GUIDEBOOK

For teachers attending a performance with their students
Table of contents

- Why create a guidebook and how to use it
- Attending a performance
- DynamO Théâtre
- The company staff
- The creative team of What if Romeo & Juliet...
- Play summary
- The themes at the heart of the production
- The main characters
- An interview with the director
- William Shakespeare and his time
- Activity 1: Theatre trades
- Activity 2: Making movement eloquent
- Activity 3: Making words move
- Activity 4: Reviewing the performance
- Activity 5: Dealing with rivalries
- Activity 6: Creating a scene or a dramatic situation
- Activity 7: Developing critical thinking skills
- Activity 8: Writing a short poem | Writing a short tale
- Activity 9: Playing a range of emotions
- Activity 10: Writing a letter
- FAQ
- Suggested readings related to the play
- Credits | Questions and comments
Why create a guidebook and how to use it

The guidebook introduces audiences to *What if Romeo & Juliet...*, a play you are about to discover with your students. It has the basic following objectives:

- **Preparing** audiences for their visit to the venue and providing information to enhance their **appreciation** of the play
- **Introducing** them to the world of Shakespeare
- **Fostering** discussion and exchanges about the play’s issues
- **Arousing** the audience’s curiosity and critical thinking while stimulating creativity
- **Giving** imagination its rightful place in the educational process
- **Moving** towards a more inclusive society.

Although the guidebook is designed for all audiences, the teachers are the ones it is specifically geared for since they are the ones who usually act as guides. Whether your students are going to see a play for the first time or are familiar with this type of outing, the texts in the guide can be read by teachers to their classes or distributed to students for them to read on their own.

As for the activities around the play, we encourage you to guide your students through them. The guidebook will tell you if the activity is to be shared with your students prior to or after the performance. In addition it specifies the age group for which each activity is designed as well as its objectives.

If you decide to use just a few elements in the guidebook, we strongly recommend that you include the play summary. It has basic information that all spectators should be given in order to better appreciate the unique moment that you will be sharing with the audience.

Attending a performance

Attending a theatre performance is an opportunity to share as well as a true meeting between the audience and the performers. It is important to remind young audiences that the performers on stage can hear what happens in the audience and feel what the audience senses. Accordingly it is important not to distract the performers and respect the rest of the audience. Still it is normal for audiences to react to what is happening on stage. Their attention is essential to the quality of the performance.

DynamO Théâtre

Based in Montreal, DynamO Théâtre is an internationally renowned theatre company whose work focuses on developing, producing and performing *Theatre of Acrobatic Movement and Clowning* productions for families and young audiences. Since it began in 1981, DynamO Théâtre produced **22 Canadian plays** and gave over **4,500 performances** in **29 countries on 5 continents** for over **1.5 million spectators**. It has won 10 prizes and was nominated 9 times. Its tours have spanned Quebec and Canada, over 40 American states and 15 European countries. The company was invited to 33 festivals worldwide. Over the years, it has also toured extensively in Asia, namely in Japan, China, Taiwan, Singapore and South Korea.
The company staff

Pierre Leclerc | General Manager  
Jackie Gosselin and Yves Simard | Coartistic Directors  
Nicole Lemire | Administrative assistant  
Chloé Besner | Head of marketing and development  
Marie-Chantal Bonin | Technical Coordinator  
Maurice Roy | Copywriting and translation

The creative team of *What if Romeo & Juliet*...

Loosely based on William Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*  
Ideator and Director | Jackie Gosselin  
Dramaturg | Kim Selody  
Set and Costume Designer | Pierre-Étienne Locas  
Lighting Designer | Martin Sirois  
Composer and Soundscape Designer | Pierre Guy Blanchard  
Fight Designer | Jean-François Gagnon  
Acrobatic Movement | Hugues Sarra-Bournet  
Shakespeare’s voice | Lucien Bergeron  
Makeup | Suzanne Trépanier  
Assistant Director and Stage Manager | Marie-Chantal Bonin  
French Voice Coach | Marie-Lise Hétu  
Creative Team | Rosalie Dell’Aniello, Marie Fannie Guay, Marc-André Poliquin, Dominic St-Laurent, Catherine St-Martin

The creative team taking comments after an open rehearsal at TOHU space, October 2016
The production reexamines Shakespeare’s timeless masterpiece and troubling tale, *Romeo and Juliet*. It features a few scenes adapted for Theatre of Acrobatic Movement and includes some of the main characters. The production is filled with the poetry of movement, the refinement of the bard’s words, the alluring lighting design and a powerful soundscape. It tells the story of 2 families, the Capulets and the Montagues. The violence raging between the clans sheds light on the ability to rein in the hostility. Is it possible to reexamine the tragic end of 2 young people dying chronicled in the play and consider another way out?

