



## **Romeo and Juliet and Westside Story: Time Stands Still in Literature**

Curriculum Unit 86.01.06  
by Cheryl E. Merritt

### **INTRODUCTION**

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Often in an attempt to acquaint minority students with “classic” literature, teachers of English assign students reading that is not appropriate. Many times students are assigned works they simply do not understand.

Teachers have a special responsibility to students. They must be able to justify teaching a curriculum. Not just because it is “classic” literature. Young minority students need to be exposed to “classic” literature, but they need to be able to relate or they will not benefit.

A plot in a Shakespearean drama may seem to be irrelevant to the minority youth of today. They are seeking to solve problems in their own lives. Thus many minority youth turn a deaf ear to “classic” literature.

This unit can be taught in the middle school, grades 6-8. It is designed for slow learners, but not limited to slow learners. The suggested teaching time for this unit is eight to ten weeks. Teachers will be able to introduce students to the joys of reading the well known classic, ROMEO and JULIET. It includes discussion questions, questionnaires of facts, vocabulary study, lesson plans, and lists of books, films, and recordings for both teachers and students.

The feuding Montagues and Capulets in old Verona may raise the question of family loyalty. Students will be able to sort out their own sense of family. Is family loyalty important and why? How far does one go? Is individuality within the family as important as family unity and strength? How is individuality developed without a loss of family loyalty?

Youth of the middle school age group will find it easy to relate to conflicts. Most young people will experience some type of conflict during this period. It may be family, peer, school, or community gang. What may not be so easy is finding ways to sort out individual feelings, effects and solutions.

Both Romeo and Juliet and Westside Story are centered around conflicts of young people. The adults seemed alienated from the needs of the youths and are not sympathetic to them.

## HISTORY OF THE FAMILY

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The family is the most important group to which most people ever belong. They are born into a family, grow up in it, and remain in their parents' family or, after they are married, in their own family throughout their lives.

The family does many things for its members. A family lives together and cares for the needs of each person. Within the family, members find love, sympathy, and companionship more easily than in any other group. A general definition of a family is that it is a small group of people related to one another by birth, adoption, or marriage, sharing a household and caring for one another.

In the United States and in other industrialized countries, the father, the mother, and their unmarried children usually make up the family. This kind of family is called a nuclear family.

In parts of the world where people live mainly by farming, often a father, mother, their married sons, the sons' wives, and their children all live and work together. This kind of family is called an extended family.

Families may differ a great deal from one place to another and from one age to another. But all have certain basic functions: providing for the care and rearing of children, either by parents or other groups; and providing for the needs of parents.

The first stage in the family life cycle begins with marriage. In this stage the family consist of the husband and wife. This stage goes back as far as Adam and Eve. In the Hebrew family unit the husband was the master, who is over the house and everyone in it. The wife is charged with running the household. She sees to it that the wishes of the master are carried out at home.

Then the second stage of the family life cycle which begins with the first child birth. In times past, many families had four or more children. A large family was regarded as a great blessing. Now two children are regarded as the ideal number and many families have only one child.

The reasons for this change in family size is clear. Women have emancipated themselves from the ear-marked duties of motherhood. Birth control equipment is more available. Women are no longer robbed of pregnancies in close succession. Today women have the time, health, and above all the spirit to agitate for better conditions for themselves, for education, and careers. As a young couple with a small family, they can aim at having a higher standard of living.

There are many kinds of families. In the equalitarian family the father is considered the head of the family, but the mother and children also have a part in making decisions. When the father makes almost all decisions and his wife and children are not supposed to make any objections this is an authoritarian family type. In other families the oldest male member—the grandfather or his oldest son—makes the decisions. Such families are called patriarchal. Matriarchal is when the women is in charge.

## OBJECTIVES FOR THIS UNIT

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The students will be able to:

- \*obtain and assess information about family relationships.
- \*make comparisons of various types of family literature.
- \*recall relevant facts.
- \*draw conclusions and record data obtained.
- \*make constructive criticisms.
- \*transform a classic piece of literature into a modern adaptation.
- \*develop a vocabulary relevant to materials.
- \*read for specific information.

