

# A Real-Life Romeo & Juliet



## Lesson Overview

With the Common Core's new emphasis on non-fiction, informational texts, it's important to bring in fresh resources to engage our students. Toward the end of your study of Shakespeare's *Romeo & Juliet*, you can use the following lesson materials to help students make real-world connections between the late-1500's play and their modern lives.

**Step 1:** After Act 5 (when Romeo and Juliet have killed themselves), ask your students if they think something like this could happen today. Have they heard of any similar cases of young lovers from different worlds trying to be together? What would happen on your school's campus if two students from different social worlds fell in love, for example a member of the Muslim Student Association and a member of the Christian-based Friends Interested in Serving Him (FISH) club? Would their friends be supportive? Their families? After your discussion, explain that just such a case transfixed the world in 1993, when two young lovers from different religious backgrounds, Admira Ismic and Bosko Brkic, were killed as they tried to flee their war-torn city of Sarajevo.

**Step 2:** View the CNN video clip. This clip focuses on the 20th anniversary of the couple's death in 1993. It's three-and-a-half minutes long. An ad-free mp4 of this clip is included in this download, but you can also access the clip online here:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-wks0\\_aRXF4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-wks0_aRXF4)

**Step 3:** Hand out the *New York Times* editorial from 1994. Have students read the article either silently alone or in teams of two. A printer-friendly version of the editorial is included in this download, but you can also access the original material online here:

<http://www.nytimes.com/1994/05/08/opinion/in-america-romeo-and-juliet-in-bosnia.html>

**Step 4:** After students have finished reading, hand out copies of the question sheet (see page 2 of this PDF). Again, you may want to have students answer the questions by themselves or in teams of two. (I prefer to have the students do Step 3 alone, but then work with a partner for Step 4. You, of course, should choose whatever method works best for your classroom.)

**Step 5:** When the students are finished with the questions, launch a full-class discussion as you work through each question. Students really want to talk about this couple and the issues raised in the editorial. Expect passionate responses from your students, especially on questions #4 and #7.

# Admira & Bosko A Real-Life Romeo & Juliet

On a separate sheet of paper, answer the following questions with complete, thoughtful sentences. Be ready to discuss and defend your answers.

1. Admira Ismic, a Muslim, and Bosko Brkic, an Eastern Orthodox Serb, died in 1993 at the height of the fighting in Sarajevo. The *New York Times* editorial, written a year later, mentions several other groups that have a long history of conflict. Thinking about today's world, name two groups whose hatred could potentially lead to a similar tragedy.

2. The reaction of Admira's grandmother to their forbidden relationship is described as "not so sanguine." Using only context clues from the editorial, what do you think "sanguine" means? Write down your guess at the word's meaning. Then, look up the word in a dictionary and record the actual definition. How close were you to guessing the real meaning of the word?



3. Bob Herbert, the editorial writer, says that "civilization is an exceedingly fragile enterprise." What does he mean? Do you agree with his opinion? Give at least two real-world examples to support your opinion.

4. According to Herbert, why do some groups of people seek to limit the rights of other groups of people? Is this something only nations do to each other, or do we also do this to each other as individuals? Explain your answer.

5. Admira Ismic and Bosko Brkic, the real-life Romeo and Juliet couple mentioned in the editorial, died as they tried to cross a bridge. What is symbolically compelling about the location of their deaths?

6. According to Herbert, what is at the core of every clash between groups of people? Write the line from the editorial (yes, I want you to write the full sentence) that gives you this answer.

7. The writer implies that the quest for peace and harmony amongst people is a hopeless pursuit. Find a line from the text that clearly expresses this idea and write it down. Then, explain whether you agree with Herbert's stance. Why or why not?



Clockwise, from top: Bosko Brkic and Admira Ismic in 1988. • They were buried together in Lions Cemetery in Sarajevo, where this grave marker is often decorated with flowers from people who didn't personally know the couple but remember their story. • The coffins of Brkic and Ismic are lowered into the ground in 1993. On the twentieth anniversary of the couple's death, Zijo Ismic, Admira's father, told a reporter, "War intervened in love - that's the problem. In such situations, the laws of love do not exist. Only the laws of war."

# Admira & Bosko, A Real-Life Romeo & Juliet – Answer Key

1. Admira Ismic, a Muslim, and Bosko Brkic, an Eastern Orthodox Serb, died in 1993 at the height of the fighting in Sarajevo. The *New York Times* editorial, written a year later, mentions several other groups that have a long history of conflict. Thinking about today's world, name two groups whose hatred could potentially lead to a similar tragedy. *Students' answers will vary, but possible answers including warring gangs, such as Norteños and Sureños, or a Muslim woman in Afghanistan falling in love with an American soldier.*

2. The reaction of Admira's grandmother to their forbidden relationship is described as "not so sanguine." Using only context clues from the editorial, what do you think "sanguine" means? Write down your guess at the word's meaning. Then, look up the word in a dictionary and record the actual definition. How close were you to guessing the real meaning of the word? *Students' guesses will vary. I like to encourage students to think of a different word they could use in place of "sanguine" that would make the sentence still make sense. The actual definition of "sanguine" is optimistic or hopeful. Students' answers to the final question will vary, depending on how close they came to the true meaning.*

