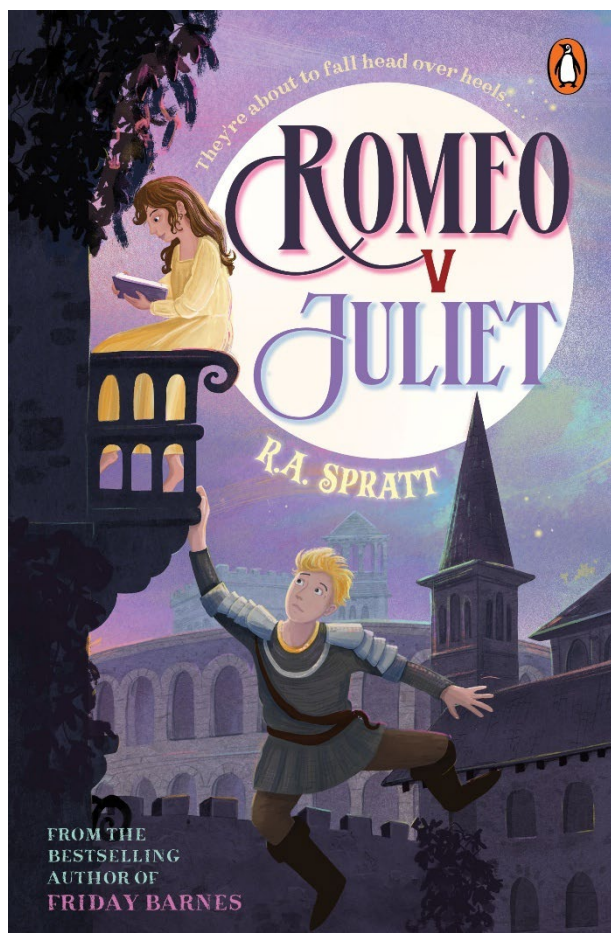




Teacher's Resources



PLOT SUMMARY

Selby does not want to be in the school play. She is much happier behind the scenes painting sets – *anything* to avoid standing on stage in front of an audience, performing for disinterested classmates and overenthusiastic parents.

So, Selby did not plan on landing the lead role of Juliet . . . and she certainly never planned to land in Verona and meet Juliet in person.

With chaos, wit and R. A. Spratt wisdom, if those who rush stumble and fall, Romeo and Juliet are about to **crash-land** into a modern-day town!

RECOMMENDED FOR

Ages 12+ (Years 7 to 10)

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KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

• **Learning areas:** English • **General capabilities:** Critical and Creative Thinking; Literacy; Personal and Social Capability; Ethical Understanding • **Cross-curriculum priorities:** Literature (Shakespeare); Intertextuality

REASONS FOR STUDYING THIS BOOK

• Bestselling author R. A. Spratt has written a contemporary novel exploring the themes of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* through a young adult lens. With humour, sharp societal observations and an obvious love of language, R. A. transports the reader into the world of *Romeo v Juliet*. In the protagonist, Selby, R.A. has created a dyslexic character who engages in Shakespeare's storytelling in a dynamic, meaningful and often humorous way.

THEMES

- Love • Honour • Fate versus free will • Family and duty
- Friendship

PUBLICATION DETAILS

ISBN: 9781761349744 (paperback); 9781760149789 (ebook); 9781761354007 (audio book).

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Romeo v Juliet

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

R. A. Spratt was born in the UK. Her family comes from Dursley, Gloucestershire – a town immortalised by Harry Potter's deeply unpleasant relatives. When she was two years old the Spratt family moved to Australia.

Growing up in the 80s in the western suburbs of Sydney, the only thing for a kid to do was get on a bicycle and go to the library, so R. A. Spratt did just that. Once there, she read everything, devouring the books of Arthur Ransome, Enid Blyton, Roald Dahl, Robin Klein and Judy Blume, and audiotapes of Shakespeare productions and Sherlock Holmes dramatisations. And so, her young mind was formed, and set on the path of becoming the extraordinary author she is today.

