

# BBC Bitesize Romeo and Juliet

## Episode 3 - Family

HOLLIE: Hi, and welcome to our Bitesize English literature podcast, my name is Hollie McNish and I'm very excited to be here. Right now, we're looking at one of William Shakespeare's best-known tragedies, Romeo and Juliet.

It's a play about what happens when two teenagers from families that hate each other meet and fall in love. Across seven episodes with the help of the brilliant writer, rapper, and beat boxer, Testament, we'll take you through the key themes of this tragic play so you're as well prepared as possible to tackle your GCSE in English literature.

Feel free to stop us - any time you want - to scribble down notes, to relisten, to repeat things in your head or out loud, whatever works for you, whatever makes it less stressful. Today, we're gonna be focusing on one of the text's key themes, family. But first, here's a couple of clips, starting with the very famous balcony scene.

[CLIP FROM ROMEO AND JULIET]

Juliet: "Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo? Deny thy father and refuse thy name, or if thou wilt not, be but sworn my love, and I'll no longer be a Capulet."

[music plays]

[CLIP FROM ROMEO AND JULIET]

Prince: "All are punished."

CAPULET: "O brother Montague, give me thy hand."

TESTAMENT: "O brother Montagu, give me thy hand" - this is about when the two families come together as a new fam-, you know, the Montagues and the Capulets, that's a chink of hope.

HOLLIE: Family, as we've heard there, is a huge theme in this play which crosses over in many ways with the themes of love and conflict, so if you're talking about family go and listen to the episodes on love and conflict as well, because we talk about family a lot in those episodes.

The whole play is built [chuckling] around the conflict and the love between these two families, after all. So, Testament, these aren't your everyday families.

TESTAMENT: No, the-, these are not just the people that lie down the road and you see them at the fish and chip shop, this is-, these are like two wealthy land-owning families in renaissance Italy, so old school, olden times, pow-, two powerful families, they're almost like two companies, or two institutions or-, almost like two massive football teams.

You've got these two estates, these two households, which-, and a family doesn't just mean, as we can see from the text, literally who's your mum, your dad, your cousin, it's down to the servants, the servants are part of this family in a-, in a, sort of, uh an old-fashioned, sort of, grand sense.

HOLLIE: How would you maybe talk about that if you're answering a question about this theme in particular?

TESTAMENT: It's this "ancient grudge", um which is a nice quote there, in the prologue, at the b-, very beginning of the uh play, "ancient grudge", file save that one, is-, is what this story is about, is a

grudge so old between these two different families and we don't know why they hate each other. And even the servants of the family hate the servants of the other family.

So, you've got these two families and you've got other people that are kind of family as well, you've got the prince and his kinsman, Mercutio and-, and Paris, who are also caught up in this. So, you've almost got three different families with the Capulets on one side, Montagues on the other, and then the prince and uh, his people uh trying to keep the peace.

HOLLIE: And as well as conflict in that way, this ancient grudge, um in the context of Verona at the time, there's also such a big sense of duty, isn't there, in Romeo and Juliet. Like, at the time that idea of honouring your family is huge.

I guess for me, Juliet is the character that Shakespeare shows this idea of family duty and loyalty maybe most powerfully, this scene which I've talked about before, but this scene with her father, with Capulet telling her she's supposed to marry Paris, like this much older man.

[CLIP FROM ROMEO AND JULIET]

CAPULET: "I'll give you to my friend; and you be not, hang, beg, starve, die in the streets, for, by my soul, I'll ne'er acknowledge thee, nor what is mine shall never do thee good".

HOLLIE: This is part of doing her duty to her family. One of the most interesting things in this play in terms of family, is that the actual-, the idea of parenting in Romeo and Juliet is-, is very clever, is very interesting, so both Romeo and Juliet, not one or the other, but both of them are in a way, they're failed by their parents,

it's not their mother or their father, who's really caring for them, that-, the parents are more interested partly in this conflict in-, in social advancement, they're not so interested in what their children actually want.

But Shakespeare does put in two other characters, which in any essay or any exam on family I would definitely mention - who are like family to both Romeo and Juliet, and who you could argue are more of a mother, and more of a father to Romeo and Juliet.

TESTAMENT: Yeah, a hundred per cent, I think. The nurse, well, has compassion for Juliet; the friar has compassion for them both, and you-, and you see, like, these are two people that Juliet and Romeo can pretty much tell anything to. Juliet can not say everything that she wants to say about her inner life and who she's in love with to her parents, and the same with um Romeo to the Montagues as well.

HOLLIE: And I think that they're put there to show that family is not just blood ties, I mean, Shakespeare's added these characters, they-, they don't gain anything by caring from-, for these children, for these young people. The fact that the-, the nurse was actually Juliet's wet nurse, which is somebody that was brought in, not only to look after the child, but also to actually breastfeed. So women that ha-, also had a baby, so they were producing breastmilk, so she's-, you know, she's nursed Juliet, she's had this absolutely maternal bond with Juliet, and I think these two characters are shown as so much more thoughtful.