**The themes at the heart of the production**

*What if Romeo & Juliet...* revolves around the following themes: **love, hate, freedom, death** and **rivalry**. As an introduction to the various themes, why not ask your students the following questions? You could reexamine the themes by looking up the definitions in a dictionary.

- What is love?
- What is hate?
- What is freedom?
- What does death mean?
- What does rivalry mean?

**The main characters**

**Juliet Capulet** | Romeo’s lover

**Tybalt** | Juliet’s cousin, an arrogant young lord and ennemy of Romeo

**Romeo Montague** | Juliet’s lover, friend of Benvolio and Mercutio

**Benvolio** | Cousin and friend of Romeo and Mercutio

**Mercutio** | Friend of Romeo and Benvolio

[Image of Juliet’s balcony in Verona]
What made you reexamine Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet?

I first read the play when I was young. I was deeply moved by the elegance of the bard’s words, the beauty of the story, the combination of romance and fighting, of love and hate. And for a number of years, I dreamed of inviting Shakespeare into the world of DynamO Théâtre. I wanted to reexamine and adapt this masterpiece by taking advantage of the creative process through acrobatic movement. Lastly, I wanted to offer young people access to the world of Shakespeare.

Why are you targeting audiences 8 years and up with the production?

During the development, we set up test performances. The age of spectators ranged from very young to very old. Despite the age differences, everybody seemed to relate to the production. Some feelings experienced at a very early age, i.e. a combination of very happy and bitterly sad events, shape us and make us who we become. When we are young we go through moments that leave long-lasting impressions. These defining moments do not necessarily occur when you reach adulthood. Some will say that kids would not be able to understand everything. This is absolutely right, but who really understands every aspect? Not fully understanding something is one possibility. No problem, remain calm and stick with it.

On what would you want audiences to focus?

In Shakespeare’s play, it took the death of 2 young people for their adults to realize the blind hate driving them and the need to dismantle it. We all need to think that today everywhere on our planet young children are victims of our fighting and wars. In this production, I realize that I can’t resolve all these conflicts, but theatre can be an essential tool to stimulate ideas that can bring about positive change.

What were the inspirations and intuitions on which you drew to begin the creative work?

The starting point idea for the adaptation of Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet was to take advantage of the acrobatic possibilities of two staircases symbolizing the two families. I also recalled Jean de La Fontaine’s tale of Love and Folly, and Chagall’s painting, The promenade.

How significant is the set in developing the play?

At DynamO Théâtre a new production always stems from a deep-felt intuition that generates the idea for a theme and a set. The set is the trigger at the start of the creative process. It involves the act of playwriting in space as it relates to the set helping us ensure that our intuitions are relevant. During the early stages of What if Romeo & Juliet..., the staircases offered many possibilities. The revolving stage also conveyed the idea of time passing, as if to help this story stand the test of time and reach us.
How does DynamO Théâtre come up with a Theatre-of-acrobatic-movement production?

It all begins with an intuition for a theme and a set. Then we begin the “playwriting on stage” process. Before the text can be written down, the movements are developed in space, like words on a blank piece of paper. Then during the production phases staggered over 2 to 3 years, the play develops through movements that are fine-tuned, by words that focus specifically on what we want to say and by lighting, costumes and music that are part of the writing that takes shape in the rehearsal space.

William Shakespeare and his time

16th century England

In England, the 16th century coincides with the Tudor period and marks the beginning of English Renaissance. Times are good, the weather is getting warmer and black death (plague) is disappearing. Harvests are increasing, new industries are being set up (coal and smelting) and the population is rising from 3 to 4 million.

