



Character Explorer:

Romeo from *Romeo & Juliet*

Who is Romeo?

Romeo is apparently the only child of the Montague family. This family is in a long-standing feud with the Capulet family, and this feud has erupted again in violence. Romeo has two parents, sometimes called Lord and Lady Montague. They express great concern for Romeo, but they don't appear in many scenes in the play. Early in the play, Romeo spends time alone or in the company of a Montague cousin named Benvolio and a friend named Mercutio. Although described as young, Romeo's specific age is unclear.

What happens with Romeo in *Romeo & Juliet*

Near the beginning of the play, we hear that Romeo has been spending time alone, avoiding the company of others. Romeo's cousin Benvolio finds out the reason: Romeo is in love with Rosaline, but this love is unrequited. So, Romeo is suffering. When Romeo and Benvolio help an illiterate servant, they learn that Rosaline will be attending a party that evening at the Capulet's house. Benvolio persuades Romeo to go and see all the other 'admired beauties of Verona'. Benvolio hopes this will help Romeo forget about Rosaline. Romeo, Benvolio, and Mercutio go to the party wearing masks, since the Capulets would probably kill Romeo and Benvolio if they saw them there.

At the party, Romeo sees Juliet and instantly forgets Rosaline. Romeo approaches and takes Juliet's hand, making an apology for this forwardness in the form of a poem called a sonnet. Juliet responds playfully, maintaining the poetic form. By the time they finish the sonnet, Romeo and Juliet have kissed twice. The Nurse calls Juliet away and Romeo finds out that Juliet is a Capulet.

After the party is over, Romeo slips away from Benvolio and Mercutio, hiding in the Capulet's orchard. Seeing a light from a window above, Romeo fantasizes that it's Juliet's window and is delighted when Juliet appears. Romeo and Juliet declare their love for one another and agree to make arrangements the next day to get married.

Romeo visits Friar Laurence and asks for help in marrying Juliet. Although troubled by how hastily Romeo's affections have transferred from Rosaline to Juliet, Friar Laurence hopes this marriage will help mend the feud between the families and agrees to help. The plan is simple: the Friar will secretly perform the wedding, and Romeo will climb a rope ladder to Juliet's bedroom so that they can spend their wedding night together.

Immediately after the wedding ceremony, Romeo encounters Juliet's cousin Tybalt in conversation with Benvolio and Mercutio. A fight breaks out, and while Romeo tries to stop it, Tybalt kills Mercutio. Romeo then kills Tybalt and immediately regrets it. The punishment for this crime is banishment, but before leaving Verona, Romeo spends the night with Juliet.

But wait, there's more! →

What happens with Romeo (continued)

While in exile in Mantua, Romeo hears that Juliet has died. Romeo doesn't know that Juliet has actually taken a special potion that mimics death to escape a second marriage. Romeo doesn't receive the letter Friar Laurence has sent explaining the situation. Romeo visits an apothecary, purchases a lethal poison, then travels to Juliet's tomb in Verona. Although astounded by Juliet's lifelike appearance, Romeo takes the poison and dies, moments before Juliet wakes up.

Some words used to describe Romeo

The ways that Romeo is talked about can illuminate aspects of the character.

star-crossed	tormented	good pilgrim	gracious
heavy	gentle	bachelor	sweet
secret	lover	beloved	pupil
good	villain	dull earth	young waverer
fair	young	wise	Fortune's fool
bound	virtuous	too bold	beautiful tyrant
whipped	well-governed	bescreened in night	fiend angelical

Some things Romeo 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 Under love's heavy burden do I sink.
- 2 O, she doth teach the torches to burn bright!
- 3 He jests at scars that never felt a wound.
- 4 With love's light wings did I o'erperch these walls,
For stony limits cannot hold love out.
- 5 O, let us hence! I stand on sudden haste!
- 6 Gentle Mercutio, put thy rapier up.
- 7 Fire-eyed fury be my conduct now!
- 8 O, I am Fortune's fool!
- 9 Is it e'en so?
Then I defy you, stars!
- 10 O true apothecary! Thy drugs are quick.
Thus with a kiss I die.

Challenging assumptions about Romeo

You may sometimes hear people say that Romeo and Juliet are “united in death” as if that were an acceptable fate for these young people. What do you think? Are Romeo and Juliet’s actions impulsive? What other choices can you imagine they might make? How might they have avoided these irreversible consequences? Why do you think people sometimes try to interpret their tragic deaths in a romantic way?

Your interpretation of Romeo

Now it's your turn! Read through the information about Romeo 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 Romeo 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 Romeo, create your own movement-based interpretation of the text.

Create a sculpture or statue using your body to express what Romeo’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 Romeo soundtrack be? What types of instruments, ambient sounds, or music would accompany your Romeo? Make a Romeo playlist, or create a soundscape: if you like, you could include recordings of the descriptive words and/or Romeo’s lines.

WRITE

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

MAKE

Create a costume design. What would your Romeo wear? Where does this character 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 Romeo 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 Romeo and by the lines that Romeo 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 Romeo? About the play? About yourself?