### **Lesson Plan—#1**

***Objectives The student will be able to obtain and assess information about family relationships.***

***Procedures Each student will be given a personal family survey form to complete. (A sample form is contained in this unit.)***

Students will then discuss their family relationship as well as other family relationships. The teacher may wish to control the direction of the discussion asking questions such as:

1. Who is the head of your household? Why?
2. Are all family members equally responsible for the protection of the family unit?
3. Should final decisions always be made in the same manner?
4. Are families closer to each other on happy occasions or in crisis? Why or why not?
5. How does where a family live affect them?

***Extension Have the students as a group compile a set of questions to ask their parents and grandparents comparing family life during their childhood and the family life of today.***

Each student will use this set of questions to obtain information from parents. They will draw on this information to discuss changes that have taken place in the family over the past fifty years.

## Lesson Plan—#2

**Objectives** *The student will make comparisons of various types of family literature.*

The student will make constructive criticisms.

**Procedure** *Ask each student to make a list of as many family related pieces of literature as they can think of.*

The teacher may also add some pieces that will be familiar to most students.

Now allow them to discuss and compare several of the pieces on the lists.

## SAMPLE FAMILY SURVEY

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Circle the best choice.

1. I am a  
boy girl
2. In my family I am  
the youngest child middle child oldest child
3. What age group are you in?  
(9-12) (13-15)
4. Do you live with both parents in the same home?  
yes no
5. How many sibling(s) live in the house with you?  
1 2 3 4 5 more
6. How many sibling(s) do not live with you?  
1 2 3 4 5 more
7. Are there any stepbrothers or stepsisters living with you?  
yes no
8. I have a  
stepmother stepfather
9. Is the entire family aware of problems in the family?  
always sometimes never
10. Are the adults the first to know about a problem?  
always sometimes never
11. Do family members outside of your home know about family problems in your home?  
always sometimes never
12. Does the family as a whole agree on how to solve problems?  
always sometimes never
13. When you have a problem, do you talk to your parents before talking to other family members?  
always sometimes never
14. Are there problems you would only talk to your brother or sister about?  
always sometimes never

15. Are there problems you would only talk to a friend about?  
always sometimes never
16. How would you rate your relationship with your mother?  
poor fair good
17. How would you rate your relationship with your father?  
poor fair good
18. Is there anyone in your immediate family with a handicap?  
yes no
19. What type of relationship does this person have with the family?  
poor fair good not applicable
20. What type of relationship do you have with the handicapped person?  
poor fair good not applicable

### Lesson Plan—#3

**Objectives** *The student will develop a vocabulary relevant to the materials and increase his understanding of the language.*

Words to know and what they mean:.

1. realized    understood
2. disease    sickness
3. tomb        a room in which the dead are buried
4. urged        tried to get someone to do something
5. reputation    honor, good name
6. curse        evil wish
7. insulted    said or did something that hurts another
8. challenge    dare, and invitation to fight a duel
9. relatives    members of one's family
10. ruin        spoil, hurt, destroy

**Procedure** *Read the following sentences aloud or write them on the board and have the students complete each sentence with the correct word.*

1. To prove that they were brave, the boys decided to spend a whole night in the cemetery near the murderer's \_\_\_\_ .
2. "We are going to visit our \_\_\_\_ in Canada next Christmas," said Geraldine.
3. "Jerry told me that an old witch put a \_\_\_\_ on him once, and now he has colds every winter," said Judy.
4. When Mark \_\_\_\_ that his baby brother was gone, he ran through the whole park until he found him.
5. "This letter is a \_\_\_\_," said the prince, "and if I open it, I must fight."
6. "My \_\_\_\_ as an honest man will be destroyed," said Mr. Collins, "unless I return two dollars to Mrs. Johnson."
7. Just as his mother finished cleaning his room, Bob came in and began to \_\_\_\_ all she had done.
8. "The counselor at school \_\_\_\_ me to study science," said Marty. "Someday I'll be another Einstein."
9. Janice was so upset when Wendy \_\_\_\_ her that all she could do was cry.
10. Tuberculosis is a \_\_\_\_ that one doesn't hear much about these days.

