

Romeo (Max Wright) Julieta (Rachel Leishman)  
Photography by Savanna Richardson/BYU



# Romeo y Julieta

**Study Guide** by Hannah Gunson-McComb and Emily Dickerson

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## Notes from the Dramaturgs

*Romeo and Juliet* haunts me—and not in the pleasant, romantic sense. Much to my dismay, *Romeo and Juliet* has cropped up every year for the past decade in some way, shape or form. It's followed me across the pond to London (twice!), and here it is again, prompting me to ask aloud: "Is this a *Groundhog Day* kind of thing?" If it is, I feel I may have broken that curse by working on this production.

I had some help with that. Our director, Julia, removed the biggest hurdle that alienated me from connecting to the play. She moved the focus away from the time-honored themes of fate and romance. When Julia started pre-production by announcing the focus would be on miscommunication and multiculturalism, I nearly wept for joy. Here was the spin I craved! *Romeo y Julieta* discusses topics that aren't talked about enough: cultural awareness, or the lack thereof, and the subsequent disconnect. In a world struggling to find empathy and interest, patience and consideration, perhaps nothing could be more important than teaching—even pleading—with our audiences to listen. Listen. Listen to our newest generation, listen to our neighboring cultures and countries, listen so we might avoid miscommunication. Horrific consequences can be avoided, and they shouldn't be necessary in order to learn how to be a better human being. If I can learn to love *Romeo and Juliet*, surely we can learn to love one another.

**Hannah Gunson-McComb**

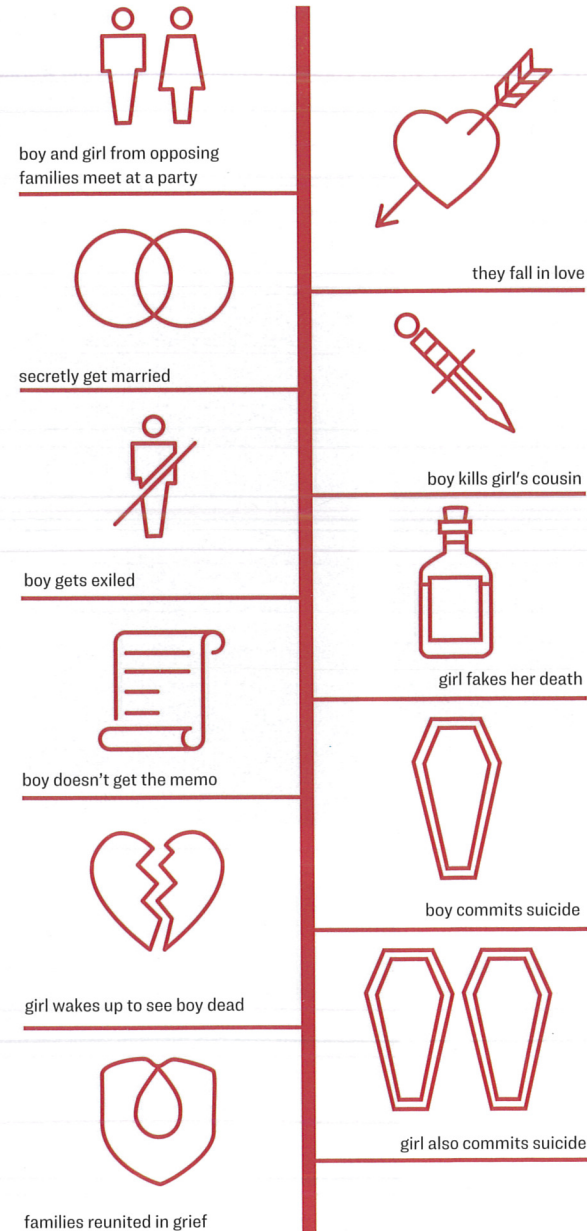
In the last six weeks of my LDS mission in Honduras, I met two young women who discovered with glee that the three of us had read many of the same novels. Having spent so long speaking Spanish, I had begun to feel removed from the stories that were once so precious to me, many even pushing me toward theatre. It was such a pleasure and a gift to share those stories again, but especially to realize that the Spanish language, which I had thought to be a barrier in this instance, was actually a link.

The act of sharing common stories while coloring them with different languages, cultures, and traditions is, in my opinion, one of the most human and lovely things we can do. Thus, when considering the idea of linking two different cultural understandings of Shakespeare's timeless *Romeo and Juliet*, layering in those different languages and traditions to create a story of great benefit to an audience diverse in both age and heritage, I was more than excited to participate. It seemed difficult to understand where cultures may blend, share, and educate. However, stories are not held by any kind of boundaries. I am so pleased that the rash "love story" that has successfully survived time can be a message now for us: the danger of miscommunication. It's a lesson we need in our families, our interactions, and our countries. ¡Qué el mensaje les bendiga!

