.php?id=aboutnd&L=0>) and consider why the Ontario Health Insurance Plan (OHIP) does not cover most of these treatments.

5. Everyday Life

When we listen to Friar Lawrence or see the domestic scenes in the play we are reminded of just how much our own lives are governed by technology and how much has changed since Shakespeare’s day. Most of us don’t even grow our own food any more, let alone make our own medicines or sew our own clothes and we depend on modern modes of transport and communication. Would Romeo have received the news about the plot if he could have been texted or called on his cell phone or nudged on Facebook? Do some research into the everyday lives of Elizabethans in your library or online at <http://www.elizabethan.org/compendium/> In groups of five, discuss what you have discovered and identify some key activities (such as preparing food, washing clothes, travelling, communicated with others) which you think are very different from today. Consider the possibility that the way Elizabethans did things were better for the environment and closer to nature than they way we do them now.

6. Plotting *Romeo and Juliet*

Shakespeare’s play moves along very quickly with some very dramatic scenes full of energy. Write one sentence summaries of the main events in the play in which Romeo and Juliet are directly involved along with the choices they make. Then come up with a very different scenario. Here is an example:

Summary: “Romeo and Juliet meet at the party, they fall in love and decide to secretly marry.”

Alternative: “Romeo and Juliet meet at the party, Romeo tries to speak with her but she brushes him off wanting only to meet Paris.”

Here are some more summaries for which you can provide the alternatives:

- “When Tybalt challenges Romeo, who refuses to fight because he has secretly married Tybalt’s cousin Juliet, Romeo’s friend Mercutio steps in and is killed when Romeo tries to hold him back to keep him safe.”

- “Juliet’s father, concerned that his daughter is miserable over her cousin’s murder, decides to hasten her betrothal and marriage to Paris in the hope that it will bring her happiness as well as being a great match for the family’s honour and prestige.”

- “Juliet, on waking and finding her beloved Romeo dead, kisses his poisoned lips and then takes the dagger she had smuggled into the tomb and kills herself.”

- “Lord Montague and Lord Capulet, on learning that their beloved children are dead, are reconciled and vow to end their feud and bring peace to the streets of Verona.”

You can act these out with others. Discuss how your alternative choices might affect the characters of the play and its ending.

7. Relating to Parents

How would you describe Juliet's relationship with her parents? Do you think her father and mother act in her own best interest by pushing for her marriage to Paris? Do you think her mother agrees with her father? Think about these questions and then organize a debate around the proposition "Juliet's mother and father only want Juliet to be happy". Take sides, either for or against the proposition and organize a formal debate between the two sides. Those in favour, for example, might argue that her father and mother have made the right decision, while those against might argue that they are being authoritarian and unfair .

8. Reviewing the Play

After you have seen our production write your own review of the play and then compare it to those that appear in the *Ottawa Citizen* or on air at CBC Ottawa 91.5 What did you catch that they didn't? On what did you agree or differ? Would you change your review having heard or read the theatre critics?

Discussion questions

1. Before you see the play:

- What do you know about *Romeo and Juliet*? What are your expectations? We all know that it is about two young lovers who die for their love.... do you think that people die for love or that they should just get over it and move on? [and after the play ask yourself "Did Shakespeare convince me?"]

- In the play Juliet is barely fourteen and Romeo only a little older and this would have struck Elizabethans as very young indeed. Shakespeare himself married younger than most men (he was only 18) but his wife Anne Hathaway (who was pregnant with their first child Susanna) was 26, not too far from the average age of marriage at the time. In Canada the average age of people marrying for the first time has shifted from 26 for women and 29 for men in the 1980s to 32 (women) and 34 (men) in 2000 (Janet Siltanen and Andrea Doucet, [Gender Relations in Canada](#) (Oxford, 2008), p. 107). Why do you think such changes have taken place? Do you think there is an optimum age for marriage? Do you think parents should have a say in their children's choice of marriage partner?

2. After you see the play:

- We ended our play as Shakespeare intended but later playwrights, actors, producers and directors decided to "improve" Shakespeare for their audiences by offering alternative endings (and sometimes adding lines and even scenes of their own invention). For example in the 18th century David Garrick had Juliet wake up before Romeo dies so the two can declare their love before dying. How would you end the play and why?

- What does Mercutio's relationship with Romeo say about male companionship? Would you be surprised to learn that in some modern productions they have been portrayed as gay (and so

passage where she suggests that their “love at first sight” might not be considered appropriate according to the assumed rites of courtship in Elizabethan England.

JULIET: O Romeo, Romeo! wherefore art thou Romeo?
Deny thy father and refuse thy name!
Or, if thou wilt not, be but sworn my love,
And I'll no longer be a Capulet.