Great Britain is becoming a major player in the world thanks to maritime exploration. It establishes itself as the ruler of the seas. The first British colonies in North America are being settled. William Shakespeare is born in Stratford-upon-Avon in 1564 (a 2-day ride from London) in a well-to-do Catholic family. At the time, the feud between Catholics and Protestants along with the Puritan pressure are firing up passions.

William attends school but does not go to university. He apprentices with his father who is a glover and a leather dealer. He marries Ann Hathaway in 1582. They have 3 children. As a playwright and young actor, he turns up in London in 1585. He is part of Lord Chamberlain’s men theatre company later known as the King’s Men under James 1st.

It is believed that he wrote “The most excellent and lamentable tragedy of Romeo and Juliet” around 1594-1595. Written early in his career the play tackles a topic that is not new. It is based on the ancient tale of Pyramus and Thisbe. Shakespeare also draws on current events, i.e. a famous feud between 2 Southampton families.

William Shakespeare died on April 23, 1616, leaving 36 plays and 2 books of poems.

1. The House of Tudor was an English royal house that ruled England from 1485 until 1603. It gave its name to a period that covers the reign of 5 monarchs who helped make England a major European power.
5. Pyramus and Thisbe are two lovers in the city of Babylon who occupy connected houses/walls, forbidden by their parents to be wed, because of their parents’ rivalry. Through a crack in one of the walls, they whisper their love for each other. They arrange to meet near Ninus’ tomb under a mulberry tree and state their feelings for each other. Thisbe arrives first, but upon seeing a lioness with a mouth bloody from a recent kill, she flees, leaving behind her veil. When Pyramus arrives he is horrified at the sight of Thisbe’s veil, assuming that a wild beast has killed her. Pyramus kills himself, falling on his sword in proper Babylonian fashion, and in turn splashing blood on the white mulberry leaves.

What if Romeo & Juliet... guidebook - DynamO Théâtre

7
Theatre trades

Goal

Understanding the director’s work and the way in which she relies on other designers throughout the creative process.

Instructions

Ask students to answer the following question:
In your mind, what are the essential elements in the staging of a play, i.e. ensuring that the original storyline moves to a staged production?

Answers

The text and the script
The directing
The acting and the performers’ movements
The set and props
The music
The lighting
The costumes and makeup

- **The text or script** is also called ideation. It can be produced by a playwright or a group of designers and performers working together in the space before developing it and writing it down.

- **The directing** gives meaning to a script by deepening understanding and providing guidance and rhythm. During the rehearsals, the director guides the performers, gives them indications that help build up the characters and the play.

- **The acting and the movements** carry the storyline. Through their movements, the performers help audiences understand the story being told, what characters are going through, experiencing and feeling.

- **The set and props** are crucial in the development of the storyline at DynamO Théâtre. In fact, the designer gives a specific meaning to these elements while providing a backdrop so the characters can tell the story through the movements.

- **Music** helps create a mood, suggest rhythms, highlight the text or the movements or suggest feelings and create tension etc. To that end the composer can come up with a piece of music, choose an existing one or alter it.

- **Lighting** helps create an ambience or a mood. The lighting designer works with areas of shadow and light to give information on a locale or a time period, or even focus on a character etc. The designer can also create more poetic moments by playing with colours and composition.

- **Costumes and makeup** provide additional information on the characters by depicting a time period, a social status, a predisposition, etc. Such elements are clues and help make the story understandable.
Making movement eloquent

Goal
Calling on one’s imagination to create a sequence of movements based on a picture.

Instructions
Make up teams of 3 to 5 and pick one of the pictures below. Imagine 3 movements describing what could have happened before and 3 movements describing what could have happened after what is pictured.

Then present your sequence to the class and ask the audience what they took away from it.

It is important to tell the students that all interpretations are valid. Each spectator can interpret the story depending on what he/she sees and feels.

Going out on a date  
Having regrets  
Getting into a quarrel
Making words move

Goal

Calling on one’s imagination to develop a character’s life story and give shape to it.

Suggested questions

• What is your name?
• How old are you?
• Where were you born?
• Where do you live?
• Give a description of your house, your neighborhood and your neighbors.
• What is your best friend’s name? Describe him/her to us and explain why he/she is your best friend.
• What is your favourite dish?
• What is your favourite activity or sport and why?
• What is your favourite colour and what does it mean for you?
• Tell us about your first love.
• What do you hate most and why?
• What is your most wonderful dream and why?
• What is your favorite word and why?
• When is your birthday?
• Describe your last birthday from the time you got up until you went to bed.

