Directed by Baz Luhrmann

April 3, 2014

Study guide written by Gwen Kelso

Brooklyn Academy of Music
Peter Jay Sharp Building
30 Lafayette Avenue
Brooklyn, New York 11217
Welcome to BAM Education! We hope this study guide will enrich your classroom study of Baz Luhrmann’s 1996 film, *Romeo + Juliet*. Both Shakespeare’s original text and Luhrmann’s adaptations will be addressed throughout this guide.

As you explore Shakespeare’s text, remember that Shakespeare wrote for actors; the words were always intended to be said out loud, not read quietly at a desk. If you are looking for a rewarding access point to language and storytelling, have your students read aloud or act out small scenes.

The BAM program includes: this study guide, a pre-performance workshop in your classroom led by a BAM teaching artist, and the film screening immediately followed by a post-show discussion (30 minutes). Please arrange for your students to stay and participate in this unique question-and-answer session.

Arts experiences resonate most strongly for students when themes and ideas from the performance can be aligned to your current curriculum. This resource guide has been created to provide you with background information to help you prepare your students to see *Romeo +Juliet*. Depending on your needs, you may choose to use certain sections that directly pertain to your curriculum, or use the guide in its entirety. We encourage you to print, photocopy, and share pages of this guide with your students. At the end of the guide you will find suggested classroom activities linked to the Common Core Standards that you can implement before or after attending the performance. In addition, we encourage you to print, copy, and distribute parts of this guide to your classes before the performance.

The overall goals of this guide are to:
· connect to your curriculum with Common Core information and activities;
· reinforce and encourage your students to exercise their critical and analytical thinking skills;
· provide you with the necessary tools to have an engaging, educational, and inspiring experience at BAM.

Look for alignment to Common Core Standards listed in bold and NYC Department of Education’s Blueprints for the Arts listed in italics.
Baz Luhrmann is an Australian director most recently known for directing F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*. Other directing credits include *Moulin Rouge* and *Strictly Ballroom*. For a full list of Luhrmann's films, visit [IMDB](https://www.imdb.com/).

In this modernized version of Shakespeare's classic, Luhrmann sets the play in Verona Beach, CA, a gritty gang-filled world where guns bear the names dagger and sword.

When asked about directing *Romeo + Juliet*, Luhrmann said:

> With Romeo and Juliet what I wanted to do was to look at the way in which Shakespeare might make a movie of one of his plays if he was a director. How would he make it? We don’t know a lot about Shakespeare, but we do know he would make a ‘movie’ movie. He was a player. We know about the Elizabethan stage and that he was playing for 3000 drunken punters, from the street sweeper to the Queen of England—and his competition was bear-baiting and prostitution. So he was a relentless entertainer and a user of incredible devices and theatrical tricks to ultimately create something of meaning and convey a story. That was what we wanted to do.

—Baz Luhrmann [Read full article here](https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0104669/quotes/)

Luhrmann made a number of changes to Shakespeare's original text when making *Romeo + Juliet*. Most notably:

- First names were given to both the Capulet and Montague parents.
- The House of Capulet and the House of Montague are two rival companies.
- The character of the Prince (originally the royal Prince of Verona) was changed to Captain Prince (a police captain of Verona Beach).
- The location was changed from Verona, Italy to Verona Beach, CA. The movie itself was shot on location in Mexico.
- Luhrmann switched Gregory and Sampson from the House of Capulet to the House of Montague.
- Friar Lawrence became a priest and Friar John was cut from the story entirely.
- The prologue is done as part of a newscast.
- As written by Shakespeare, Romeo dies moments before Juliet awakes. In Luhrmann's version, Juliet awakes to see Romeo take the fatal poison; the two share a few moments together before he dies (and she kills herself).
- Friar Lawrence does not discover the still living Juliet clinging to her dead Romeo.
- The last words of the movie are spoken as part of a newscast, not by the Prince.

