

R+J

Stratford
FESTIVAL

2021 STUDY GUIDE

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EDUCATION SUPPORT PARTNER **Scotiabank.**

R+J

BY WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE
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PRODUCED IN COLLABORATION WITH WHY NOT THEATRE

TOOLS FOR TEACHERS
SPONSORED BY



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PRODUCTION SUPPORT IS GENEROUSLY PROVIDED BY **DR. M. LEE MYERS** AND BY **CATHERINE & DAVID WILKES**.

SUPPORT FOR THE FILMING OF PRODUCTIONS IN THE 2021 SEASON IS GENEROUSLY PROVIDED BY **RICHARD & MONA ALONZO**, **THE JOHN AND MYRNA DANIELS CHARITABLE FOUNDATION**, **THE HENRY WHITE KINNEAR FOUNDATION**, **MARTIE & BOB SACHS**, **ROBERT & JACQUELINE SPERANDIO**, **ALICE & TIM THORNTON** AND BY AN **ANONYMOUS DONOR**.

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ABOUT THE PLAY

R + J

By William Shakespeare

Adapted by Ravi Jain, Christine Horne and Alex Bulmer

Directed by Ravi Jain

[R + J Pre-Show Podcast](#)

[R + J House Program](#)

Grade and Curriculum Connections

- Grades 7+
- Global Competencies: Collaboration, Communication, Critical Thinking, Creativity, Learning to Learn/ Self-Awareness
- The Arts
- English
- Language
- Health and Physical Education
- Social Sciences and Humanities

Content Advisory

Deals with mature themes including sexual desire, patriarchal oppression and suicide

Synopsis

They say that love is blind – and with blindness comes the freedom to open the mind’s eye to a world of limitless possibility. Likewise, the challenge of staging the world’s most famous love story, *Romeo and Juliet*, in a time of physical distancing brings with it the opportunity to explore modes of theatrical presentation that are both unexpectedly novel and as old as the art of storytelling itself.

Intended for blind, low-vision and sighted audiences alike, this radically reimagined version of Shakespeare’s beloved romantic tragedy invites you into an up-to-the-minute modern world of sound and music, a world that challenges the identities we construct when we use only our eyes, a world in which the entrenched hostilities of an older generation are challenged by the passions of young people who only want to love.

Themes and Motifs

- Generational Change and Conflict
 - Rebellion and Resilience
 - Youth Navigating a World of Adults
 - Interrupting Systems of Injustice
 - Public and Private Worlds

- Identity and Inclusion
 - Blindness and Exploring New Perspectives
 - Gender, Love and Relationships
 - Self-Determination
 - Freedom, Choice and Fate
 - Light and Darkness

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Pre-Show

- What do you already know about the story of Romeo and Juliet? How do you know what you know? Where or from whom did you learn about the story?
- What are the qualities of a Shakespearean tragedy?
- What is love?
- Do you believe in “love at first sight”? Why or why not?
- How are our identities influenced by our families, communities and social norms and values?
- What is your understanding of blindness?
- What causes generational conflict? Is conflict between young and old inevitable? Why or why not?
- What does resilience mean to you?
- How do young people today uniquely foster social and cultural change? Can you think of any examples of young people who have changed the world?
- Why do you think young people aren’t given more power and access to leadership? How might the world be different if they were?

Post-Show

- Describe how the world of the young people differs from the world of adults. How do the young people in the play try to find their power amid the world of adults?
- Do you believe that Romeo and Juliet were truly in love? Why or why not?
- Why do you think Lady Capulet sides with her husband rather than standing up for her daughter’s wishes?
- Who or what is to blame for Juliet and Romeo’s deaths? Explain your position.
- If the Friar were presented again with the same situation they encountered with Romeo and Juliet five years ago, do you think they would intervene differently? In what ways?
- What impact did the accessible dramaturgy (the inclusion of Blind audience considerations) of the play have on you?
- How did the casting influence the storytelling? Was it different from what you expected or from the casting in other productions of *Romeo and Juliet*?
- The production was built around the concept of blind gain, the idea that blindness is not a deficiency, but that it can open up new possibilities and perspectives. How did this impact your experience of the show? How have social and cultural understandings of blindness changed over time?
- In your opinion, which character changed most over the course of the play? Why do you think this is the case?

MINDS ON

Objective: This exercise invites students to explore some of the themes in the play and their personal responses to them.