Instructions

Make up teams of 5 participants. Each team chooses a character among the following: Juliet, Romeo or Tybalt (refer to the main characters on page 5). Four students sit beside each other in a line and face the class. All of them will play the character who is interviewed. The 5th participant will be playing the interviewer. The interviewer asks questions to the 4 others who will be answering in turn. Every time the interviewer snaps his/her fingers, the one next in line will be completing the answer. It is stimulating and surprising not to let the individual taking the question finish the answer. Take advantage of the “and”, “so” or the “At that point...” to snap and let the one next in line complete the answer.

One member in each of the five teams will act as a storyteller and recount the interview. A 2nd member will take on the role of the protagonist while the others complete the elements of the story (if need be) as told by the storyteller and played out. In addition everybody will answer the following question in front of the class : describe your last birthday from the time you got up until you went to bed.
ACTIVITY 4  

Reviewing the performance

Goal

Reviewing the emotional aspect of the performance.

Instructions

Ask your students to recall and single out the most significant moment in the performance, one that they related to. Ask them to try and explain why. What feeling did that moment bring forth?

ACTIVITY 5

Dealing with rivalries

Goal

Looking at the importance of resolving conflicts that are escalating.

Instructions

At first make sure students clearly understand the concept of rivalry. Then tell them about an event that involved a rivalry or have someone tell fellow students about it. Describe the reactions and feelings that they brought forth or ask students to describe it.

Try to draw parallels with the performance of What if Romeo & Juliet... and have your students think about possible solutions that could prevent a conflict from escalating.
Creating a scene or a dramatic situation

Goal
Raising student awareness about the elements of a dramatic situation.

Instructions
Explain to your students that a dramatic situation generally involves 3 components: a presentation of the situation, an issue or a conflict to be resolved and an outcome or an end. Among the teams of 3 or 4 members, distribute the following themes: love, hate, freedom, death and rivalry. By drawing on situations in the play or the discussion prior to this activity, ask them to prepare a 2-minute scene that will include a beginning or presentation of the situation, an issue and an end.

Present your scene to the class and ask audience members to describe what they saw.

Developing critical thinking skills

Goal
Helping students express their feelings and ask questions following the performance.

Instructions
Ask students to comment one of the elements of the play by referring to Activity 1: Theatre trades. Suggest they write a review of the play by focusing specifically on one element such as directing, movements, text or script, acting, story, costumes, set, music or lighting.

You could group the students that made the same choice of element (e.g. text) and begin a discussion. Let them express why they “liked it or not”, their various answers, viewpoints and preferences.
Writing a short poem

Goal
Having fun writing a short poem.

Instructions
Have your students read aloud a few poems that you selected in advance and have them identify the features of the poem.

Some answers
At first the term “poem” referred to any text written in verse (words ending with a rhyme). Such was the case until the 18th century when prosaic poetry began being used (non-rhyming verses).

Instructions
In teams write a short poem based on What if Romeo & Juliet... and as a team read the poem in front of the class by splitting the verses between the members.

You could also ask your students to write a poem in verse by starting each line with the first letter of one of the main characters (p.5). The topic could emerge as you write or through improvisations. For instance, the letters that make up Juliet®.

Just say her name aloud
Unique, unlike any other
Look up above the clouds
In the air she floats and hovers
Embracing light and giving rise to a fever
Tis’ my Juliet forever and ever

8. RODARI, Gianni, The grammar fo fantasy, An introduction to the art of inventing stories, Teachers and Writers Collaborative, 1996
Writing a short tale

Goal

Having fun imagining and writing a short tale

When we produced What if Romeo & Juliet... in addition to Shakespeare’s words and the staircases, we drew inspiration on what we call our “sensitive resources”, including the Jean de La Fontaine fable entitled Love and folly (L’amour et la folie).

Instructions

Have your students read the fable aloud. You could also add in other tales.

Then in a group, highlight the elements that make up a fable.

Some answers

Fables are short stories in verse or prose designed to provide a life lesson in an amusing way. They often portray animals able to speak or human beings. A moral is usually included at the beginning or end of the story.

