



TEACHER GUIDE

GRADES 9-12

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

Romiette and Julio

Sharon M. Draper

READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT

Romiette and Julio

Sharon M. Draper

TEACHER GUIDE

NOTE:

The trade book edition of the novel used to prepare this guide is found in the Novel Units catalog and on the Novel Units website. Using other editions may have varied page references.

Please note: We have assigned Interest Levels based on our knowledge of the themes and ideas of the books included in the Novel Units sets, however, please assess the appropriateness of this novel or trade book for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading with them. You know your students best!

ISBN 978-1-50204-129-6

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Skills and Strategies

Thinking

Compare/contrast, decision making, brainstorming, advantages/disadvantages, research, problem solving, analyzing details, drawing conclusions, creative thinking

Comprehension

Predicting, sequencing, main idea, summarizing

Writing

Journaling, creative writing, chat room conversation, news writing, interview, letter to the editor, multiple text formats, quiz question creation, rebus

Vocabulary

Parts of speech, definitions, context, synonyms, antonyms, usage, Spanish vocabulary

Literary Elements

Stereotypes, figurative language, characterization, setting, plot development, irony, allusion, foreshadowing, metaphor, suspense, symbolism, sensory descriptions, point of view, theme, multiple text formats, slang

Across the Curriculum

Literature/Drama—*Romeo and Juliet*, *West Side Story*;
Art—rebus, magazine cover, advertisements, symbols;
Library skills—dictionary;
Geography—maps;
Psychology/Sociology—horoscopes, zodiac, peer pressure, cultural differences;
Music—*1812 Overture*; Social Studies—genealogy/heritage, gangs, marketing

Genre: young-adult fiction

Setting: mid-1990s, Cincinnati, Ohio

Point of View: multiple (first person and third person)

Conflict: person vs. person, person vs. nature, person vs. self, person vs. society

Themes: friendship, stereotypes, prejudices, teenage love, peer pressure, acceptance

Tone: serious but occasionally humorous

Date of First Publication: 1999

Summary

Julio Montague's family has moved from Corpus Christi, Texas, to Cincinnati, Ohio, to escape the threat of high-school gangs, but Julio runs into the same prejudices and gang threats at his new school. However, he finds a friend in Romiette Cappelle, whom he meets in an Internet chat room. Julio and Romiette later learn they attend the same school, and upon meeting, the two develop strong feelings for each other. They are antagonized early on by a local gang, the Devildogs, who oppose interracial relationships. The Devildogs single out Julio because he is Hispanic and Romiette is African American. The gang threatens them and demands that they stop seeing each other. Fearing that adults will not take them seriously, Romiette and Julio turn to their two friends, Ben and Destiny, for help. Romiette and Julio plan to videotape the gang making threats and turn over the tape to the local television news station, but the plan goes awry. The Devildogs kidnap Julio and Romiette and set them adrift in a small boat on London Woods Lake during a raging thunderstorm. In a story that is a contemporary twist on William Shakespeare's tragic play *Romeo and Juliet*, the couple faces a desperate situation, and the reader wonders if they will survive or suffer the same fate as their namesakes. Told from multiple viewpoints, the story explores the intensity of teen love and overcoming all odds in the face of violence, peer pressure, prejudice, and preconceived stereotypes.

About the Author

Sharon M. Draper began her literary career as a professional educator and for over 30 years taught her junior-high and high-school students to appreciate literature and develop their writing skills. Her writing career actually began as a challenge from one of her students. She entered and won first place in a literary contest with the publication of her short story, "One Small Torch." Since then she has published numerous novels, essays, poems, and short stories. She has been honored as the National Teacher of the Year, is a four-time winner of the Coretta Scott King Literary Award, and is a *New York Times* bestselling author.

As one of the first teachers in the nation to achieve National Board Certification in English/Language Arts, Draper was elected to the Board of Directors of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. Her award-winning essay, "The Touch of a Teacher," was published by the National Governor's Association in *What Governors Need to Know about Education*. She travels extensively and is a frequent speaker on television and radio programs touting the importance of education and literacy.