**Emily Dickerson**

## Plot Synopsis

"In fair Verona, where we lay our scene..."





# The Story of the Story of Romeo and Juliet

Shakespeare was born in 1564, in Stratford-upon-Avon. He forged a successful career in London as an actor, playwright, and part owner of The Lord Chamberlain's Men (later to become The King's Men). A prolific writer, he wrote 37 plays and 154 sonnets before retiring in 1613. His contemporary, Ben Jonson, said that he was "not of an age, but for all time." As the adaptations of his plays roll endlessly on and students continue to study his works, we reinforce Jonson's declaration. Shakespeare's plays explore universal themes such as redemption, tragic flaws, and the pursuit of love; they are all relatable, constant pieces of our humanity.

But perhaps his most famous work is *Romeo and Juliet*—the story of star-crossed lovers, fated to die before the play even starts. It's one of the most well-known stories throughout history... but where did it start?



- 1 Neolithic times: The Lovers of Valdarò. A set of mummies were discovered in 2007, in Mantua, embracing each other.
- 2 1217 - Teruel, Spain: Diego, a Marcilla, and Isabel, a Segura, were separated for five years while Diego went to seek his fortune. At the end of the five years, Isabel's father commanded her to marry another. That very night, Diego returned and, seeing Isabel married, died of a broken heart. Upon seeing her true love dead, Isabel died the following day.



- 3 Teruel asked for permission to exhume the bodies and bury them together—they're encased in a marble monument, open to the public.
- 4 1530: Luigi Da Porto writes his novel, *Historia Novellamente Ritrovata di Due Nobili Amanti* (A Story Newly Found of Two Noble Lovers)
- 5 1554: Matteo Bandello publishes his novella, *Giulietta e Romeo*, as part of a collection published by Masuccio Salernitano, called *Il Novellino*
- 6 1562: Arthur Brooke writes the poem "The Tragickall Historie of Romeus and Iuliet"

Misc

Image Credits from L to R: Own work, By Dagmar Hollmann, 2015, CC BY-SA 4.0 / Lovers, Teruel, España, 2014, By Diego Delso, CC BY-SA 3.0 / The Reconciliation of the Montagues and Capulets over the Dead Bodies of Romeo and Juliet, Frederic Leighton, 1855, Public Domain, / Photo of the "Gee, Officer Krupke" segment of West Side Story by the Jets, Fred Feh, 1957, Public Domain / Dr. Michael Gunson; Verona, Italy, 2009

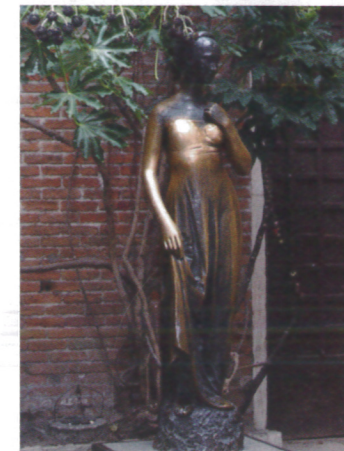


- 7 pre-1580: Brooke's poem appears in William Painter's collection of stories known as *The Palace of Pleasures*
- 8 1599: The first authorized version of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* is published (though most scholars believed the play was written sometime between 1594 and 1596)
- 9 1905: The Capello family buys a 14th century house in Verona. Based on both the 'cap' motif in the archway and the similarities in name, the city declares it to be "Casa di Giulietta." The balcony did not exist, but was created and added.



- 10 1957: West Side Story premieres on Broadway

- 11 1996: Baz Luhrman's movie *Romeo + Juliet* premieres



- 12 2014: Legend has it that should anyone rub the breast of the Juliet statue that stands outside of her home in Verona, they will have luck in their romantic life. The statue sustained damage beyond repair.
- 13 2018: BYU presents our Young Company production of *Romeo y Julieta*



## Exploring Cultures

As we began adapting the script into Spanish, it was important to root our production in specific cultures. Each cast member of the Capuleto household had special say in where their character was from, choosing their heritage and experiences to draw upon. You will see three different Spanish cultures incorporated into the show:



### Teobaldo

Drawing from Catholic influence in Mexico, Teobaldo sports a Virgin Mary hoodie.

Teobaldo calls Romeo a “Chamaco” which means “Punk!” or “Brat!”

- “!A poco!” -- “Really?! No way!”



### El Ama

Careful and colorful embroidery on El Ama’s blouse hearkens to the masterful stitching of traditional Peruvian textiles.