**bolded** character names represent an addition or change to Shakespeare's original

**THE CAST**

Leonardo DiCaprio  Romeo
Claire Danes Juliet
John Leguizamo Tybalt
Harold Perrineau Mercutio
Pete Postlethwaite Father Laurence
Paul Sorvino Fugencio Capulet
Brian Dennehy Ted Montague
Paul Rudd Dave Paris
Vondie Curtis-Hall Captain Prince
Miriam Margolyes The Nurse
Christina Pickles Caroline Montague
Diane Venora Gloria Capulet

---

**THE PRODUCTION**
THE CHARACTERS

House of Capulet
Lady Capulet & Lord Capulet: married
Juliet: their daughter, secretly marries Romeo
Tybalt: Juliet’s cousin, kills Mercutio then is killed by Romeo
Petruchio: friend of Tybalt
Nurse: Juliet’s caretaker
Peter
**Sampson and Gregory (in Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet, servants to Capulet; in Luhrmann’s Romeo + Juliet, servants to Montague)

House of Montague
Lady Montague & Lord Montague: married
Romeo: their son, secretly marries Juliet
Benvolio: Romeo’s cousin
Balthasar: servant to Romeo
***Abram and Petruchio (in Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet, servants to Montague; in Luhrmann’s Romeo + Juliet, servants to Capulet. “Abram” changed to “Abra”)

House of Escalus
Escalus: the Prince, banishes Romeo from Verona
Paris: suitor to Juliet, cousin of the Prince
Mercutio: kinsman to the Prince, slain by Tybalt when defending Romeo

Supporting Characters
Friar Lawrence: marries Romeo + Juliet and concocts the plan to fake Juliet’s death
Friar John (cut from Luhrmann’s version): sent to Mantua to tell Romeo of the Friar’s plan. He is quarantined and never arrives
Apothecary: illegally sells Romeo poison
### Preparation

- Photocopy the quotes listed on the next page and cut them apart.
- Give each student one of the quotes.
- Have students take a moment to rehearse their line by saying it out loud.
- You can take this activity to the next level by having students add a physical gesture to the line while saying it.
- Then, read the synopsis aloud and have students insert their corresponding line (and gesture). The more dramatic, the better!

### Synopsis

The play begins with a prologue that famously tells the audience what they are about to see. (In *Romeo + Juliet*, the prologue is done as a newscast. The House of Capulet and the House of Montague are two rival companies of Verona Beach.)

1. A prologue tells us what we are about to see.
3. The Prince intervenes and warns that another fight will result in the death of the perpetrators.
4. Romeo, a Montague, was not at the fight. It is revealed that he is lovesick for Rosaline, who does not love him back. Benvolio suggests that the best way for Romeo to get over his lovesickness is to meet other girls. Romeo agrees to sneak into the Capulet's masque (party) that evening.
5. Paris is eager to marry Juliet; Capulet, Juliet's father, feels that his daughter is too young to marry.
7. The evening of the Capulet party, Romeo, Benvolio and Mercutio are discovered by Tybalt. Capulet warns Tybalt to leave them alone.
8. Romeo and Juliet see each other and fall in love.
9. In what is now famously called "the balcony scene", Romeo sneaks into the Capulet orchard and overhears Juliet professing her love for him.
10. Romeo makes his presence known and professes his love for Juliet.
11. The two agree to be married the next day.
12. The next morning, Juliet sends her nurse to learn what time she is to meet Romeo. After teasing Juliet, the Nurse reveals that Juliet is to meet Romeo at Friar Lawrence's later that evening.
13. With the help of Lawrence, Romeo and Juliet are married.
14. Tybalt, still furious over Romeo's party crashing, seeks (the now secretly married) Romeo for a duel. Romeo tries to keep the peace.
15. A fight erupts and Mercutio is slain by Tybalt. Dying, Mercutio exclaims "a plague on both your houses." An enraged Romeo kills Tybalt.
16. Upon learning what has transpired between Tybalt and Romeo, Prince exiles Romeo.
17. Before departing Verona, Romeo spends the night with Juliet. Capulet thinks that Juliet's grief is over the death of her cousin Tybalt. He decides the best way to end her grief is to marry her to Paris. Juliet informs her parents that she will not marry Paris.
18. Capulet threatens to disown Juliet.
19. When Juliet turns to her mother for help, her mother leaves her. Grief stricken, Juliet seeks council from Lawrence, who provides her with a drug that mimics death, thus stopping her marriage to Paris.
20. In the meantime, Lawrence will send word to Romeo to return to Verona and all will be well. Unfortunately, the messenger sent to Romeo does not reach him in time. Instead, Balthasar tells Romeo that Juliet is dead.
21. Grief-stricken, Romeo visits an apothecary, who provides him with a deadly poison.
22. Romeo returns to Verona and to the Capulet crypt. Paris, thinking that Romeo is there to vandalize the crypt, confronts him. Paris is killed in the ensuing duel. Believing Juliet to be dead, Romeo drinks the poison and dies.
23. Juliet awakes to find Romeo dead. Without a “friendly drop” of poison left, Juliet stabs herself and dies.
24. Lawrence returns and explains what has transpired to the Prince, the Montagues and Capulets. As a result of this tragedy, the two families reconcile their differences.
1. A pair of star-crossed lovers take their lives. — Chorus

