

SHAKESPEARE SOLVED

THE TRAGEDY OF ROMEO AND JULIET



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THE PLAY'S THE THING

I love Shakespeare. I'll bet you love Shakespeare, too. After all, we're English teachers. We love the richness of Shakespeare's language, the force of his characters, and the romance of the Elizabethan stage. Many of us became English teachers just so we could spend all day introducing eager young readers to the joys of Shakespeare.

So why don't kids "get" Shakespeare? We're good teachers. We do all the right things, like act out the important scenes, help students translate the writing into modern English, maybe show clips from movie versions of the plays. Yet for many students, nothing really works the way we'd like.

Well, the problem is solved. At their essence, Shakespeare's plays are all about what problems he has set up for the main characters, and how the other characters help to solve those problems. Even students who couldn't care less about sonnets and soliloquies enjoy approaching a play as a game, a game where they get to BE Shakespeare.

Rather than laboring to get students to analyze characters, the Shakespeare Solved approach gives students the point of view of the playwright. What must this character do next to push the plot forward? Who makes the next move on the game board? With Shakespeare Solved, all the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players.

Try our approach, and *your* problems can be solved like Shakespeare's.

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ACT I: PROLOGUE

Complete the paraphrase of the prologue to Act I.

Two _____, both _____,
 In fair Verona, where _____,
 From old _____ switch to new _____,
 Where _____ blood makes _____ hands unclean.
 From _____ of these two _____
 A pair of _____ lovers take their life;
 Whose _____ pitiful _____
 Do with their death _____ their parents' _____.
 The _____ of their doomed love,
 And the continuance of their parents' rage,
 Which, _____ for their children's _____, nothing could remove,
 Is now the two hours' _____ of our stage;
 The which if you _____ carefully,
 What here shall miss, our acting will _____.

Can you imagine going to a movie that opens with some guys coming on screen and telling the audience everything that's going to happen? Why would anyone stay to watch? Well, that's pretty much what Shakespeare does in the Prologue to Act I of *Romeo and Juliet*. Sure, there's lots of great language, and it's cool that it's a sonnet, but why tell everybody what's going to happen?

Today, of course, most people know the story pretty well. But so did audiences in Shakespeare's time, because the story isn't new. Remember Pyramus and Thisbe? Shakespeare isn't really giving anything away in the Prologue. What he does do, however, is set up a problem. How do playwrights solve problems? They use characters.

Characters in a dramatic work are totally at the mercy of the writer—they can only do and say what the writer allows them to. The main characters in *Romeo and Juliet* are obviously, well, Romeo and Juliet. Everyone else exists to help Shakespeare solve the problem he has created between these two. It's almost like he paints himself into corners just to see how creatively he can work out of them. Let's look at the first problem and some characters that help to solve it.

THREE CIVIL BRAWLS

Complete the paraphrase of Prince Escalus's speech in Act I, Scene I, lines 83-105.

Rebellious subjects, _____ to peace,
 Whose swords are stained with your _____ blood,--
 Will they not hear? What, ho! you men, you _____,
 That _____ the fire of your _____
 With _____ pouring from your veins,
 I'll punish you with _____ unless you
 Throw your _____ down,
 And hear my _____ sentence.
 Three civil brawls, started because of _____,
 By thee, old Capulet, and Montague,
 Have _____ disturb'd the quiet of our streets,
 And made Verona's _____
 Cast aside their _____,
 To take up _____ as in olden days,
 _____ with peace, to break up your _____:
 If ever you disturb our streets again,
 You'll pay the price of it with _____.
 For this time, _____ go away:
 You Capulet; shall _____ with me:
 And, Montague, _____ this afternoon,
 To find out _____ in this case,
 To old Free-town, our common judgment-place.
 Once more, on pain of death, _____ leave.

Here Shakespeare lays out the first problem in the play. Before Romeo and Juliet can fall in love, they must meet. What is standing in the way of their meeting at this point in the play?

How do you predict Shakespeare will solve this problem?

THE PLOT THICKENS

What do we learn in Act I, Scene, I, lines 168-232?

Does this help to solve Shakespeare’s problem of bringing Romeo and Juliet together? Explain.

Paraphrase Capulet’s speech in lines 13-19.

And too soon _____ are those who so _____ early
All my _____ but she are _____.
She is my last _____ for _____:
But _____ her, gentle Paris, get her heart,
My _____ to the marriage is _____;
If she _____, so far as she has _____
Then I will _____ and give you my _____.

Does this help to solve Shakespeare’s problem of bringing Romeo and Juliet together? How?

What do we learn in Act I, Scene III. Lines 75-105?

Now list three problems Shakespeare has created to keep Romeo and Juliet apart.

A LITTLE HELP FROM MY FRIENDS

By the end of the first Act, Shakespeare has indeed brought Romeo and Juliet together, despite the many obstacles established earlier. Complete the chart below to show what role other characters played in solving the problem.

Character	What s/he does	Quotes (w/line numbers)
Rosaline	Draws Romeo to the Capulet's feast where he meets Juliet	
Capulet servingman		
		"This night I hold an old accustomed feast... 1:2, lines 20-23
	Convinces Romeo to crash the Capulet party	
Lady Capulet		