3. Bob Herbert, the editorial writer, says that "civilization is an exceedingly fragile enterprise." What does he mean? Do you agree with his opinion? Give at least two real-world examples to support your opinion. *He means that our society is much more delicate and easily broken than we realize. Students' opinions will vary, but this question always makes for a compelling class discussion.*

4. According to Herbert, why do some groups of people seek to limit the rights of other groups of people? Is this something only nations do to each other, or do we also do this to each other as individuals? Explain your answer. *Herbert says that some groups are driven to erase the rights, and even the existence, of other people as a move to make themselves feel stronger and more impor-*

*tant. Nations certainly do this, but individuals are also guilty of this. During the class discussion of this question, I like to remind students of the horrible treatment of peers many of them likely witnessed during middle school. Often, students work to socially isolate/ignore/rip apart someone they've deemed as weak solely as a move to make themselves feel more powerful. This is a sickness within the human spirit and it's best to acknowledge it and confront it. This question almost always leads to a powerful class discussion.*

5. Admira Ismic and Bosko Brkic, the real-life Romeo and Juliet couple mentioned in the editorial, died as they tried to cross a bridge. What is symbolically compelling about the location of their deaths? *The bridge is symbolic because these two young people were trying to bridge the hateful divide in their community with love.*

6. According to Herbert, what is at the core of every clash between groups of people? Write the line from the editorial (yes, I want you to write the full sentence) that gives you this answer. *The core issue of every conflict, Herbert argues, is ethnic and/or religious conflict. The line that shows this is: "There are various ostensible reasons for the endless conflicts – ideological differences, border disputes, oil – but dig just a little and you will uncover the ruinous ethnic or religious origins of the clash."*

7. The writer implies that the quest for peace and harmony amongst people is a hopeless pursuit. Find a line from the text that clearly expresses this idea and write it down. Then, explain whether you agree with Herbert's stance. Why or why not? *There are several lines that students might choose, but the closing paragraph is particularly dire. I give credit for any reasonable answer. Students' answers to the final two questions will vary and make for a good class discussion. I always encourage students to back up their opinions with real-world examples. This question would also be a good debate topic, if you have extra class time to devote to this assignment.*

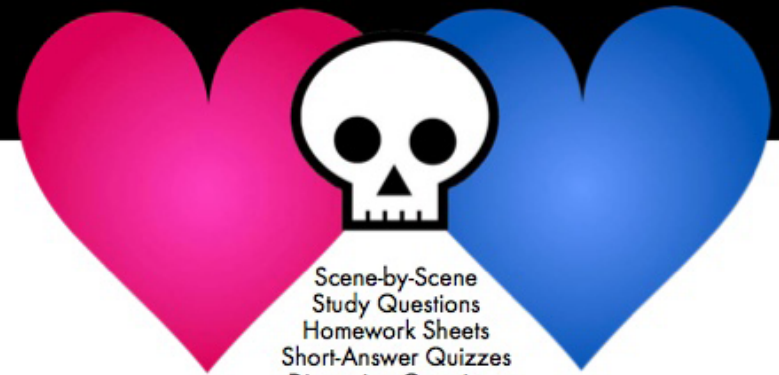


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# ROMEO & JULIET

## SCENE-BY-SCENE WORKSHEETS Mix & Match Uses

# Shakespearean Sonnets

Genius at Work

## Sonnet 18

(The most famous one, of course...)

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?  
Thou art more lovely and more temperate:  
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,  
And summer's lease hath all too short a date:  
Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,  
And often is his gold complexion dimm'd;  
And every fair from fair sometime declines,  
By chance or nature's changing course untrimm'd;  
But thy eternal summer shall not fade  
Nor lose possession of that fair thou owest;  
Nor shall Death brag thou wander'st in his shade,  
When in eternal lines to time thou growest:  
So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,  
So long lives this and this gives life to thee.



total number of words  
Shakespeare wrote

# 154

**Sonnet 130: Deconstructed**

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?  
Thou art more lovely and more temperate:  
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,  
And summer's lease hath all too short a date:  
Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,  
And often is his gold complexion dimm'd;  
And every fair from fair sometime declines,  
By chance or nature's changing course untrimm'd;  
But thy eternal summer shall not fade  
Nor lose possession of that fair thou owest;  
Nor shall Death brag thou wander'st in his shade,  
When in eternal lines to time thou growest:  
So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,  
So long lives this and this gives life to thee.

The heartbeat or tick-tock rhythm of iambic pentameter can be heard in the opening line of Shakespeare's Sonnet 18.

When I do count the clock that tells the time

So, that one was there out Sonnets, but this one is the most fun. As I read it aloud, see if you can glean the meaning...

### Sonnet 130

My mistress's eyes are nothing like the sun;  
Coral is far more red than her lips' red;  
If snow be white, then her skin is blacker;  
Her breast is not a hill, but a bare fallow;  
Her breath fans the air like a sickle's wind;  
Her voice is a shrike's cry, a grating sound;  
Her teeth are pearls, yet she is black as ink;  
So, that one was there out Sonnets, but this one is the most fun. As I read it aloud, see if you can glean the meaning...

Structure  
14 lines in the poem  
10 syllables per 'tenet' per line



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