ABOUT THE FILM

William Shakespeare’s *Romeo + Juliet*, directed by Australian filmmaker Baz Luhrmann, is an adaptation of William Shakespeare’s well-known classic, *Romeo and Juliet*. A unique adaptation, Luhrmann’s version transports the story from Verona, Italy in the 1600s and places it in the fictional seaside town of Verona Beach, but keeps the classic Shakespearean dialogue. When released in 1996, the film received mixed reviews, but has come to be known as a cult classic in the years following its release.

ABOUT THE FILMMAKER

**BAZ LUHRMANN, DIRECTOR**

Mark Anthony Luhrmann, known to the world as “Baz” Luhrmann, is well known for his “Red Curtain Trilogy” that begins with *Strictly Ballroom* (1992), continues with *Romeo + Juliet*, and concludes with *Moulin Rouge* (2001). His unique style and eye for extravagant set and sound design placed him apart as a visionary director. He is currently working on a 3D adaptation of F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby*, slated to be released in the fall of 2011.

THINKING AHEAD

**Q:** The story of Romeo and Juliet is about two families fighting over their differences, otherwise known as a “feud.” Have you ever been in a feud? What might a feud be called today? Why did it start? What was it about? How do people resolve feuds today?

**Q:** The original play was first published in 1597, over 400 years ago. Thinking beyond things like cell phones, the Internet, and television—how do you think life was different 400 years ago? What about life hasn’t changed in 400 years? Do you think your life is easier today then it would have been then? Why?

**Q:** Originally, *Romeo and Juliet* was written to be performed on stage, which involves live actors, a limited amount of time, and other restrictions. What tools are available when the story is told on film, rather than in an actual theater?
THE FILM IN CONTEXT

CONSIDERATIONS OF AN ADAPTATION

When adapting a play into a film, there are many things to consider. *Romeo + Juliet* is a great example because it not only takes the classic play off the stage and onto the big screen, it also takes this classic story out of the past and sets it in the modern world.

Although written almost half a century ago, the themes of love, fate, and conflict are still relevant today. In order to adapt the original work, many changes were made to the setting, costumes and props, yet the original dialogue remained the same. Consider the following topics, and how the filmmaker transitioned the story from the past to the present, and then from the stage to the screen.

**COSTUMES**

Pay close attention to the choice of costumes used in the film. Notice what the characters wear in the costume party scene—what do these costumes say about the characters? Would the modern day clothing used in the film work in a stage version of the play? Why or why not?

**PROPS**

This adaptation replaces Shakespeare’s swords with handguns. Take note of how the guns are held and used by the characters like swords. What other props have been updated for the film adaptation?

**DIALOGUE**

Baz Luhrmann made many changes, but chose to use the original dialogue. Why? How would you describe the experience of hearing “old-fashioned” dialogue while seeing present-day images?

**SETTING**

The original play takes place in the Italian city of Verona. In keeping with that setting, the filmmaker chose to set this adaptation in Verona Beach, a fictional town based on Venice Beach in Los Angeles. What had to be done by the filmmaker to make this fake town seem realistic? Do you imagine that the film’s setting is more engaging than a set used on stage for play? Is it more distracting? How and why?

OTHER “MODERN DAY” SHAKESPEARE FILM ADAPTATIONS

*West Side Story* (1961)
A musical adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* set in 1960s Manhattan, switching the Montagues and Capulets for two rival gangs, the Jets and the Sharks.

*10 Things I Hate About You* (1999)
*The Taming of the Shrew* set in a modern day high school where a “No-Dating Rule” enforced by a young girl’s father is challenged by the new boy in school.

*Hamlet* (2000)
The story of this tragic play is moved from a royal family in Shakespearean times and placed into a modern day company called “Denmark Corporation,” but still uses Shakespeare’s original dialogue.

*O* (2001)
*Othello*, Shakespeare’s classic tale of racism, love, jealousy and betrayal, rewrites the title character as Odin James, a high school basketball player and only African American student at his school.

*Scotland, PA* (2001)
*Macbeth* retold as the power struggles within one family as they fight for control of their dead father’s diner.
HOW TO BE A CRITICAL VIEWER

Being a critical viewer is different than simply watching a movie. Critical viewing is about being able to examine the information that a movie, commercial, music video or TV show is giving you and ask meaningful questions about the information that you receive. Media makers create work for many reasons: to inform, persuade, entertain, shock, sell, etc. A critical viewer asks, “What goal is the media maker trying to achieve, and what impact do they want to have on me?”

A critical viewer is someone who:

• Listens carefully to what is being said in the movie
• Pays attention to the details used by the filmmaker to convey the message of the film
• Asks meaningful questions

Being a critical viewer will help you understand:

• The themes and issues that the filmmaker is addressing
• The reasons why the filmmaker chose to make the movie
• The message of the movie

In this study guide you will find background information, activities, and questions that will help you practice being a critical viewer.
CRITICAL VIEWING REFLECTION

Now that you’ve watched the film and worked through the Study Guide, take some time to reflect on the following questions. These worksheets are an important step in practicing your critical viewing skills. Write down your answers and compare with your friends and classmates.