Materials: Access to the *R+J* statements (below)

Directions:

- Let students know that you will read a series of statements to which students will be invited to express their agreement/disagreement on a scale of 1 to 10 with 1 being “completely disagree” and 10 being “completely agree.”
- Students can express themselves through a variety of means based on your student group/teaching context, but some examples include having them move to a particular place in the room along a spectrum of agreement, voice their opinion, show their numbers with their hands or type/write down their numbers on a piece of paper.
- After students have a chance to respond to the statements, invite them to reflect on the debriefing questions independently, in conversation with a partner or in small groups, or in a written reflection.

R + J Statements

- Young people are more open-minded than older people.
- We have very little control over our fates; our destinies are predetermined.
- Parents always know what’s best for their children.
- Teenagers can’t really fall in love – what young people feel when they think they’re in love isn’t as deep as true love.
- People are treated differently based on gender.
- Young people are more impulsive than older people.
- Adults don’t remember what it was like to be young.
- Wisdom is something that only comes with age and experience.

Debriefing Questions:

- Did any of your responses surprise you?
- Did any of your peers’ responses surprise you?
- Have your opinions on any of these statements changed over time? Do you think your opinions might change in the future? Why or why not?

CONNECTION TO THE ARCHIVES

The character of Friar Lawrence is central to this production. These archival materials show the different ways in which the Friar has been represented in previous productions at the Stratford Festival. What's different about the casting and portrayal of the Friar in this production in comparison to previous shows? Why do you think this is the case?



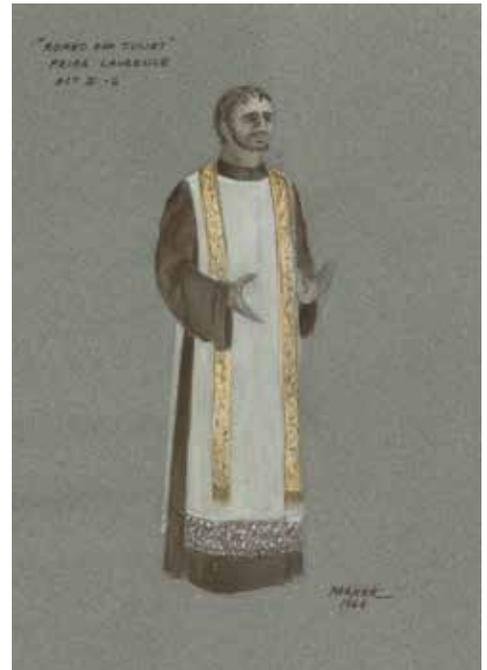
The Stratford Festival's Archives maintains, conserves and protects recent and historical records about the Festival and makes those materials available to people around the world. Our multi-media archival holdings date from 1952 and extend through to contemporary materials. We house correspondence, production records, Board minutes, photography, design artwork, scores, audio-visual records, costumes, props and set decoration, press releases and other promotional materials: these document the processes that bring a production to the stage and reflect all aspects of mounting a play from the administrative to the creative and beyond.

In addition to visiting the Archives in person, you can explore our [online catalogue](#).



Top: Antoine Yared as Romeo, Sara Farb as Juliet, and Wayne Best as Friar Lawrence with members of the company in *Romeo and Juliet*, 2017. Directed by Scott Wentworth. Design by Christina Poddubiuk. Photography by Cylla von Tiedemann.

Right: Costume design by Carolyn Parker. *Romeo and Juliet*, 1968, Friar Laurence, Act II-6.





Top: Louise Marleau as Juliet, Bernard Behrens as Friar Laurence and Christopher Walken as Romeo in *Romeo and Juliet*, 1968. Directed by Douglas Campbell. Design by Carolyn Parker. Photography by Douglas Spillane. Stratford Festival Archives, GPO_1968_003_0182



Right: Graham Abbey as Romeo, Keith Dinicol as Friar Laurence and Claire Jullien as Juliet in *Romeo and Juliet*, 2002. Directed by Miles Potter. Design by Patrick Clark. Lighting design by Steven Hawkins. Photography by Michael Cooper. Stratford Festival Archives, GPO_2002_012_0012

RESOURCES

Thompson, Ayanna and Laura Turchi. *Teaching Shakespeare with Purpose: A Student-Centred Approach*. 2016.

If you are worried about a friend or loved one, or have suicide-related concerns, help is available. Please connect with the following resources:

- The [Canada Suicide Prevention Helpline](#): 1-833-456-4566
- The [U.S. Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#): 1-800-273-8255
- Go to [Kids Help Phone](#) for live chat counselling, text “CONNECT” to 686868 or call 1-800-668-6868
- Post-Secondary Students can access [Good2Talk](#) at 1-866-925-5454

Contact us to book a streamed viewing of this production for your class: groups@stratfordfestival.ca