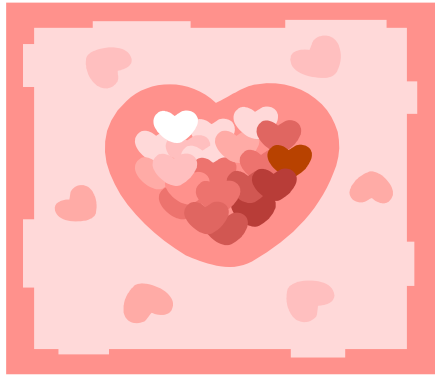
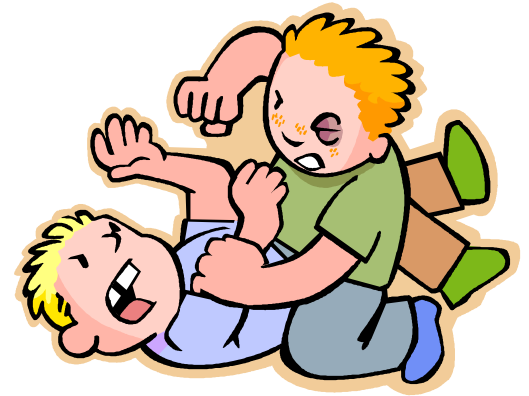


Romeo and Juliet: Themes



Love and Hate



The central theme of Romeo and Juliet is a love which overcomes hate. It is a story of a “a pair of star-crossed lovers” who “with their death bury their parents’ strife”. Romeo and Juliet fall in love in a world of feuding and hostility but their love for each other struggles against all the obstacles and though they meet a tragic end, their deaths bring love and reconciliation to Verona. Throughout the play there is a constant conflict between the love of the two lovers and the hate that surrounds them.

Theme: Love and Hate



In Act 1 Scene I we see the extent of the hatred in Verona as the play opens with a battle on Verona's streets. All are involved in disturbing the peace of Verona from the servants, to the young men, to the heads of the rival families. Prince Escalus tries in vain to solve the problem saying:

***“If ever you disturb our streets again
Your lives shall pay the forfeit of the peace”***

In Act 3 Scene I the Prince tries yet again to stop the violence on the streets which led to the deaths of Mercutio and Tybalt. However, all of the Prince's efforts fail to restore peace to Verona.



Theme: Love and Hate



The hate-filled environment Romeo and Juliet attempt to survive in is made clear through the characters Tybalt and Lady Capulet. After the slaying of Tybalt, Lady Capulet seeks vengeance, even though it was Tybalt who caused his own death by seeking to punish Romeo:

“Romeo slew Tybalt, Romeo must not live”

The same Tybalt in Act 1 Scene I shows utter contempt for peace:

*“What! Drawn, and talk of peace. I hate the word
As I hate hell, all Montagues and thee”.*

Theme: Love and Hate

Thus we see that hatred and vengeance are rife in Verona and even the Prince cannot bring peace. Benvolio's efforts to bring peace were also in vain when he failed to persuade Mercutio to stay off the streets in Act 3 Scene 1:

*"I pray thee good Mercutio, let's retire
The day is hot, the Capulets abroad"*

Friar Laurence's attempts to restore peace to Verona are also a failure and all he can do is adopt a desperate and ill-fated plan to save the lovers. Verona is a hotbed of violence and hatred which makes it impossible for Romeo and Juliet's love to thrive.



Theme: Love and Hate



The love of Romeo and Juliet brings a new ray of hope to violent Verona. In Act 2 Scene II the lovers declare their true love for each other which transcends the hatred of their families. Juliet declares that her love is more important than all else saying:

*“My bounty is as boundless as the sea
My love as deep ...”*

Romeo matches Juliet’s commitment announcing:

“Call me but love and I’ll be new baptiz’d”

Thus the lovers take on the hatred of the world, hoping to transform it into love. They enjoy precious few stolen moments away from the violent world of Verona but reality is never far away.

Theme: Love and Hate



As they try to overcome the obstacles to their love later on in the play, they each sacrifice all for the sake of love. In Act 3 Scene V Juliet puts Romeo's safety ahead of her own desire to keep him with her in Verona.

"hie hence, be gone away"

In Act 4 Scene III Juliet is confronted with marriage to Paris but she does not hesitate to risk even death itself, by taking the Friar's potion. She takes on the hatred and misunderstanding of her family and friends for the sake of her love with Romeo.

"Romeo, I come! this do I drink to thee."

Theme: Love and Hate

Romeo too is prepared to sacrifice himself for love when confronted with the report of Juliet's 'death' and acts swiftly and decisively saying:

"Well, Juliet, I will lie with thee tonight."

The sacrifices of the lovers results in the tragic suicides of Romeo and Juliet in Act 5 Scene III when they both decide to die rather than be separated by a hostile world. The hate and conflict of Verona made it impossible for their love to flourish.



Theme: Love and Hate



Yet all is not lost. By the end of the play love triumphs over death and hatred as the grief-stricken families mourn the death of their children. Where all else had failed to bring peace and harmony to Verona, the young lovers by their example and sacrifices reconciled their families and brought a much needed peace to Verona. Love overcame hatred and though tragic the lovers' deaths were at least not in vain.

*“A glooming peace this morning with it brings;
The sun, for sorrow, will not show his head.”*

Order is restored in the disordered world of Verona.

Theme: The Inevitability of Fate

In its first address to the audience, the Chorus states that Romeo and Juliet are “star-crossed” meaning that fate - a power often vested in the movements of the star - controls them. This sense of fate permeates the play, and not just for the audience. The characters also are quite aware of it: Romeo and Juliet constantly see omens. After killing Tybalt Romeo cries out “O! I am Fortune’s fool” openly acknowledging his ill-fate. When Romeo believes that Juliet is dead, he responds, “Then I defy you, stars,” completing the idea that the love between Romeo and Juliet is in opposition to the decrees of destiny.





Of course, Romeo's defiance itself plays into the hands of fate, and his determination to spend eternity with Juliet results in their deaths. The mechanism of fate works in all of the events surrounding the lovers: the feud between their families; the horrible series of accidents that ruin Friar Lawrence's seemingly well-intentioned plans at the end of the play; and the tragic timing of Romeo's suicide and Juliet's awakening. These events are not mere coincidences, but rather manifestations of fate that help bring about the unavoidable outcome of the young lovers' deaths.