

Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet: Understanding the Prologue

A prologue is an introduction in a play; it may be at the beginning of the play, or it may appear before one or more acts of the play. It is spoken by unnamed character or characters called the chorus. Below is the Prologue to Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*.



Romeo and Juliet by William Shakespeare

Prologue

Chorus:

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1 Two households, both alike in dignity, | 7 Whose misadventured piteous overthrows |
| 2 In fair Verona, where we lay our scene, | 8 Doth with their death bury their parents' strife. |
| 3 From ancient grudge break to new mutiny, | 9 The fearful passage of their death-mark'd love, |
| 4 Where civil blood makes civil hands unclean. | 10 And the continuance of their parents' rage, |
| 5 From forth the fatal loins of these two foes | 11 Which, but their children's end, nought could remove, |
| 6 A pair of star-cross'd lovers take their life; | 12 Is now the two hours' traffic of our stage; |
| | 13 The which if you with patient ears attend, |
| | 14 What here shall miss, our toil shall strive to mend. |

Explain each line of the Prologue in your own words.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____
11. _____
12. _____
13. _____
14. _____

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Explain each line of the Prologue in your own words. **Student's choice; example of correct answers**

1. Two families of similar status
2. Who live in Verona, where the story takes place,
3. Have an old feud that continues with new violence,
4. Where noble blood makes noble hands dirty.
5. The children of these two rival families
6. Become unlucky lovers and kill themselves.
7. Their sad misfortune
8. Does with their deaths heal the feud between their parents.
9. Their tragic love story
10. And their parents continuous anger,
11. Which nothing could stop except their children's deaths,
12. Is the story we will present on stage.
13. If you listen closely,
14. The play will tell you what the prologue left out.