**Assignment Read Act I of ROMEO AND JULIET and Act I of Westside Story.**

**Follow up Show movies of each.**

**Lesson Plan—#4**

**Objectives The students will be able to recall relevant facts from the selection read, Act 1 of Romeo and Juliet .**

**Procedure Following an in-depth discussion of the selection each student would be given a list of incomplete facts from the selection. From a multiple choice list they must complete the facts by the correct choice.**

A sample fact list entitled HOW WELL DID YOU READ will be found in this unit.

**Some Discussion Questions for Romeo and Juliet**

1. What atmosphere is most strongly stressed in the beginning of the selection?
2. What words, phrases, or sentences most clearly indicate this atmosphere?
3. What threat does Prince Escalus make against the “enemies of peace”? Do you think this threat will or will not end the conflict between the feuding families? Why?
4. Why does Romeo hide from Benvolio and Mercutio?
5. How has Romeo’s attitude toward life changed since he has met Juliet?
6. Think of several adjectives you might use in describing Friar Lawrence.
7. List the steps the nurse is to take in carrying out Romeo’s instructions.
8. What is your impression of the nurse? Is this impression the same throughout the play?
9. Who renews the quarreling and feuding between the Montagues and the Capulets? Which character attempts to serve as peacemaker?
10. In your opinion, is Romeo’s decision to assume personal responsibility for avenging Mercutio’s death justified?
11. What is the nurse’s advice to Juliet, and what is Juliet’s reaction to that advice?
12. What does Juliet plan to do now?
13. What plan did the Friar give Juliet?
14. What questions and doubts come to Juliet’s mind during the “potion” scene?
15. What are your feeling toward Juliet in this scene?

Teachers may now indicate the parallelism of Romeo and Juliet and Westside Story. Have students identify the counterparts in the rival gangs of New York's West Side.

Allow students to discuss how problems outside of the family can penetrate the family unit and in what ways the family may react. How does the family maintain its unity by sharing mutual responsibility?

## **(SAMPLE) HOW WELL DID YOU READ**

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Check the correct answer.

1. Tybalt was:

- a. a relative of the Montagues.
- b. an enemy of County Paris
- c. interested in marrying Juliet.
- d. hot-headed and always ready to fight.
- e. angry that Romeo had come to the Capulets' party.

2. Romeo had gone to the costume party only because:

- a. he had hoped to meet Juliet there.
- b. he was tired of staying home alone.
- c. he thought a young lady named Rosaline was going to be there.
- d. he had nowhere else to go.
- e. he wanted to see if he could start a fight with any of his enemies who might attend.

3. Juliet was worried about marrying Romeo because:

- a. she knew Romeo was an enemy of her family.
- b. she wasn't sure she loved him.
- c. she knew her parents had found someone else for her marry.
- d. she realized that both their lives would be in danger if they married.
- e. she did not want to upset Friar Laurence.

4. Mercutio fought Tybalt in Romeo's place because:

- a. he thought that Romeo was too afraid to fight.
- b. he thought that Romeo was love-sick over Rosaline.
- c. he knew Romeo hadn't been feeling well lately.
- d. he felt like fighting at the moment, and this was his chance.

5. Instead of having Romeo executed for killing Tybalt, Prince Escalus decided that:

- a. he should be put into prison for life.
- b. he should be sent away from Verona forever.
- c. he would never be allowed to get married.
- d. he would have to work for the city of Verona as punishment.

Genealogy and family history may be an area that is sparked by this unit. The desire to know themselves and their origins, to learn from whom they acquired their genes that make them unique.

If you count the number of people whose blood flows in your veins, you notice that, in the first generation back, there were only your two parents whose genes contributed to your genetic make-up. In the second generation back, your grandparents' generation, there were four people and in the third generation back, eight and so on. The number keeps doubling in geometric progression. Viewed another way, it took, in only six generations (added up:  $64+32+16+8+4+2$ ), 126 people make you genetically what you are.

Tracing families genealogy is a hobby anyone can pursue because we all descend from people who have passed through this world before us.

Today genealogy is recognized as a science. It uses all the techniques that any other science employs: research to discover what has been previously proved; building on that to discover new data; analysis of old and new research to discover weaknesses and strengths; synthesis to pull old and new together and complete a product. It begins with the known and works toward the unknown. Searching for an ancestor involves many disciplines; history, geography, mathematics, law, religion, and more. These may become tools for a sixth grade teacher especially because on this level all of the major required courses may be taught by one teacher. This teacher may incorporate this aspect simultaneously in this unit.