Every film has a **MESSAGE** that the filmmaker wants to communicate. There are a few key questions you can ask yourself to help figure out a film’s message.

What do you think the film is about?

What is the filmmaker trying to say about the subject? What evidence is used?

Why do you think the filmmaker made this film?

**PRODUCTION** describes the process of making a film and includes writing the script, choosing different types of shots while filming, editing the final footage, and choosing music. The choices made during production affect how we experience the movie.

How is the story of the film told? Does it remind you of other films you have seen? If so, which ones and how? If not, how was it unique?

How does the way the film is made change the way you understand the topic? (Think about the structure of the film, the music, etc.)
CRITIQUE: WHAT DO YOU THINK?

When you CRITIQUE a film as a critical viewer you are doing more than saying whether you like it or not, you are forming your own opinions about the quality of the film, clearly explaining your thoughts, and using evidence from the film to support these opinions.

What did you find interesting about the film? Why?

Why is the film interesting to other viewers (even if it wasn’t interesting to you)?

Why do you think the filmmaker took the time to make this film?

What would you have done differently if you were the director?

What kind of audience is the film targeting? (Remember, one film can target many different kinds of audiences!)
RESOURCE GUIDE

FURTHER READING  IF YOU’RE INTERESTED IN LEARNING MORE ABOUT SOME OF THE ISSUES PRESENTED IN THE FILM, CHECK OUT THESE BOOKS.

**Ungentle Shakespeare (2001)**  
By Katherine Duncan-Jones  
Most of Shakespeare’s private life is forgotten by history, but through the intensive research of the author, this book reveals it for the first time. Great for recounting the life of the most prolific playwright of all time, this book also looks deeply into the world Shakespeare lived in.

**Romeo and Juliet: Side by Side (2004)**  
Published by Prestwick House  
Shakespeare’s original dialogue appears on one side of the page, and a modern day translation is on the other for immediate comprehension of the language.

**Shakespeare: Script, Stage, Screen (2005)**  
By David Bevington  
A collected analysis of over 20 of Shakespeare’s most popular plays, including studies of performance styles and cinematic adaptations.

**No Fear Shakespeare–Graphic Novels (2008)**  
Published by SparkNotes  
*Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, and *Romeo and Juliet* are given modern day twists in these graphic novels that are drawn in varying styles and deliver the source material in a unique and accessible way.

FURTHER WATCHING  IF YOU LIKED THIS FILM, YOU MIGHT ALSO LIKE SOME OF THESE OTHER FILMS.

**Shakespeare in Love (1998)**  
This fictional take on the love life of William Shakespeare offers a rare glimpse into what his life might have been like, and explores possible inspirations for his classic works.

**Romeo Retold (2005)**  
Similar to Baz Luhrmann’s *Romeo + Juliet*, this British series transports several of Shakespeare’s plays to modern day settings such as a TV news station, a three-star restaurant, and an amusement park.

**Slings and Arrows (2003)**  
Based on the real-world Stratford Festival (an international Shakespeare festival), this film is notable for its open and honest depiction of the difficulty of engaging an audience who continuously questions the relevancy of Shakespeare.

**Hamlet 2 (2008)**  
A high school drama teacher produces a quirky sequel to *Hamlet* that involves time travel to prevent the deaths of the main characters. This film offers another interesting take on the lengths modern theater sometimes has to go to make Shakespeare relevant to the modern audience.

ONLINE RESOURCES  DISCOVER MORE INFORMATION ON THE WEB ABOUT THIS FILM AND RELATED TOPICS.

**Shakespeare Online**  
[www.shakespeare-online.com](http://www.shakespeare-online.com)  
This site is what it says, the one stop shop for anyone interested in learning more about the life and works of William Shakespeare.

**British Film Institute**  
[www.screenonline.org.uk](http://www.screenonline.org.uk)  
A wealth of knowledge for any film fan, including a breakdown of the history of film adaptations.

**ShakespeareBot**  
[www.shakespearebot.com](http://www.shakespearebot.com)  
Ever wanted to IM with William Shakespeare? Well thanks to the amazing technology of ShakespeareBot, you can! Chat with ol’ Willy and see what his response would be.

**TV Tropes–Screen to Stage Adaptations**  
[www.tvtropes.org](http://www.tvtropes.org)  
Check out the tropes (techniques) most commonly seen in film to stage adaptations, and then search this addictive site to discover some surprising similarities used in adaptations.
ABOUT TRIBECA YOUTH SCREENING SERIES
This program provides NYC public school students and teachers with access to free, educationally-relevant and challenging films. Each screening is followed by a Q&A, study guides and supplemental educator materials are provided, and teachers are strongly encouraged to utilize films as part of their curriculum. This monthly-series strives to expose New York City students to independent films and help educators and students incorporate film-viewing into their classroom work. For more information about TFI's youth programs, please visit www.tribecafilminstitute.org/youth or email youth@tribecafilminstitute.org

The Tribeca Youth Screening Series trailer features the song “A Speck of Granola” by Teddy Blanks, from Tiny Furniture Original Soundtrack.

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The Tribeca Film Institute (TFI) is a year-round nonprofit arts organization that empowers working filmmakers through grants, professional development and resources, while also helping New York City students discover independent film and filmmaking.