ROMEO: *Aside.*

Shall I hear more, or shall I speak at this?

JULIET: 'Tis but thy name that is my enemy.
Thou art thyself, though not a Montague.
What's Montague? it is nor hand, nor foot,
Nor arm, nor face, nor any other part
Belonging to a man. O, be some other name!
What's in a name? That which we call a rose
By any other name would smell as sweet.
So Romeo would, were he not Romeo call'd,
Retain that dear perfection which he owes
Without that title. Romeo, doff thy name;
And for that name, which is no part of thee,
Take all myself.

ROMEO: I take thee at thy word.

Call me but love, and I'll be new baptiz'd;
Henceforth I never will be Romeo.

JULIET: What man art thou that, thus bescreen'd in night,
So stumblest on my counsel?

ROMEO: By a name

I know not how to tell thee who I am.
My name, dear saint, is hateful to myself,
Because it is an enemy to thee.
Had I it written, I would tear the word.

JULIET: My ears have yet not drunk a hundred words
Of that tongue's utterance, yet I know the sound.
Art thou not Romeo, and a Montague?

ROMEO: Neither, fair maid, if either thee dislike.

JULIET: How cam'st thou hither, tell me, and wherefore?
The orchard walls are high and hard to climb,
And the place death, considering who thou art,
If any of my kinsmen find thee here.

ROMEO: With love's light wings did I o'erperch these walls;
For stony limits cannot hold love out,
And what love can do, that dares love attempt.
Therefore thy kinsmen are no stop to me.

JULIET: If they do see thee, they will murder thee.

ROMEO: Alack, there lies more peril in thine eye
Than twenty of their swords! Look thou but sweet,
And I am proof against their enmity.

JULIET: I would not for the world they saw thee here.

ROMEO: I have night's cloak to hide me from their eyes;
And but thou love me, let them find me here.
My life were better ended by their hate
Than death prorogued, wanting of thy love.

JULIET: By whose direction found'st thou out this place?

ROMEO: By love, that first did prompt me to inquire.
He lent me counsel, and I lent him eyes.
I am no pilot; yet, wert thou as far
As that vast shore wash'd with the farthest sea,
I would adventure for such merchandise.

JULIET: Thou knowest the mask of night is on my face;
Else would a maiden blush bepaint my cheek
For that which thou hast heard me speak to-night.
Fain would I dwell on form, fain, fain deny
What I have spoke; but farewell complement!
Dost thou love me? I know thou wilt say 'Ay';
And I will take thy word. Yet, if thou swear'st,
Thou mayst prove false. At lovers' perjuries,
They say Jove laughs. O gentle Romeo,
If thou dost love, pronounce it faithfully.
Or if thou thinkest I am too quickly won,
I'll frown, and be perverse, and say thee nay,
So thou wilt woo; but else, not for the world.
In truth, fair Montague, I am too fond,
And therefore thou mayst think my haviour light;
But trust me, gentleman, I'll prove more true
Than those that have more cunning to be strange.
I should have been more strange, I must confess,
But that thou overheard'st, ere I was ware,
My true love's passion. Therefore pardon me,
And not impute this yielding to light love,
Which the dark night hath so discovered.

ROMEO: Lady, by yonder blessed moon I swear,
That tips with silver all these fruit-tree tops—

JULIET: O, swear not by the moon, the inconstant moon,
That monthly changes in her circled orb,
Lest that thy love prove likewise variable.

ROMEO: What shall I swear by?

JULIET: Do not swear at all;
Or if thou wilt, swear by thy gracious self,
Which is the god of my idolatry,
And I'll believe thee.

4. Performing Shakespeare

Shakespeare wrote his plays to be performed not read out loud in class or silently to our selves. In the rehearsal room the first thing actors do is read the play out loud while sitting asking themselves (and others) questions about what this character is doing, what is happening, where the action is taking place, who is doing what to whom and so on. Then they get up on their feet

and read the play while standing, moving and sometimes gesturing. Then they rehearse the play properly, first without and then with props and costumes and finally on the actual stage where the production will be. This activity aims at getting you off your feet and onto the floor and gives you a chance to act out a scene.

Open the play at Act One, Scene 5 which is the scene where Romeo and Juliet meet for the first time. There are ten characters: four un-named serving-men, Lord Capulet, Cousin Capulet, Romeo, Tybalt, Juliet and the Nurse.