In *Romiette and Julio*, Draper aspires to show that the themes in Shakespeare’s works are universal and still apply today. “Students often have negative attitudes about the study of Shakespeare,” she said, “and I want to make the experience fun and contemporary.” *Romiette and Julio* was listed as an ALA Best Book, received the Young Hoosier Book Award, was selected by the International Reading Association as a 2000 Notable Book for a Global Society, and was listed by the New York Public Library in their 2000 Books for the Teen Age.

Some of her other novels include *Tears of a Tiger* (1994), which received numerous awards, including the American Library Association/Coretta Scott King Genesis Award for outstanding new book; *Forged by Fire* (1997), the sequel to *Tears of a Tiger* and winner of the 1997 Coretta Scott King Book Award; and *Darkness Before Dawn* (2001), the third book in the Hazelwood High trilogy, which received the Children’s Choice Award from the International Reading Association. Other works include *Double Dutch* (2002); *The Battle of Jericho* (2003), a 2004 Coretta Scott King Honor Book; and *Copper Sun* (2006), a 2007 Coretta Scott King Book Award winner. Sharon Draper lives in Cincinnati, Ohio, with her husband.

Background Information

The novel is a modern-day retelling of William Shakespeare’s tragic play *Romeo and Juliet*, the story of two young star-crossed lovers who fall in love despite the ongoing feud between their families, the Montagues and the Capulets. When Romeo’s friend Mercutio is accidentally killed by Tybalt, Juliet’s cousin, Romeo, seeks revenge and kills Tybalt. Prince Escalus, who is exasperated by the two feuding families and the trouble they cause in the city, banishes Romeo to Mantua. Friar Laurence, who has secretly married the two young lovers, hatches a plan for Juliet to stage her own death and Romeo to meet her in the family tomb when she awakens. Romeo misses the message from the friar, and his young page tells him that Juliet is dead. He rushes back to the tomb, where he finds Juliet. Stricken with grief, Romeo drinks poison, thinking that Juliet is truly dead. When Juliet awakes, she discovers Romeo’s body and stabs herself. Amazed by the acts of love and sacrifice committed by Romeo and Juliet, the two families end their age-old feud and live in peace.

Allusions to Shakespeare’s Play Found in the Novel

Romiette’s and Julio’s names are similar to Romeo and Juliet, and the two recognize the similarity. Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, another tragedy, is referenced in a chat room conversation. Romiette and Julio refer to studying *Romeo and Juliet* in high school and watching the similar movie *West Side Story* about gangs. Destiny is interested in star signs, and Romeo and Juliet are described as star-crossed lovers in the play. The authors use comic relief characters in both—the nurse in *Romeo and Juliet* and Ben, Destiny, and Nannette Norris in the novel. Both couples make bad choices. Both fathers blame the other for what has happened to their children. The police captain notes the similarity between the Montague and Cappelle last names and the children’s first names, Romiette and Julio, to those in Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*. He also notes the coincidence that the two families were enemies. Ben and Destiny discuss the similarity between the play and their friends’ situation and how they fall for each other so quickly. They also discuss a difference, as the play has families fighting and their situation has gangs fighting. Romeo cries, “I defy you, stars!” when he hears Juliet is dead. Julio pleads to the stars to help find Romiette when she is underwater. When Romiette lies unconscious on the shore, Julio shouts curses at the stars. At one point late in the novel, the police captain questions whether

Chapters 1–7

Cincinnati high-school student Romiette Cappelle is haunted by a recurring dream of drowning while a mysterious voice calls to her. She confides her fears to her best friend Destiny, and to her personal journal. Julio Montague is the new kid in town. Because his father lost his job and because of rampant gang violence, Julio's family is forced to move to Cincinnati from Corpus Christi, Texas. Julio is depressed because things seem so different in his new life and he feels alone. Romiette and Julio go to the same school, yet they do not know each other. They unknowingly meet in an Internet chat room.