- “Bacán” -- “Cool!”

- “Al toque”-- it means “right away,” but that might really be a few hours or a few weeks!



### Senora Capuleto

The dramatic black and floral pattern, the slight flare in the skirt, and the excess material in the sleeves are all subtle, elegant nods to classic Spanish traditions, specifically flamenco.

- The Spaniard accent, better known as the “Castilian” accent, switches their soft “c” and “z” sounds with a “TH.” Legend has it that King Ferdinand had a lisp and his subjects copied him out of admiration . . . but it’s just a tall tale. Any dialect will evolve and get its own personality!

- “Ser la leche”—odd, but true. The word “milk” is frequently used for both happy and angry expressions. It just depends on the connotations it’s used with!

costume sketches courtesy of Elizabeth Banks and Zoe Taylor; Teobaldo, El Ama, Senora Capuleto respectively from T to B

## Miscommunication

Have you ever played a game of Telephone? Has your phone ever accidentally auto corrected one word and it changed the text completely? Or, as you got older, have you watched a rumor spiral and grow farther away from a once simple truth? How did that happen? Well . . . ever heard the term “lost in translation?”

As information is passed around, original intentions can get muddled in many ways: the messenger doesn’t understand the message; the information is vague or enigmatic; the delivery of a message gets convoluted, or is just plainly misinterpreted. The tragedy and farce of miscommunication is in frustrating the flow of connection between people. But instead of the joyous resolution used in such comedies, in the case of *Romeo y Julieta*, that frustration proves fatal.

Look for moments of miscommunication between the characters in the performance! When is it funny? When is it damaging?

Misunderstanding happens on both a global scale and a personal one, even in our homes. Seeds of intolerance are planted in the hearts of communities both big and small and create rifts. All too often, fear plays a role in establishing prejudices that continue to divide us from the other. When we allow such hasty judgments to govern our actions, we deny ourselves new friendships. We bar ourselves from an enriched education, taught by the diverse experiences of others.

It might be wise to ask ourselves questions like “what don’t I understand about the world yet?” We could stop to consider the other side of an argument. We might practice awareness as we interact with the world outside of us, outside of Provo, outside of America. Because perhaps, if we did so, we could prevent the tragically avoidable. We can soften the hatred in this world. And it starts wherever we are.

Pick a trending topic of debate and research the other side—what surprises you? Did you connect with any of it? At any rate, you’re more educated about it, and can now clearly relay information!



## Lost in Translation

Have you ever noticed that there are some phrases that don't translate very well into other languages? Here are a few sayings and their literal translations— try to match them with their meaning!

### Meaning

### Word & Direct Translation

"I couldn't care less."

A

1

French, *Coincer la bulle*  
Literal: "To wedge the bubble"

"This isn't worth my time."

B

2

Swedish, *Att glida in på en räkmacka* Literal: "Slide in on a shrimp sandwich"

"To do nothing"

C

3

Polish, *Z choinki się urwać?*  
Literal: "Did you fall from a Christmas tree?"

"You didn't have to work to get where you are today"

D

4

Portuguese, *Pagar o pato*  
Literal: "Pay the duck."

"It was pure chaos"

E

5

Spanish, *Me importa un pimiento* Literal: "It's as important as a pepper"

"Taking the blame for something you didn't do"

F

6

Chilean, *Quedo la escoba*  
Literal: "The broom was left"

"You don't know what you're talking about and everyone can tell."

G

7

German, *Das ist mir wurst*  
Literal: "This is sausage"

Have you thought about our own idioms?

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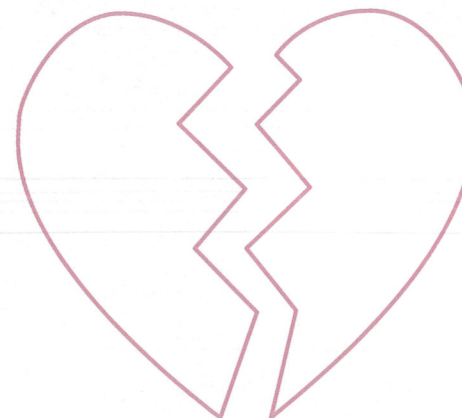
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Key A7, B5, C1, D2, E6, F4, G3

## Autographs

After the show, the cast will mingle with the audience. Use this page to get their autographs.





Julieta (Rachel Leishman)  
Photography by Savanna Richardson/BYU



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Last year more than 1,300 productions were entered in the KCACTF involving more than 200,000 students nationwide. By entering this production, our theater department is sharing in the KCACTF goals to recognize, reward, and celebrate the exemplary work produced in college and university theaters across the nation.



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