The teacher may have students write down what they know about themselves. This can be a rewarding experience for the students. They will start with what is pertinent and go on from there with what ever they want to add.

Beginning with where and when they were born. What is their father's name? Their mother's? What was her maiden name? Were they baptized, christened, or Bar Mitzvahed? Where? When? Are they still single?

It may be of special interest to Black students and teachers of Black students that throughout the Western world and Africa, there are thousands of records dealing with slavery. In many cases, they were dutifully kept because of their importance to the growth of capitalism. When Africans were seized from their homeland and brought to America, the slave ship captain recorded it in his manifest. Once off the ship, if able to survive the journey, the slaves' lives were recorded in many ways— sometimes in separate records, but more often as part of the normal course of events in the slave owner's business affairs.

Once a family is traced through oral history, census, and vital statistics records back to slavery, there are familiar techniques to establish relationships through slave records.

## **RECORDS TO LOOK FOR**

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1. Slave trading records
2. Bills of slave sales
3. Slave advertisements
4. Birth, baptism, marriage, and death records
5. Census and tax records

6. Court records
7. Plantation records and diaries
8. Medical records
9. Wills, interstate records and inventories
10. Surveys

As students talk and correspond with relatives, and as they later begin research in other sources, the amount of material will grow. In genealogy the accumulation divides into at least three categories: (1) the main body of information; (2) the documentation to prove its accuracy; (3) illustrations such as pictures of places, people, things, or maps. All can be used to enhance the finished products.

There is no set standard form. The most important criterion is that the system used is readily understandable to you and anyone who uses it.

In this this unit there are some sample forms that may be used by teachers. There is a FAMILY GROUP SHEET, a MY ANCESTORS, and a FAMILY TREE. Teachers and/or students wish to develop sheet and filing systems of their own.

## MY ANCESTORS

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NAME OF PERSON \_\_\_\_\_  
 RELATION TO ME \_\_\_\_\_  
 BIRTH DATE \_\_\_\_\_ PLACE \_\_\_\_\_  
 FATHER'S NAME \_\_\_\_\_  
 MOTHER'S NAME \_\_\_\_\_  
 BROTHER'S NAMES \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 SISTER'S NAMES \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 SCHOOLS ATTENDED \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
OCCUPATIONS \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
WHERE HE/SHE LIVED \_\_\_\_\_

SPOUSE'S NAME \_\_\_\_\_

MARRIAGE DATE \_\_\_\_\_ PLACE \_\_\_\_\_

NUMBER OF CHILDREN \_\_\_\_\_

NAME      BIRTH DATE

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## STUDENT VOCABULARY

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1. feud—a fight between to families that usually lasts for many years
2. nephew—the son of one’s brother or sister
3. citizens—people who live and vote in a particular place
4. County—another word for count, a nobleman
5. included—among others
6. musicians—people who play instruments
7. beloved—someone who is loved
8. recognized—knew from having seen or heard something before
9. ruin—spoil, hurt

10. argued—quarreled
11. disturbed—bothered
12. glimpse—brief sightly glance
13. disappeared—went away, vanished
14. balcony—a small upstairs porch
15. relatives—members of ones family
16. Friar—a priest, a member of a religious order
17. challenge—dare; in this case, an invitation to fight a duel
18. Cupid—the god of love; he shoots arrows into people’s hearts to make them fall in love
19. insulted—said or did something that hurt another 20. forbidden—said that something is not allowed
21. curse—evil wish
22. wounded—hurt, injured
23. reputation—honor, good name
24. urged—tried to get someone to do something
25. penalty—punishment
26. grief—great sadness
27. Liquid—watery drink
28. vial—a small glass tube
29. tomb—a room in which the dead is buried
30. stunned—shocked , upset
31. disease—sickness
32. awakened—woke up
33. dagger—knife
34. plunged—pushed quickly
35. realized—understood

## Suggested Reading for Students (annotated)

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Baker, Margaret Joyce. *Home From the Hill* . Faraar, Straus and Giroux, Inc., 1968 (166 pages)