2. This quarrel is between our masters, and us their men. — Gregory (1.1)

3. If ever you disturb our streets again, Your lives shall pay the forfeit of the peace. — (Captain) Prince (1.1)

4. Go thither, and with unattained eye Compare her face with some that I shall show... — Benvolio (1.2)

5. Let two more summers wither in their pride Ere we may think her ripe to be a bride. — Capulet (1.2)

6. Go girl, seek happy nights to happy days. — Nurse (1.3)

7. Content thee, gentle coz, let him alone. — Capulet (1.4)

8. If I profane with my unworthiest hand This holy shrine, the gentle sin is this: My lips, two blushing pilgrims ready stand To smooth that rough touch with a tender kiss. — Romeo (1.5)

9. 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. — Juliet (2.2)

10. Call me but love, and I’ll be new baptized. — Romeo (2.2)

11. Good night, good night! Parting is such sweet sorrow That I shall say good night till it be morrow. — Juliet (2.2)

12. There stays a husband to make you a wife. — Nurse (2.5)

13. Come, come with me, and we will make short work.... Til Holy Church incorporate two in one. — Friar (Priest) Lawrence

14. Gentle Mercutio, put thy rapier up. — Romeo (3.1)

15. O, I am fortune’s fool! — Romeo (3.1)

16. And for that offence Immediately we do exile him hence. — (Captain) Prince (3.1)

17. He shall not make me there a joyful bride! — Juliet (3.5)

18. An you be mine, I’ll give you to my friend; An you be not, hang, beg, starve, die in the streets...” — (Fugencio) Capulet (3.5)

19. And this shall free thee from this present shame... — Friar (Priest) Lawerence

20. Her body sleeps in Capel’s monument... — Balthasar (5.1)

21. Put this in any liquid thing you will And drink it off, and if you have the strength Of twenty men, it would dispatch you straight. — Apothecary (5.1)

22. ...O true apothecary! Thy drugs are quick! Thus with a kiss I die. — Romeo (5.3)

23. Yea, noise? Then I’ll be brief. O happy dagger! This is thy sheath; there rust and let me die. — Juliet (5.3)

24. For never was a story of more woe Than this of Juliet and her Romeo. — (Captain) Prince (5.3)

Blueprint: Theatermaking

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.3 Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.3 Analyze the impact of the author’s choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed).
Costumes play a large role in Luhrmann’s adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet*.

Share the below quote with your class. Have your students pay close attention to what the characters wear when seeing the movie. Afterwards, discuss:

What does a character’s costume tell us about him/her? Are there differences between how the Capulets and Montagues dress in the film? If so, what are they? What do you think this tells us about the two families?

“Romeo and Juliet were our hardest because there is so much baggage attached to them. Everyone has their own vision of them. So, our first goal was to really concentrate on them, to work out how we could relieve them of all that expectation, so they could have their own life in this film. Ultimately, it seemed that the best thing to do was to let Claire and Leonardo become Romeo and Juliet, that their interpretations would create the personas of the characters. To allow them to do that, I thought that Romeo and Juliet should be different from everyone else in the piece, but they couldn’t be so different that they’d be conspicuous or so that the audience would think they were special. The result was that we made their clothes the simplest of all, very clean lines, not embellished at all.”
– Kym Barrett, costume designer

Learn more on the artistic vision with the film’s production notes

Read Act 5 scene 3 (available for free by using the Folger Digital Text).

Pay close attention to how Luhrmann ends the movie. Note the changes he made from Shakespeare’s original text (in particular, the timing of Romeo and Juliet’s deaths). As a class, discuss what effect(s) these changes had on the story.

Divide into small groups for group discussion. Allow each group to come up with their own ending. What effect do they want to have on their audience?

Using the text as a guide, allow students to cut out, rearrange or edit the language to tell their version of the story. Be sure to have each group explain their choices.

Blueprint: Literacy in the Arts and Making Connections

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.1 Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
What Do We Learn from the Prologue?

The prologue provides the audience with information about the world of the play before it even begins. It’s a great place to start a conversation about Romeo and Juliet.

As a group, read the prologue aloud. Have students add a gesture to each line.

