



Character Explorer:

Juliet from *Romeo & Juliet*

Who is Juliet?

Juliet is the only child of the Capulet family, which is in the throes of a terrible feud with the Montague family. Juliet has two parents, sometimes called Lord and Lady Capulet, with whom Juliet seems to have a formal, rather than a familiar, relationship. Juliet spends most of the play in the company of the Nurse, who's more like a nanny or chaperone. Juliet also has a cousin, Tybalt, who's full of violent hatred for the Montagues. At the beginning of the play, Juliet's age is about 13 years, eleven months, and two weeks. It's the only time Shakespeare is so specific about a character's age.

What happens with Juliet

The first we hear about Juliet is in the second scene of the play. A member of the nobility named Paris wants to marry Juliet and is discussing this with the head of the Capulet family. Capulet invites Paris to a party that evening, to meet and try to woo Juliet.

We first meet Juliet in the next scene. Capulet's wife asks the Nurse to summon Juliet, then introduces the idea of marrying Paris. Juliet agrees to consider it.

At the party, a masked stranger takes Juliet by the hand and expresses desire in a stylized, poetic form. Juliet responds in kind. They create a sonnet together, which cleverly leads to a kiss, only to be interrupted by the Nurse. Juliet asks the Nurse to find out who the masked stranger was. Upon hearing that it was Romeo, the only child of the Montague household, Juliet exclaims, "My only love, sprung from my only hate!"

Later that night, Juliet takes some time alone, either at a high window or on a balcony. Juliet wonders out loud why Romeo is Romeo and a Montague, and is surprised when Romeo answers. Romeo has stayed behind, hidden among the trees in the Capulet's orchard, even though that's a dangerous place for a Montague to be. Romeo and Juliet declare their love for one another. They agree to make arrangements the next day to get married.

The following day, Juliet waits an excruciatingly long time for news about the marriage. Finally, the Nurse returns with instructions: Juliet is to meet Romeo at Friar Laurence's cell, where they are married. Because it's dangerous for them to be seen together, they plan for Romeo to climb up to Juliet's bedroom that night. While Juliet waits impatiently for night to come, the Nurse arrives with news: Romeo has been in a street fight, has killed Juliet's cousin, Tybalt, and has been banished from Verona.

But wait, there's more! →

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What happens with Juliet (continued)

Romeo spends the night with Juliet and then leaves for exile in Mantua. Juliet's mother then arrives with news that in a few days, Juliet will marry Paris. When Juliet refuses, Juliet's father becomes violently angry. Juliet goes to Friar Laurence for help and receives a special potion that will make everyone believe that Juliet is dead. The plan is that Juliet will be placed into the Capulet tomb; meanwhile, Friar Laurence will send letters to Romeo explaining the situation. Romeo will then take Juliet to Mantua until they can return to Verona.

Unfortunately, Romeo never gets the Friar's letter, and instead hears the news that Juliet is dead. Juliet wakes up in the tomb and finds that Romeo has just died, having taken a lethal poison. Juliet hears people coming and acts impulsively, using Romeo's dagger to die by suicide.

Some words used to describe Juliet

The ways that Juliet is talked about by other characters can illuminate aspects of the character.

child	headstrong	hopeful	unworthy	young	slugabed
the sun	beast	young baggage	disobedient wretch	good	tender
true	faithful	dear saint	sweet flower	self-willed	cold

Some things Juliet says throughout the play

Lines that a character speaks can reveal details about their personality and relationships with other characters. The lines below are listed in the order that they appear in the play.

1 For that name, which is no part of thee,
Take all myself!

2 All my fortunes at thy foot I'll lay
And follow thee my lord throughout the world.

3 My bounty is as boundless as the sea,
My love as deep.

4 I would thou hadst my bones, and I thy news.

5 Leap to these arms, untalk'd of and unseen.

6 Sweet my mother, cast me not away!

7 Is there no pity sitting in the clouds
That sees into the bottom of my grief?

8 I have a faint, cold fear thrills through my veins
That almost freezes up the heat of life.

9 Thy lips are warm.

10 O happy dagger, this is thy sheath;
There rust and let me die.

Challenging assumptions about Juliet

Over the years, certain traditions have prevailed about how we imagine or portray Juliet. More recently, however, theatre artists have taken a more expansive, more inclusive approach. We celebrate that, and encourage you to do the same by thinking about the character from your perspective. As you think about who Juliet is, and how Juliet responds to events in the play, what qualities or character traits stand out to you as essential? Do you or do people you know share those same qualities? How are you different?

Your interpretation of Juliet

Now it's your turn! Read through the information about Juliet on the previous pages. Then, using these words, lines, and the story, choose activities from the list below to explore your own interpretation.

MOVE

How would your Juliet move? How would you express the thoughts with your body? How could you use your voice and/or body to create this character? Based on what you now know of Juliet, create your own movement-based interpretation of the text.

Create a sculpture or statue using your body to express what Juliet's lines mean to you. Create a gesture or sculpture for each line. You could also speak the line as you hold each pose. Try it many different ways and notice how each version feels to you.

LISTEN

What would your Juliet's soundtrack be? What types of instruments, ambient sounds, or music would accompany your Juliet? Make a Juliet playlist, or create a soundscape: if you like, you could include recordings of the descriptive words and/or the Juliet's lines.

WRITE

Create a poem, story, or monologue inspired by the list of words that describe Juliet. Then, create another piece using the lines that Juliet speaks. How are the two different?

MAKE

Create a costume design. What would your Juliet wear? Where do they live? What's the climate like? How do they spend their time? How do they move? What do they want others to think about them? What do they enjoy wearing?

Gather objects that your Juliet might use or care about. (Just remember to ask before borrowing anything!) Use these props in your other explorations, or create a still life of the objects by drawing or photographing them.

Create an art project inspired by the words used to describe Juliet and by the lines that Juliet speaks.

Reflect

- What discoveries did you make as you explored the text?
- Why did you make the creative choices that you made?
- What did you learn about Juliet? About the play? About yourself?