Now based in Bowral, NSW, she's the bestselling writer of dozens of absurd and witty books including *Hamlet is Not OK*, *The Adventures of Nanny Piggins*, *The Peski Kids* and the *Shockingly* and *Astonishingly Good Stories* collections. Her podcast, *Bedtime Stories with R.A. Spratt*, has had over 7 million downloads and connects R. A. with story-lovers across the globe.

For more information, visit raspratt.com

AUTHOR'S INSPIRATION

I was inspired by my own children. I was taking them to see Shakespeare plays and realising how confusing it was for them. I love Shakespeare. He was the GOAT. The all-time master of creating art with words. I didn't want my kids to miss out on enjoying his work. So, I decided to write a book about *Hamlet*. A lot of Shakespeare books for children modernise the language. I didn't want to do that because the language is the most beautiful part of Shakespeare's work. So, I decided to make a novelisation that kept chunks of the original language and then insert Selby, a modern character, into the narrative. Making the Shakespeare language into dialogues with modern language created context that helps the reader understand what the characters are talking about. Selby could ask all the questions a young

person might have watching Shakespeare for the first time.

Pre-reading Questions

1. If you don't already know the story of *Romeo and Juliet*, research the main synopsis. Have a look at the cover of *Romeo v Juliet*. Based on the title, illustrations and the blurb, how different or similar do you think this adaptation will be? What mood does it evoke?
 - a. The title of the book is *Romeo v Juliet*, where v is an abbreviation of the word versus. Consider how the term *versus* impacts any assumptions or expectations of the classic recognisable storyline.
2. Identify other contemporary adaptations of *Romeo and Juliet*. Examples include songwriter Taylor Swift's 'Love Story' and Arthur Laurents's play *West Side Story*. How do these creators adapt the story? Make a table identifying key themes, characters and story beats and how they pan out differently or remain the same in the adaptation.
3. Now, pretend you are tasked to write an adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet*. Based on your understanding, what would you keep the same and what parts would you make different in your version? Why?

Writing Style

1. Author R. A. Spratt has been a television writer and a comedy writer. What are some of the writing techniques employed in *Romeo v Juliet* that might also work in TV writing? What does the strategic use of dialogue, for example, give the novel's pace and plotting?
2. Both R. A. Spratt and William Shakespeare use humour in their writing. Humour serves many purposes. It can be used to lighten the mood, relieve dramatic tension and develop characters. It can also be used to challenge the audiences' perception, getting them to think about an idea in a different way. Some examples of the humour techniques are listed below. Discuss the examples



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of these techniques throughout *Romeo v Juliet* and how they enrich the story:

- **Irony:** A literary device in which the literal meaning is the opposite of that intended, especially when the locution understates the effect intended, employed in ridicule or merely playfully (Macquarie Dictionary). A simple way of putting it is that irony usually signals a difference between the appearance of things and their reality (Gail Erskine, 2014)
- **Hyperbole:** Exaggeration used to evoke strong feelings or create an impression which is not meant to be taken literally. Often involves a surprise or unexpected event or consequence (Gail Erskine, 2014)
- **Parody:** The opportunity to imitate the style of an individual, place, object or institution with a nonsensical approach (Gail Erskine, 2014)

KEY STUDY TOPICS

Intertextuality

1. Shakespeare's *Romeo v Juliet* was published in 1597 and continues to be one of the most influential pieces of literature in the world. After reading *Romeo v Juliet*, do you feel like you have more of an understanding of Shakespeare's famous play? What is it about R. A. Spratt's novel that may help a reader grasp the plot and themes of *Romeo v Juliet*? Do you feel differently about the representation of certain themes now?
2. Adaptations of classic texts offer fresh perspectives on universal themes, enhancing the original story. Research some of the ways of thinking and living in the Elizabethan age. How do these societal norms differ to today's contemporary world? For instance, the outlook on love and marriage.
3. Identify other contemporary adaptations of classics. An example is *Beth is Dead* by Katie Bernet, an adaptation of *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott and the film *Lion King*, which is based on Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. How do these versions incorporate contemporary attitudes to ideas that remain timeless?
4. R. A. Spratt has included pop culture references in her writing, such as *Dr Phil* and *The Bold and the Beautiful*. How do these references impact our experience of reading the novel?

