

Some Famous Shakespeare's Masterpieces

Hamlet, Prince of Denmark

One night Prince Hamlet of Denmark meets the ghost of his dead father inside *Elsinore* Castle. The Ghost tells him that he was murdered by Hamlet's uncle Claudius. Now Claudius has married Hamlet's mother, Gertrude, and has declared himself the new King. The Ghost asks Hamlet to take revenge.

The Prince's life changes completely. He discovers that the girl he loves, Ophelia, her father Polonius and even his mother the Queen, all support Claudius. Because of his strange behaviour, everybody except his friend Horatio, believes that Hamlet is mad.

After many disasters, finally Hamlet kills Claudius, but his revenge causes many other people to die... including himself. Only Horatio survives to tell the truth to the world and to create a new beginning for Denmark.



Main Themes of the Play

What makes this play deeply modern is first of all its characters. Hamlet is a modern man with psychological problems and suffering. Just because he is not a "strong and brave" man like most of the men of his times he hesitates in killing his uncle in cold blood. Hamlet hates violence, revenge and killing because they are not part of his nature: still he feels that he has to avenge his beloved father.

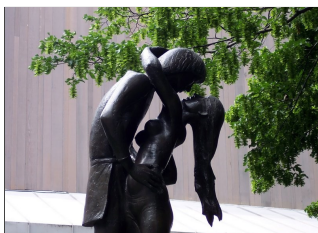
Romeo and Juliet: the Story and the Plot

The play takes place in the town of Verona, where the *Montagues* and the *Capulets* are two rival families involved in a family feud. No member of the family is ready to forgive and forget the past. Romeo Montague goes to a party where he meets Juliet, and immediately falls in love with her. He later discovers that she is a *Capulet*, the rival family of the Montagues. But he loves her anyway and they confess their love for each other during the very famous "balcony scene" in which they decide to secretly marry the next day to stop the feud between the families.

But unfortunately, things can only go worse and Romeo ends up killing Tybalt of the *Capulet* family. For this, Romeo is banished from Verona.

The *Capulets* plan Juliet's marriage to Paris. But Juliet does not want to marry him so she arranges with Friar Lawrence to fake her own death with a sleeping potion that will make everyone think that she is dead. Friar Lawrence promises to tell Romeo about the potion, but he does not receive the message on time and when he hears of Juliet's "death" he goes to her tomb, drinks a real poison and dies. When Juliet's potion wears off, she awakens and finds her lover's corpse. She then stabs herself with Romeo's dagger. The two families find the bodies and finally make peace with each other. The feud is finally over.

Main Themes of the Play



Romeo and Juliet's Statue
in Central Park, NYC

Again, this Shakespeare's drama is absolutely modern. For example, Romeo and Juliet are too hasty to fall in love and to get married: they don't even think that something could go wrong (typical of the young people).

The feuding of the families, so common in modern world, is the real responsible for the tragedy. Families don't even know what they are fighting about, still some members of the *Capulets* and *Montagues* hate each other only because of their family names.

In the drama there are many difficult decisions, and all of them – like in real life - are very difficult to be taken. For example, Juliet's big dilemma: to follow her parents ideas and wishes, or follow her heart and marry Romeo?

But *Romeo and Juliet* is also about the eternal feeling of Love, and Shakespeare's message is that Love admits no barriers!

Now answer these questions:

1. What is *Hamlet Prince of Denmark* about? Shortly summarize the plot.
2. Why is Hamlet still such a modern character?
3. Why does Hamlet kill his uncle Claudius?
4. What does revenge cause all through the story of *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*?
5. Who are the *Montagues* and the *Capulets* and where do they come from?
6. Why does Juliet's father hate Romeo?
7. Who is Tybalt and what happens to him and to Romeo as a consequence?
8. Why does Juliet drink a potion? And Romeo?
9. What is Juliet's reaction when she awakes and sees Romeo by her side?
10. Why, in your opinion, is *Romeo and Juliet* still actual?
11. Which of these two famous plays is your favourite? Explain why.