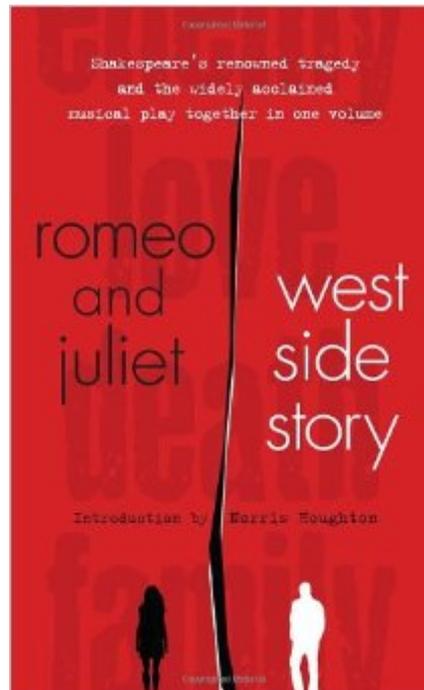


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# Romeo And Juliet And West Side Story



## Synopsis

The tragedy of love thwarted by fate has always intrigued writers. In the sixteenth century, William Shakespeare took this theme and fashioned one of the world's great plays: *Romeo and Juliet*. In our own time, Shakespeare's drama has been used as a basis for the overwhelmingly successful musical play *West Side Story*. Though one of these works is set among the nobility of Verona, and the other among immigrant families of New York's West Side, both tell the story of the plight of young "star-crossed" lovers. As Norris Houghton writes in his introduction: "What we see is that all four young people strive to consummate the happiness at the threshold on which they stand and which they have tasted so briefly. All four are deprived of the opportunity to do so, the Renaissance couple by the caprice of fate, today's youngsters by the prejudice and hatred engendered around them...." Poets and playwrights will continue to write of youthful lovers whom fate drives into and out of each other's lives. The spectacle will always trouble and move us, even as the two dramas in this volume do today."

## Book Information

Series: Signet Classic Shakespeare

Mass Market Paperback: 256 pages

Publisher: Laurel Leaf (August 15, 1965)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0440974836

ISBN-13: 978-0440974833

Product Dimensions: 4.2 x 0.7 x 6.9 inches

Shipping Weight: 4.8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 stars See all reviews (31 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #90,475 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #2 in Books > Teens > Art, Music & Photography > Performing Arts > Theater #15 in Books > Children's Books > Arts, Music & Photography > Performing Arts > Drama & Theater #67 in Books > Teens > Literature & Fiction > Performing Arts

Age Range: 12 and up

Grade Level: 7 and up

## Customer Reviews

I have been hooked on musicals and plays in general since before I can remember. When I first found this book, I couldn't believe my eyes, I got the script for *West Side Story* and *Romeo and*

Juliet together in one volume, so I had the words to all my favorite songs and I could study the varied, hilarious lines too. I could relive the thrills of watching the play, or just reread my favorite scenes. If you're the least bit like me, you'll love this too.

A great word-for-word rendition of both plays. It was especially helpful to me, because I had a research paper comparing the two.

This is two books in one: the text of William Shakespeare's tragedy "Romeo and Juliet" and the text of "West Side Story," the 20th century musical with a book by Arthur Laurents and lyrics by Stephen Sondheim. The book also includes an introduction by Norris Houghton, who notes, among other things, that WSS is based on R&J. Each text tells the story of a love affair between a young woman and a young man who are caught between warring factions. I find it stimulating and useful to have these two pieces, linked in theme but separated by centuries, together in one volume. Each is a great text on its own, but having them together may help the reader to see each piece in a different light. One of the things I find most striking as one moves from R&J to WSS is how the latter text adds the element of ethnic tension to the fundamental story of "star-crossed lovers." R&J is more than just a classic piece of literature; it's also a touchstone of pop culture (hey, it's even been incorporated into a "Brady Bunch" episode!). Despite the passage of centuries, I find Shakespeare's portrayal of the joy and pain of forbidden love to remain relevant and compelling. And R&J holds up as a reader's text, even with the availability of filmed versions. I think that WSS, being a musical play, naturally loses some impact as a text strictly on the page, but nevertheless I found it a rewarding reader's text also. One might try listening to a CD of WSS's songs as an accompaniment to reading the text. To supplement WSS's portrayal of urban Puerto Ricans, I recommend that interested readers seek out some writings by "Nuyorican" authors; to start with, try Roberto Santiago's illuminating anthology "Boricuas: Influential Puerto Rican Writings."

This dual book provides both the timeless Shakespeare classic and then the more-modern New York City gang tale. Romeo and Juliet was one of Shakespeare's top efforts; a tragic love between youngsters from warring factions. In initially-difficult old English, the story glows as the tragedy examines love, distance, and the foolhardy hostilities that divide us. The couple tries but cannot navigate the difficult waters of their love, and come to tragic end via hostility and misunderstanding. Seldom has Shakespeare so captured the human condition as here. West Side Story is the stunning musical adapted to modernity. Tony is a Jet, a white gang that senses they are losing their

New York City neighborhood to the Puerto Ricans and their gang the Sharks. These more-recent arrivals feel the sting of hostility and discrimination. When Tony meets Maria the two fall in love, but Maria's brother Bernardo leads the sharks will never accept Tony. Again, tragedy results, and Tony and Maria are not the sole victims of hatred. Ironically, the Jets and Sharks of the 1950's seem much tamer than today's drug-running, gun-toting gangs. Two excellent plays, emphasizing tragic hostility, and highly popular with younger readers.

This single volume containing the scripts of both "West Side Story" and its source, "Romeo and Juliet," is an excellent resource for comparing and contrasting both plays. I highly recommend it.

Shakespeare's play, Romeo and Juliet is a story that combines swordfighting, disguise, misunderstanding, tragedy, humor, and some of the most romantic language found in literature all in the name of true love. In Verona, Italy, two powerful families the Montagues and the Capulets have been feuding with each other for years. Old Capulet, Juliet's father, throws a party to which he invites all his friends. Romeo asists to that party and falls instantly in love, but is disappointed when he finds out that Juliet is a Capulet. Juliet notices Romeo too, but she is unaware that he is a member of the hated Montagues. The very next day, with the help of Romeo's friend Friar Lawrence, Romeo and Juliet are secretly married. On the day of the wedding, Juliet's cousin, Tybalt is out to get Romeo for crashing the Capulet's party so he starts a fight with his friends. Romeo shows up, but does not want to fight Tybalt because he no longer holds a grudge against Juliet's family. Mercutio is killed. To avenge the death of his friend, Romeo kills Tybalt, an act that will award him even more hatred from the Capulet family. The Prince of Verona banishes Romeo and he is forced to leave Juliet, who is devastated by the loss of her love. Juliet's father, not knowing of his daughter's marriage, decides to marry her to another young man named Paris. In despair, Juliet consults with Friar Lawrence. Then, the Friar will send Romeo to rescue her. Bad news travels fast. Before the Friar can tell Romeo of the hoax, Romeo hears from someone else that his beloved Juliet is dead. Overcome with grief, Romeo buys a poison and goes to Juliet's tomb to die beside his wife. Inside the vault, Romeo drinks the poison and kisses his last breath next to his sleeping wife. Moments later, Juliet awakens to see her husband's dead body. With no reason left to live, Juliet kills herself with Romeo's dagger.

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