



Romeo and Juliet

by William Shakespeare

In a Nutshell

[William Shakespeare](#) wrote the tragedy of *Romeo and Juliet* around 1595. Arguably the most famous love story of all time, this play tells the tale of a boy and a girl from warring families who meet and fall in love. Fate is not on their side, however, and they eventually choose to kill themselves rather than live without each other.

Because the play has always been popular with audiences, some scholars have refused to take *Romeo and Juliet* too seriously. They sometimes dismiss it as Shakespeare's trashy blockbuster, not complicated enough to be "high art." It's easy to think the play is nothing more than a tearjerker plot and a collection of pick up lines so cheesy they've become clichés. ("O Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo," etc.) But *Romeo and Juliet* is more than a love story. The supporting characters - Mercutio, above all, but also the Nurse and Friar Laurence - are complicated and morally ambiguous. Through them, the play shows how romance comes in conflict with other relationships. And love itself can't be taken for granted, either. The play actively poses the question of whether the title characters' legendary romance is nothing more than infatuation.

Why Should I Care?

A lot of people think the balcony scene is about as deep as a twelve-year-old interpretation of true love.

Boy meets girl, cue sappy music.

They stare into each other's eyes and say a lot of poetic things.

Anybody who makes it past the age of fourteen, of course, realizes that's not what love is about.

Romeo and Juliet's interaction can seem pretty shallow.

They're swearing that they love each other fifteen minutes after they've met.

That's not love - it's infatuation.

But *Romeo and Juliet* is not just about what happens when two hormonal teenagers collide.

It's clear to anyone that's watched [Engaged and Underaged](#) that getting what you want out of young love isn't always all its cracked up to be. The real moral of the story here is that sometimes love is doomed to fail, and that applies no matter how old you are and what time you're living in.

This story is relevant as a cautionary tale to anyone that's ever been in love - next time you're fresh out of a breakup and see some young couple kissing at the bus stop, you can take solace in the thought that they're likely to break up soon via text message. At the end of the day, young love isn't worth killing yourself over. Love like Romeo and Juliet's just doesn't happen in real life. If you fall into the mythical half of society that is happily married, you might take away the good feeling that passion is delightful but is useless without communication. Shakespeare reminds us that lack of communication, or communicating through your church representatives, might end up in badly timed double suicide.

It's also important to remember that *Romeo and Juliet* is a tragedy, not a romance. Fine, love hits our two young heroes hard, but they act rashly, and it costs them their lives. They live in a time fraught with tension, and as there's no omnipotent [Bono](#)-figure to call in for conflict resolution, all the odds are against them. In Shakespeare, as in life, everything is tragic when times are tragic, and even love can't be expected to solve every problem. You can't buy the world a Coke, and you can't blaze through your own life living only on love. *Romeo and Juliet* moves us because we hope to feel the love that these two feel, but it stays with us because we're jarred by the poignancy of their failure and loss. For all the good strategizing, great sex, and poignant speeches, *Romeo and Juliet* is a simple lesson that love doesn't conquer all. But it has the potential to conquer each of us. We can take solace in our shared misery or delight here, but the most important thing is that, whatever we feel, we're all feeling it. Cold comfort, but comfort nonetheless.