Vocabulary
ebbed
flounder
dignitaries
boutique
graffiti
jostling
monotone
enhance
terminal
incredulously

Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think Romiette has a recurring dream of drowning? *(Answers will vary.)*
2. Who do you think could be the unknown male voice in Romiette's recurring dream? Why? *(Julio; They are destined to meet.)*
3. How can you tell that Romiette's family is affluent and cultured? *(Her father is a television newscaster and socializes with well-known celebrities; her mother owns an African boutique in downtown Cincinnati and knows African kings and presidents; her maternal grandparents are college professors.)*
4. What type of boy would Romiette like to meet? *(a boy who is a free-thinker, has ideas of his own, and is comfortable discussing topics in which she shares an interest)*
5. In William Shakespeare's play *Romeo and Juliet*, Juliet asks, "What's in a name?" Is there any significance to the name the author gives to Romiette's best friend Destiny? What about Ben? *(Destiny is a synonym for fate, meaning the inevitable succession of events. It is appropriate that she is interested in horoscopes and how the stars control lives. Ben is like Benvolio from the play—a cheerful, peace-seeking friend. Ben seeks peace rather than "rat out" on Julio and goes out of his way to make friends with Julio.)*
6. What are some of the major differences between Romiette and Julio? *(Answers may vary. Suggestions: Romiette is African American, while Julio is Hispanic; Romiette is a native of Cincinnati, Ohio, while Julio is a native of Corpus Christi, Texas, who recently moved to Cincinnati; Romiette's family is well-to-do, while Julio's father is out of work; Romiette hates the water and swimming, while Julio loves to swim and sail.)*
7. Discuss the author's use of color and its symbolism. *(Whenever Julio is unhappy, he describes things in neutral colors: the gray city, the brown Ohio River, gray letters on brown buildings, brown brick school. What would make him happy is to "color this place up!" [p. 16]. Ben is always changing the color of his hair and becomes Julio's first friend. Romiette and Destiny each dress in bright colors. Destiny writes in her journal that she likes rainbows. Dark colors are used during Romiette's nightmare.)*
8. Why is Diego, Julio's friend from Texas, having a difficult time now that Julio has moved? *(Answers will vary, but Diego says he is now one of the few students not in a gang and is having a hard time getting by.)*
9. What do you think Julio's grandfather meant when he told Julio to "keep the river in [his] heart and follow it" (p. 20)? *(Answers will vary but could include that Julio should remember his roots and always be honest with himself. The river is where he's from, and it is where he learned how to swim, a skill Romiette lacks.)*

10. Do you think Romiette’s and Julio’s chat room names reflect who they are or who they want to be? *(Answers will vary.)*

Supplementary Activities

1. Literary Devices: The author introduces the novel with a dream sequence that uses extensive literary elements to paint a picture. Working in pairs, find at least three examples each of metaphors and personification. Examples: metaphor—“the dark shadow of death” (p. 1); personification—“the silence swallowed her” (p. 1).
2. Writing: In a journal entry, describe yourself in the same format that Romiette does. Use three similes to describe yourself, things you like, things you dislike, things you are afraid of, things you are not afraid of, who your parents are, and what you look like.
3. Writing: Romiette is introduced in a journal entry; Julio is introduced in a telephone conversation with a friend. Think of another unique way to introduce yourself, and write a brief introduction in your journal.
4. Character Analysis: Chart the different names used in the chat room. Describe each character based on what he/she writes and how each expresses him/herself.

Chapters 8–18

Romiette and Julio quickly develop a relationship, at first only through a private chat room. They share fears, hopes, likes, and dislikes and discover that they attend the same school, though they have not yet met. They decide to meet at school during lunch, and their bond grows. Some of their friends and family have developed prejudices based on preconceived stereotypes, and the local gang threatens Julio because he is new and Hispanic. The Devildogs are the “strongest gang in school,” and they try to intimidate Romiette and Julio. They disapprove of the budding interracial relationship.

Vocabulary	
	stagnant
	philosophical
	scrawny
	unison
	bilingual
	amigo
	extrasensory
	interstellar
	incompatibility
	podium
	lilt

Discussion Questions

1. Compare using fictitious names in an Internet chat room to wearing masks at a party such as in *Romeo and Juliet*. How are they similar? *(Both are ways to hide one’s true identity, and in doing so, be bold enough to say things one might not say if talking face to face.)*
2. Romiette’s and Julio’s writing styles change from short, clipped phrases in the chat room to longer, more eloquent and poetic sentences in the private chat room. Why does the author do this? *(Other teens in the chat room are not serious and are just exchanging idle chatter. In the private chat room, Romiette and Julio are engaged in a deeper, more meaningful conversation.)*
3. Why do you think the author uses “Peaceout” as a closing for chat room and phone conversations? *(Answers will vary. The author could be foreshadowing that peace is what these students want, but may not be what they get. It is also a common term used by teens when they say goodbye.)*