Discuss:
- What information is given about the play?
- What do we know about the world of Verona from the prologue?
- What is the meaning of “star-crossed?”
- What role does fate play in Romeo and Juliet?

Once you have read the play (or seen the movie), have students break into small groups. Assign each group a character (not Romeo or Juliet).

Within the small group, read the prologue aloud again. Have students pay attention to what information is included and what information is left out.

Have each group rewrite the prologue from their assigned character’s point of view and share with the class.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.4 Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.

HEARTBEAT (ba DUM ba DUM ba DUM)

Shakespeare wrote the prologue in perfect iambic pentameter (ten-syllable sentences that follows an unstressed/stressed rhythm). Iambic pentameter is the rhythm of the human heart.

- Take a moment for students to “beat out” the rhythm of the prologue by placing their hand over their heart.
- Discuss what clues this rhythm tells us about operative (important) words (hint: usually in the stressed position).
- Why would Shakespeare open a play with a heartbeat?

Two households, both alike in dignity,
In fair Verona, where we lay our scene,
From ancient grudge break to new mutiny,
Where civil blood makes civil hands unclean.
From forth the fatal loins of these two foes
A pair of star-crossed lovers take their life,
Whose misadventured piteous overthrows
Do with their death bury their parents’ strife.
The fearful passage of their death-marked love,
And the continuance of their parents’ rage,
Which, but their children’s end, nought could remove,
Is now the two hours’ traffic of our stage;
The which if you with patient ears attend,
What here shall miss, our toil shall strive to mend.
ENRICHMENT ACTIVITY

Making Choices: The Director

Shakespeare's plays are often adapted for film. The rich language, passionate characters and complex relationships lend themselves to the big screen, and to different directorial interpretations.

Take a moment to watch different clips from various versions of Romeo and Juliet. Notice the differences (and similarities?) in each version.

Pay particular attention to the costumes, music, location each director chooses.

What effect does each of these elements have on the story? Which of these adaptations speak to you? Why?

Prologue + Act 1 Scene 1
Franco Zeffirelli
West Side Story film adaptation by Leonard Whiting

Act 2 Scene 2 – “The Balcony Scene”
Franco Zeffirelli
Royal Shakespeare Company
West Side Story

ENRICHMENT ACTIVITY

Other Adaptations

There are many film versions and adaptations of Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet. Most notably:

The 1968 Franco Zeffirelli film starring Leonard Whiting and Olivia Hussey.


On stage most recently, Orlando Bloom and Condola Rashad starred in the title roles as Romeo and Juliet on Broadway. A film version of this production will be released this spring.

RESOURCES

There are many resources available to help enrich your study of Romeo and Juliet. For a free, downloadable version of the text, be sure to check out the Folger Theatre’s digital texts.

The Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) has a number of clips and resources that can enrich your classroom experience. Click on “Romeo and Juliet” in the RSC’s resource bank for activities and resources:

- Hear an interview with Leonardo DiCaprio on Shakespeare
- Hear Baz Luhrmann discuss the importance of “the pitch” in getting the movie produced. (A “pitch” is where a filmmaker or director tries to convince a producer to make his or her film)
Your tax dollars make BAM programs possible through funding from:

and The Robert and Joan Catell Fund for Education Programs.

Endowment for Education and Humanities Programs; The Irene Diamond Fund;

Public Affairs Programs; Martha A. and Robert S. Rubin; William Randolph Hearst

Lila Wallace-Reader’s Digest Endowment Fund for Community, Educational, &

Education programs at BAM are endowed by:

Foundation; Turrell Fund; and the Joseph LeRoy and the Ann C. Warner Fund.

Robert Sklar; Sills Family Foundation; Joseph and Silvia Slifka Foundation;  The

David Rockefeller Fund; May and Samuel Rudin Family Foundation; In Memory of

Lemberg Foundation; National Grid; The Jerome Robbins Foundation, Inc.; The

Jaharis Family Foundation; Emily Davie and Joseph S. Komfeld Foundation;

Lemberg Foundation; National Grid; The Jerome Robbins Foundation, Inc.; The

David Rockefeller Fund; May and Samuel Rudin Family Foundation; In Memory of

Robert Sklar; Sills Family Foundation; Joseph and Silvia Slifka Foundation; The

Alvin and Fanny B. Taftheimer Foundation; Travelers Foundation; Michael Tuch

Foundation; Turrell Fund; and the Joseph LeRoy and the Ann C. Warner Fund.

Leadership support for school-time performances, pre-show preparation

workshops, and educational film screenings is provided by The Simon and

Eve Colin Foundation, Inc. and Lemberg Foundation.