- Read the scene out loud in front of each other while sitting.
- Ask questions such as: Where is the scene taking place? What is the atmosphere like? What would it look like? What happens? Who are the characters? How would you describe them? What motivates them? Why do they say the things they say? Think about the action: Who starts things off? What role does each character play in the action? Why do they do what they do?
- Stand up and read the play while standing. Face the characters you are talking to or face another way (in other words, experiment!). Add gestures and different tones of voice.
- Finally, consider as a group what you learned. How did performing change the way the play worked or the meaning of the words (for example saying something angrily with aggressive gestures as opposed to quietly with a shrug)?

Feature Artist(s)

An interview with our Designer, Christine Poddubiuk, on the difficulties of staging the tomb scene on a thrust stage. [To take place soon after rehearsals start on 13 September]

Romeo and Juliet: A Glossary

alderman - leading member of city government
ambuscadoes - traps
amerce – punish (by a fine)
Aurora - goddess of the dawn
bark – a ship
benedicte – “Bless You” (Latin)
benefice - church living
bescreen'd – hidden
beseeming - appropriate
bower – a protective dwelling
caitiff – wretched
charnel house – building housing human bones
cheverel – goatskin
cockatrice – a legendary serpent that kills with its eyes
collier - a person who digs coals
cot-quean – a man who does housework
covert - thicket
Cynthia – goddess of the moon
demesnes – territories
descry – work out
disclout – dishcloth
doff – discard

doublet – men’s jacket (with or without sleeves)
dram – portion
ell – a measurement (forty-five inches)
enjoined – ordered
alconer – a trainer of hawks
fee simple – outright ownership
fettle – arm or prepare
gadding – wandering about aimlessly
gleek – scornful gesture
gossamer – fine thread or cobwebs
gyves – shackles
hams – thighs
heretics - people whose ideas opposed those of the official church
hilding – a worthless creature
hinds - hounds
hood-winked – blindfolden (like a hunting hawk)
jocund – joyful
jointure – inheritance for a married woman on the death of her husband
Lammas-tide – harvest festival (August 1st)
Lenten – during Lent, a religious festival during which the eating of meat was outlawed
lieve – rather
King Cophetua – African king who loved a servant
marchpane – marzipan, an almond sweet
Mammet – a doll or puppet
mattock – an flat pick-axe
maw – mouth
medlars – small brown fruit
mickle – great
mouse-hunt – womanizer
orisons – prayers
osier cage – a willow basket
partisans - weapons (usually an axe)
passado – a fencing term (a forward thrust)
Pentecost – a religious festival, seventh Sunday after Easter
poor John - a salted fish
Phoebus – Apollo
Phaeton – his son
post – haste
presage – predict
princox - a strutting rooster
prolixity - common (modern) usage
puling – complaining
rebeck – a three-stringed fiddle
rood - the cross
ropery – roguish behaviour
runagate – runaway, wanderer
set cock-a-hoop – to be full of oneself
shanks – calves (of the leg)
shrift – confession

shriv'd – to be forgiven after confession
simples – herbs
skains-mates – nasty companions
stoccata – a sword thrust
surcease – stop
trencher - a serving dish
truckle bed – a bed on wheels
unattainted - unbiased
wanny – pale
wot - know
zounds – a swear word from “By God’s wounds”

Visuals

[from the production and perhaps a few copyright clear ones that are historical relating to the themes above]

Resources

Books:

David Crystal and Ben Crystal, Shakespeare’s Words: A Glossary and Language Companion (2002)
Robert Thomas Fallon, A Theatregoer’s Guide to Shakespeare (2001)
Rex Gibson, Teaching Shakespeare (1998)
Stephen Greenblatt, Will in the World (2004)
Andrew Gurr, The Shakespearean Stage (2009)
Alan Hager, Understanding Romeo and Juliet (1999)
R.E. Pritchard, Shakespeare’s England (1999)
James Shapiro, A Year in the Life of William Shakespeare ((2005)
Gary Taylor, Reinventing Shakespeare (1989)

Websites:

In Search of Shakespeare - an excellent site with many resources and ideas, associated with Michael Wood’s series and produced in association of The Folger Shakespeare Library:
<http://www.pbs.org/shakespeare/educators/>
Folger Shakespeare Library – North America’s leading research centre into Shakespeare and his time offers many excellent resources from on-line exhibitions and games to archived documents and images: <http://www.folger.edu/>
The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust – Shakespeare’s “home” with a website which offers excellent information on Shakespeare’s life, work and times and links to historic sites:
<http://www.shakespeare.org.uk/>

Films:

Romeo and Juliet 1968 (dir. Franco Zeffirelli) starring Leonard Whiting and Olivia Hussey
Romeo + Juliet 1996 (dir. Baz Luhrman) starring Leonardo DiCaprio and Claire Danes

Romeo and Juliet in Sarajevo (dir. John Zaritsky, 1994) documentary