

# CliffsNotes.com® At a Glance for ROMEO & JULIET

In William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, a long feud between the Montague and Capulet families disrupts the city of Verona and causes tragic results for Romeo and Juliet. Contrast and conflict are running themes throughout Shakespeare's play, *Romeo and Juliet* — one of the Bard's most popular romantic tragedies.

The play begins one morning in Verona, Italy, when a brawl takes place between the servants of the feuding Montague and Capulet families. That night, teenaged Romeo Montague attends a masked ball at the Capulets', where he and Juliet Capulet meet and fall in love. Romeo appears beneath Juliet's balcony afterwards, and despite their families' feud, they agree to marry the next day.

After Romeo's advisor Friar Laurence performs the secret marriage ceremony, Juliet's cousin Tybalt kills Romeo's friend Mercutio, so Romeo kills Tybalt. The Prince banishes Romeo for killing Tybalt, and Romeo leaves at dawn for Mantua. Juliet discovers that her father has arranged for her to marry the suitor Paris in two days, so the Friar offers her a potion to make her appear dead for 42 hours and plans to send a message to Romeo so he can return to Verona in time for Juliet to awaken. Juliet agrees to marry Paris to buy herself some time, then takes the potion. Early the next morning, her apparently dead body is placed in the family tomb.

The Friar's messenger never reaches Romeo, who instead receives news of Juliet's death, buys poison himself, and returns to Verona. Late that night, Romeo fights and kills Paris at the Capulet tomb. Unaware that Juliet is alive, Romeo takes the poison and dies beside her. Juliet awakes and, seeing Romeo dead, kills herself with Romeo's dagger. The heartbroken Montague and Capulet families vow to stop feuding.

**Written by:** William Shakespeare

**Type of Work:** play

**Genres:** romantic tragedy

**First Published:** 1594-1595

**Setting:** Verona, Italy

**Main Characters:** Juliet; Romeo; the Nurse; Mercutio; Friar Laurence

**Major Thematic Topics:** love; revenge; fate; courtship; marriage; value/doubleness; meaning of gender

**Motifs:** fate; light and darkness

**Major Symbols:** poison; nighttime

**Movie Versions:** *Romeo and Juliet* (1968); *Romeo + Juliet* (1996)

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## **The three most important aspects of *Romeo and Juliet*:**

- The first half of *Romeo and Juliet*, with its bawdy jokes, masked ball, and love poetry, is more like a Shakespearean comedy than a tragedy. Only after Tybalt kills Mercutio near the play's midpoint do things become tragic.
- Near the start of Romeo and Juliet's famous balcony scene, Juliet asks, "Wherefore art thou Romeo?" Because the word "wherefore" means "why," Juliet is wondering why the boy she loves is called what he's called — not where he is, as many readers believe.
- At the time of the play, Juliet is only 13 years old, and Romeo is not much older.