

## Director's Notes

*Romeo & Juliet* was first performed at The Curtain Theatre in London, 1595. The Royal Shakespeare Company noted that the title page of the 1597 edition of "*Romeo and Juliet*" revealed that it immediately gained popularity. "...it hath been often (with great applause) plaid *publicly*". The play has been performed throughout the world continuously since then. It is the most well-known of all Shakespeare tales, taught in almost every 9<sup>th</sup> grade curriculum in the country.

Our production is faithful to the way that Shakespeare intended his plays to be staged. From the Royal Shakespeare Company: "*Shakespeare designed it to be played in daylight on the simple thrust stage of an Elizabethan playhouse, where the rear balcony provided Juliet's bedroom window and a trapdoor in the stage was her tomb,*" RSC wrote on its website of "*Romeo and Juliet's*" stage history. "*No scenery and few props allowed the action to move swiftly and the audience to focus on the language. Music and costume added to the effect.*"

We are producing a one-act version of *Romeo & Juliet*. It will move quickly with characters often surrounding the audience and performing in the aisles. The story, in brief, is a tale of a feud between two families, The Montagues (Romeo's Family) and the Capulet's (Juliet's Family). Romeo and Juliet see each other at a masked ball and fall in love. The need to hide this from their feuding families brings about the tragedy and the well-known ending of the play.

The language, themes and actions found in *Romeo & Juliet* have not changed since that first production in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century, but the world has. These shifts in attitudes are reflected in the conversations the Juanita Drama Company explored while working with the text and designing the performance. An

excellent podcast by the Folger Library examines the relevance of the play in modern times (*Romeo & Juliet Throughout The Ages, Shakespeare Unlimited: Episode 12*). '*Shifting attitudes about taboo love and marriage, gender roles, and even guns and street violence inform the way we read or see the play today*', reminds us that an audience absorbs a play through the lens of their own experiences, in their own time. The performance will tug, perhaps, at memories of an earlier involvement with *Romeo & Juliet*. We can relate to the eagerness of young love, and our own experiences with family. Our own times make the violence and the consequences of the families' feud far too real. The ending of the play, when '*a pair of star-crossed lovers take their life*' is beyond painful. Their deaths '*end their parents' strife*'. Dramatic tension gives way to an ironic conclusion: Romeo and Juliet are the last of the Montagues and Capulets, the feud dies with them.

We live in a time when suicide is one of the leading causes of loss of life for teens and young children. If you, or anyone you know, has thoughts of suicide, reach out to any teacher or staff at Juanita. We are here to help. **National Suicide Prevention Hotline: 1-800-273-8255** or <https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/>

Thank you for coming to be a part of Juanita Drama's *Romeo & Juliet*. I will leave you with a sweet thought from the play to remind you that you are loved: '*And yet I wish but for the thing I have; My bounty is as boundless as the sea, My love as deep; the more I give to thee, The more I have, for both are infinite*'.  
*Juliet (Act 2, Scene 2)*

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