In teams choose a subject or a theme the fable will be dealing with. Discuss its development until its conclusion at the end and draft a short storyline. Lastly read the fable in front of the class by sharing the lines between you.

Love and Folly (translated by F. C. Tilney)

Everything to do with love is mystery. Cupid’s arrows, his quiver, his torch, his boyhood: it is more than a day’s work to exhaust this science. I make no pretence here of explaining everything. My object is merely to relate to you, in my own way, how the blind little god was deprived of his sight, and what consequences followed this evil which perchance was a blessing after all. On the latter point I will decide nothing, but will leave it to lovers to judge upon. One day as Folly and Love were playing together, before the boy had lost his vision, a dispute arose. To settle this matter Love wished to lay his cause before a council of the gods; but Folly, losing her patience, dealt him a furious blow upon the brow. From that moment and for ever the light of heaven was gone from his eyes. Venus demanded redress and revenge, the mother and the wife in her asserting themselves in a way which I leave you to imagine. She deafened the gods with her cries, Jupiter, Nemesis (*), the judges from Hades, in fact all who would be importuned. She represented the seriousness of the case, pointing out in that her son could now not make a step without a stick. No punishment, she urged, was heavy enough for so dire a crime, and she demanded that the damage should be repaired. When the gods had each well considered the public interest on the one hand and the complainant’s demands upon the other, the supreme court gave as its verdict that Folly was condemned for ever more to serve as a guide for the footsteps of Love.

(*) Greek mythological figure: daughter of the night, she personifies divine vengeance.
Playing a range of emotions

Goal
Using movement to convey a feeling

Instructions
Make up groups of 3 or 4. In turn each group goes in front of the classroom and is given a feeling. Players will need to express the particular feeling through movement, sounds or words in a crescendo. They begin with a small feeling that grows larger and larger.

Feelings related to the performance:
- Love
- Jealousy
- Hate
- Joy
- Freedom
- Sadness
- Rivalry
- Anger

Writing a letter

Goal
Think back to an event that you regret or are trying to put right.

Instructions
Teachers ask their students to remember an event during which they did something to someone that they deeply regret. Based on this suggest they write a letter to this individual. In it they apologize for their behaviour. Ask them also to explain how they could have avoided the situation so as not to have to mend their ways or words. You could suggest to begin the letter in the following manner:

Dear you,
I have been wanting to write to you for a long time to apologize for the unpleasant situation I made you go through. Do you remember...
FAQ

**How much time did you need to work on developing *What if Romeo & Juliet*...?**

The development lasted over 3 years in several stages. The company’s productions usually take 2 1/2 to 3 years before opening.

**What kind of training do the performers have?**

The company’s performers have trained in a theatre school or a circus school. Some have also trained as gymnasts when they were younger or have acrobatic movement skills.

**When did the production open?**

*What if Romeo & Juliet*... opened on May 1st, 2017, at the Maison des arts venue in Laval, Quebec as part of the Rencontre Théâtre Ados (RTA) festival.

**How much time do you need before the performance and what do you do during that time?**

At DynamO Théâtre, performers are always on stage 2 hours prior to the performance. As they come in, they exchange with the crew who have been putting up the set and adjusting the lighting and sound. Then they warm up their bodies and voices. Next they review parts of the play that require additional attention and precision. They do what we call a quick runthrough, i.e. they run through their lines and set up the props they need for the performance. They check all the devices in the set and lastly they put on their make-up and costumes and say to each other “Break a leg!”
Suggested readings related to the play

For younger readers
DE LA FONTAINE, Jean, *Fables*


For older readers

*West Side Story*, an adaptation of the play - see website at www.filmsite.org/wests.html

Complementary works for teachers


Credits

Guide design and copywriting | Jackie Gosselin and Maurice Roy
Layout | Nicole Lemire
Photos | DynamO Théâtre and Guy-Carl Dubé

Questions and comments

If you have questions or comments about the guidebook or if it inspired some activities we would be thrilled to read about them and share them with others.

You can write to us at one of the following addresses:

DynamO Théâtre
131-911 Jean-Talon street East
Montréal (Québec) H2R 1V5
Canada
Phone: 514-274-7644
www.dynamotheatre.qc.ca
info@dynamotheatre.qc.ca