Leadership support for educational film screenings and Brooklyn Reads is

provided by Goldman Sachs Gives at the recommendation of David and Susan

Marcinek.

Development of new education and community initiatives at the BAM Fisher sup-

ported by Brooklyn Community Foundation; Rockefeller Brothers Fund; and The

Skirball Foundation.

Education programs at BAM are supported by:

Altmann Foundation; Jody and John Arnhold; Barker Welfare Foundation; Tiger

Baron Foundation; The Bay and Paul Foundations; The Bloomingdale’s Fund of

the Macy’s Foundation; The Simon and Eve Colin Foundation; Constans Culver

Foundation; Robert and Mercedes Eichholz Foundation; William and Mary Greve

Foundation; The Hasty Pudding Institute of 1770; Charles Hayden Foundation;

Jaharis Family Foundation; Emily Davie and Joseph S. Komfeld Foundation;

Lemberg Foundation; National Grid; The Jerome Robbins Foundation, Inc.; The

David Rockefeller Fund; May and Samuel Rudin Family Foundation; In Memory of

Robert Sklar; Sills Family Foundation; Joseph and Silvia Slifka Foundation; The

Alvin and Fanny B. Taftheimer Foundation; Travelers Foundation; Michael Tuch

Foundation; Turrell Fund; and the Joseph LeRoy and the Ann C. Warner Fund.

Education programs at BAM are endowed by:

Lila Wallace-Reader’s Digest Endowment Fund for Community, Educational, &

Public Affairs Programs; Martha A. and Robert S. Rubin; William Randolph Hearst

Endowment for Education and Humanities Programs; The Irene Diamond Fund;

and The Robert and Joan Catell Fund for Education Programs.

Your tax dollars make BAM programs possible through funding from:

BAM would like to thank the Brooklyn Delegations of the New York State

Assembly, Joseph R. Lentol, Delegation Leader; and New York Senate,

Senator Velmanette Montgomery, Delegation Leader.

The BAM facilities are owned by the City of New York and benefit from public

funds provided through the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs with

support from Mayor Bill De Blasio; the New York City Council including Council

Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito, Finance Committee Chair Julissa Ferreras

Cultural Affairs Committee Chair Jimmy Van Bramer, the Brooklyn Delegation

of the Council, and Councilwoman Laurie Cumbo; and Brooklyn Borough

President Eric Adams.

BAM Education & Humanities

The mission of BAM Education & Humanities is to ignite imagination and ideas

through programs that enrich the audience experience, spark conversation, and

generate creative engagement.

BAM Education connects learning with creativity, engaging imagination by

encouraging self-expression through in- and after-school arts education

programming, workshops for students and teachers, school-time performances,

and summer arts programs.

After-School Programs & In-School Residencies:

Young Film Critics

Arts & Justice

Dancing Into the Future

Shakespeare Teaches Students

Shakespeare Teaches Teachers

Young Shakespeare

AfricanDanceBeat

Department of Education and Humanities Staff:

Stephanie Hughley: VP Education & Humanities

Steven McIntosh: Director of Education and Family Programs

John P. Tighe, DMA: Assistant Director

Violine Huisman: Humanities Director

Shana Parker: Director of Operations for Education & Humanities

John S. Foster, Ph.D.: Education Manager

Verushka Wray: Program Manager

Eveline Chang: Program Manager

Jennifer Leeson: Operations Manager for Education & Humanities

Nathan Gelgud: Box Office Manager

Cathleen Plazas: Internship Coordinator

Molly Silberberg: Humanities Coordinator

Tamar MacKay: Education Assistant

Rebekah Gordon: Administrative Assistant

Victoria Collado: Education Intern

Daniel Balkin: Humanities Intern

About the Writer

Gwendolyn Kelso is currently a lead teaching artist for Brooklyn Academy of

Music. As a teaching artist and professional actor, she has worked for the

Repertory Theatre of Saint Louis, Appletree Theatre (Chicago), ZACH Theatre

(Austin) and Austin Shakespeare Festival. Here in New York, Gwendolyn is the

co-founder of Hedgepig Ensemble Theatre, a company dedicated to helping

women find a voice in classic theater. She has an MFA in classical acting from

the Shakespeare Theatre, DC. gwendolynkelso.com

Copyright © 2014 by Brooklyn Academy of Music

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in

any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photography,

recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without

permission in writing from the Brooklyn Academy of Music.