RUNNING AWAY

Family: unity

Resourcefulness

Brenner, Barbara Johnes. *A Year in the Life of Rosie Bernard* . Harper & Row Publishers, Inc., 1971 (179 pages)

GRANDPARENT: Living in Home

Family: extended

School: pupil-teacher relationships

Stepparent: mother

Brink, Carol Ryrie. *Caddie Woodlawn: A Frontier Story* . MacMillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1935 (270 pages)

MATURATION

Courage: meaning of

Family: unity

Gender role identify: female

Burch, Robert Joseph. *Simon and the Game of Chance* . The Viking Press, Inc., 1970 (128 pages)

COMMUNICATION: parent-child

Death: accidental

Family: unity

Guilt: feeling of

Mental illness: of parent .

Parental: control

Carlson, Natalie Savage. *The Empty Schoolhouse* . Harper & Row Publishers, Inc., 1965 (119 pages )

INTEGRATION

Afro-American

Education: value of

Curriculum Unit 86.01.06

Family: unity

Friendship: meaning of

Prejudice: ethnic/racial

Carlson, Natalie Savage. *The Half Sisters* . Harper & Row Publishers, Inc., 1970 (163 pages)

SIBLING: Half brothers/half sisters

Ambivalence: feeling of

Death: of sibling

Family: unity

Maturation

Sibling: middle

Cone, Molly Lamken. *A Promise Is a Promise* . Houghton Mifflin Co., 1964 (153 pages)

MATURATION

Values/Valuing: moral/ethical

Family: unity

Jew

Promise: keeping

Gerson, Mary-Joan. *Omoteji's Baby Brother* . Henry Z. Walck, Inc., 1974 (47 pages)

SIBLING: new baby

Africa

Giving: meaning of

Sibling: jealousy

Lee, Harper. *To Kill a Mockingbird* . J.B. Lipponcott, Co., 1960 (296 pages)

VALUES: moral/ethical

Family: unity

Justice: injustice

Prejudice: ethnic/racial

Naylor, Phyllis Reynolds, *To Walk the Sky Path* . Follett Publishing Co., 1973 (144 pages)

IDENTITY: search of

Death: of grandparent

Family: extended

Grandparent: respect for life style

Native American

Values/valuing: moral/ethical

Rawlings, Majorie Kinnan. *The Yearling* . Charles Scribner's Sons, 1938 (405 pages)

LONELINESS

Death: of pet

Family: unity

Friendship: meaning of

Nature: appreciation

Stolz, Mary Slattery. *By the Highway Home* . Harper & Row Publishers, Inc., 1971 (174 pages)

LIFE STYLE: change in

Boy-girl relationships

Death: attitude towards

Death: of sibling

Family: unity

Maturation

Sibling: rivalry

Vestly, Anne Catharina. *Help Aurora* . Translated from the Norwegian by Aileen Amos. Thomas Y. Crowell Co., Inc., 1973 (135 pages)

FAMILY: unity

Gender Role Identity: female/male

Life style

Shame

Woliff, Ruth. *A Crack in the Sidewalk* . John Day Co., Inc., 1965 (282 pages)

IDENTITY: search of

Death: of father

Parental: control

Talents: musical

COMMON READING

Shakespeare, William. *Romeo and Juliet* . (Adaptation by Rich Margopoulos) Pendulum Press, Inc., West Haven, CT 1980.

Shakespeare, William. *Romeo and Juliet* . and

Laurents, Arthur. *Westside Story* . Dell Publishing Co. Inc., NY 1978.

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Lenz, Carolyn et al. *The Woman's Part; Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare*. 1980. See esp Coppelia Kahn, "Coming of Age in Verona", on *Romeo and Juliet* .

Shelton, Frank W. *The Family in the Novels of Wharton, Faulkner, Cather, Lewis, and Dreiser*. 1971.

Stone, Lawrence. "Family History in the 1980's: Past Achievements and Future Trends". 1981.

Walker, Alice. *The Color Purple* . Pocket Books/Washington Press. 1982.

Wright, Richard. *Black Boy* . Harper & Row Publishers, 1966.

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