

Did love die in a bloody brotherhood?: romeo and juliet vs. west side story

[Business](#)



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* and Laurents's *West Side Story* are two of the best classics of star-crossed lovers. From the cramped city streets of Verona, *Romeo and Juliet* is a drama of two rivaling families, the Capulets and the Montagues. The cramped city streets of New York City have their own deadly rivalries between two gangs, the Jets and the Sharks, in the musical *West Side Story*. Separated by a gap of about six hundred years, these two stories are different in settings, characters, and culture, but the themes and tones of both tales intertwine them as family, like a bloody brotherhood; love seems to never survive the hate of enemies. The two plays are alike in many ways, considering that *West Side Story* got its inspiration from Shakespeare's drama *Romeo and Juliet*. For one, both plays push the main theme of forbidden love.

Romeo and Juliet in their drama are from two enemy families, being children of the families' patriarchs. Tony and Maria in their musical are from two different gangs, and two different races (Maria is Puerto Rican and Tony is White). Secondly, the tone in both plays is tragic. Sure, the thought of love is heartwarming to the audience, but Shakespeare and Laurents use love as a mirage to hide the despair and misfortune that is to come until the end of both plays. There is a third similarity to note: the plays feature two young lovers who trespass the norm and break the status quo.

In *West Side Story*, gang disloyalty kills Tony, and in *Romeo and Juliet*, family disloyalty kills Romeo, with the assistance of a little poison. None of it has to happen, but a lack of forgiveness between enemies and the lovers' breaking of the norm brings confusion and spite into their own worlds. *Romeo and Juliet* and *West Side Story* also have some differences, such as in setting, <https://assignbuster.com/did-love-die-in-a-bloody-brotherhood-romeo-and-juliet-vs-west-side-story/>

characters, and culture. Romeo and Juliet takes place in 14th century Italy, while West Side Story is set in the 1950s in New York City. Something absent in Romeo and Juliet that West Side Story does have is a reason for the gang war. It is not mentioned why the Capulets and Montagues hate each other in Shakespeare's play, but the Jets and the Sharks see each other as racial stereotypes and fight because of a mix of pride and fear.

The biggest contrast between the two plays, however, is the female lead character. In West Side Story, the "Juliet", Maria, actually lives! The actual Juliet lets Romeo's happy dagger rust and make her die, leading to a dramatic and somewhat unsatisfying conclusion (but if you like fictional teenage suicide then I don't judge you). Both classics have characters that mirror each other in the two plays, proving that they have family ties in terms of story. Romeo is the main character lead in Romeo and Juliet, and Tony from West Side Story is the main character lead. Juliet and Maria act the same role of the female character lead and lover to the main male character. Doc correlates to Friar Lawrence as a confidant to the main male character, and Anita and the Nurse are opposite as friends to the female lead.

Riff's wild attitude in West Side Story matches perfectly with Mercutio's personality in Romeo and Juliet. Hot-headed Tybalt from Shakespeare's cast of characters is the mirror of Bernardo's strict temperament in Laurents's cast. There are plenty of correlations between the two plays in terms of character tropes, but *dios mio* ("my goodness" in Spanish), explaining everyone else in detail would require a whole new essay. Overall, I believe

the better play to be West Side Story, and it is not because of its musicality (which I really appreciate). The 1957 tale of two races is great in how modern and realistic it is, especially in a country such as America. The play really uncovers undertones of racism, sexism, forbidden love, and gang fidelity all in a movie filled with opera singing and extreme choreography.

The characters act like real teenagers (despite the sporadic musical numbers), and the repercussions of Tony and Maria's love feels more impactful in my eyes. The ending is by far one of the best tragic endings I've seen from any play, and it also concludes all of the themes down to a tee at the end. Racism, sexism, disloyalty - which all stems from foolish prejudice - can be broken by powerful emotions such as love. Unfortunately, Romeo and Juliet and West Side Story show the worst case scenario of those themes being solved by unnecessary death. This is the main theme both plays share, and why I consider them to be in a bloody brotherhood. They are brother plays in theme, they both end in someone's bloodshed.

There's still the question of did the love of these star-crossed lovers die. Did Romeo and Juliet die in vain because of their families? Did Tony and Maria's love get bashed in by the hate of their rival gangs? I believe not to both, for love breaks hate, always. Even the definition of hate is the extreme love of not liking someone. Both of these plays, Romeo and Juliet and West Side Story, have conclusions that ultimately lead to the best case scenario; the war between ongoing rivals stop. Even though the rivals in particular did not have love for each other, the lovers within their plays had love that was true and undeniable to anyone who wanted to examine it for themselves.

Therefore, what makes both the drama and musical interpretation of Romeo and Juliet tragic is when no one sees this love until the very bloody end. As people of a wild and unforgiving world, let us not let our love die because of hate. Humans are brothers to one another in some form or fashion; let us not drown our relationships in crimson and let love die in bloody brotherhoods.