[music plays]

TESTAMENT: What I love about the marriage between Romeo and Juliet is, even though it's in secret, it has, in-, certainly in the minds of Romeo and in Juliet have united, so now, Tybalt isn't an enemy anymore, now he's a family member.

HOLLIE: Yeah, even though he doesn't know it!

TESTAMENT: Even though he doesn't know it, and so a family's actually growing in this play without the Capulets and [chuckling] Montagues realising it, because of the love, the "pure love" to quote Friar, that uh Romeo and Juliet have got.

HOLLIE: And that's a-, that's a turning point in the plot, isn't it? [Testament: Yeah.] It's one of-, one of the first family themed turning points when they get married and they have actually combined these two families.

TESTAMENT: Yeah, and it's a point of no return because once they're married, actually you're uniting the two households. They're all family now, they don't realise it. And uh what I love is by the end of the play, after the tragedy is done, what does Capulet call Lord Montague? He says, "O brother Montague, give me thy hand." [Hollie: Yeah.]

Um so now you've got what were two separate families, so these two-, two tribes - now they're brothers.

[music plays]

HOLLIE: Right, so each episode as well as talking about the theme, chatting about the theme, we're gonna give you some great quotes, [sniggering] or quotes that we think are great that you can use to make your essays sound excellent that you can easily remember and that you can talk about the author's intention and the language.

So you might wanna write down these quotes, highlight them in your text or go through and-, and think of your own if you've got quotes that you prefer, so Testament, you go first, give us a line that really speaks to this question about the theme of family.

TESTAMENT: I've got a very bitesize one, it's just the two words "ancient grudge", and if you want the long w-, long version of it, you could say, "from ancient grudge break to new mutiny." Later-, later on, in the same opening monologue, it talks about, "the continuance of their parents' rage". So yeah, "the continuance of their parents' rage".

HOLLIE: One of the ways that I find it easy to remember is to choose quotes that I like the sound of. [Testament: "Mm."] Do you like the sound of the quote?

TESTAMENT: Uh you'd have to pull some right faces to say the word ancient grudge, it's like you're eating, like, a giant ball of chewing gum, "ancient grudge", and as a beat boxer, I love a lot of the sounds that are used for different syllables and different parts of words.

Ancient grudge, ancient grudge, [repeats "ancient grudge" in a beat box manner] yeah? Let's beat box it, fam.

HOLLIE: I wish I had so many skills as you in this respect. [chuckles] Some-, so my quote here is another quote that I've already used and then I'll give you a new one that I haven't used in another theme, and it is when Juliet's father, Lord Capulet, is telling her "Hang, beg, starve, die in the streets." And I think this is just such a sad moment in terms of the theme of family.

The other quote I'll use for this, for family, is, "Deny thy father, and refuse thy name ... and I'll no longer be a Capulet." It's like refuse the entire ancient family heritage, it's-, it's not a small thing. And that is like the 'Lurve' scene in Act One, Scene Two.

TESTAMENT: It's very patriarchal, it's not, deny your mother, nope, it's your father, coz the father in this society's dominating and bullying everyone into fights.

HOLLIE: And I liked this because-, basically, I just always choose quotes that have stuff that I can say about the language. Language analysis is what will make the essay stand out to an examiner, they 'lurve' language. There's obviously repetition, "Deny thy father and refuse they name" there's a kind of rhythm and a rhyme to it that kind of makes it for me seem-, seem simple.  
"I'll no longer be a Capulet", the use of the future tense here, quite nice easy way to talk about language is talk about tenses, so she says, "and I'll no longer be a Capulet", it's not, I might no longer, I'll try, it's like, I will no longer be a Capulet.

TESTAMENT: I-, I like the use of three there, you've got three chunks of that quote, you've got, do that, then do that, and this'll be the result. [Hollie: [laughing] Yeah.] One, two, and three. [Hollie: Yeah, it's simplicity again.]  
[over Hollie] So first of all, "Deny thy [sniggering] father", then, "refuse thy name", "I'll no longer be a Capulet." So, you've got-, that might help you um land in your brain and-, and, sort of, sort it in your brain, "Deny thy father," yeah, "refuse they name ... I'll no longer be a Capulet." I've got a bit of a hopeful one uh to end on, when Capulet says to Montague, "O brother Montague, give me thy hand."

[music plays]

HOLLIE: Thank you so much for listening to this episode, hopefully you've now got a better grasp on why family is such an important and interesting theme in Romeo and Juliet.  
Check out more information about Romeo and Juliet on the BBC Bitesize website. And have a listen to other episodes of the Bitesize English Literature podcast on BBC Sounds about this text where me and Testament will be looking at five more key themes: fate, youth, individual versus society, conflict, and love. Good luck.

TESTAMENT: "O, the blood is spilt of my dear kinsman!"