Plotting

1. In *Romeo v Juliet*, Selby and Dan attempt to give Juliet a happier, or at least less deadly, ending. In intervening with the play's plot as was done in *Hamlet is Not OK*, simple changes have complicated knock-on effects. By taking Juliet out of the play, a bloodbath occurs in act five, increasing the play's original death count. What are other examples of the domino effect in life, or in other books you've read?
2. Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* is often described as a 'romantic tragedy' and is considered by many to be the quintessential love story. Like in other romantic tragedies by Shakespeare such as *Antony and Cleopatra*, we see the consequences of an all-consuming love. How does R. A. Spratt treat this theme in *Romeo v Juliet*? Do you think there is good reason, like Dan asserts, for Romeo and Juliet's romance to proceed, or do you agree with Selby's cynicism? List out all the pros and cons.

Tropes

Different fiction genres often come with their own tropes – recurring themes, motifs or plots that are common across many books in that genre. For instance, the 'enemies-to-lovers' scenario in *Romeo v Juliet* is a trope in the romance genre, in which two characters start as rivals but ultimately fall for one another.

Questions and activities

1. Identify other novels/movies/stories you have come across that explore the enemies-to-lovers trope, and modern examples of romantic tragedies in literature or film/TV in general. (For instance, *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen or *I Hope This Doesn't Find You* by Ann Liang.) What is the typical path that follows in these stories? Draw a flowchart describing the natural progression you identify.
2. Once you have done this, compare this to how the trope plays out in *Romeo v Juliet*. Is it similar? Do the characters realise they have fallen for each other around a similar point in the narrative? Or is Shakespeare's timeline much faster than contemporary stories?
3. Writers need to work hard to make sure a story feels fresh and original if the plot includes a trope. Name some of the plot points that R. A. Spratt has added to *Romeo v Juliet* that deepen and enrich the story beyond the 'enemies-to-lovers' romance elements.



Teacher's Resources

Character development

1. We see Selby's motivations change throughout the novel. She starts off traumatised after the events of *Hamlet is Not OK*, dreading of landing in the world of another book again. But once she finds herself in Verona, Selby resumes her role as a motivated heroine that not only saves lives but gives guidance to various Elizabethan characters. This is called character development. What inspired her change? Can you think of times from your own life, or examples from other stories, where someone progresses from one position to another? What does this add to the story, and our enjoyment of it as readers?

Moreover, R. A. Spratt uses Selby as a vehicle to offer sharp social commentary, using Selby's wit and humour to critique dated customs and ideologies. Does reading the story through Selby's lens offer a more nuanced, contemporary interpretation?

2. By the end of the story, we see Juliet have more agency and think about what she wants for herself, rather than what is expected of her. Can you identify the turning points where Juliet questions her belief system and realises she now has free will? What changes occur in Juliet's life as a result?
3. The character of Romeo Montague is known to be young, passionate and impulsive. What do you make of Selby's view of him as also childish, narcissistic and a bit of a 'playboy'? How does this modern reading point out his faults? What evidence is there to support this assessment, and do you agree?

Themes

1. Commonly cited themes of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* include love, honour, fate versus free will, violence, family duty and grief. Did these come across while reading *Romeo v Juliet*? Why do you think these themes continue to inspire readers? What are some examples of modern books, films or TV that explore these perennial themes?
2. Can you find some examples where Juliet's story mirrors that of Selby's? Do you think relating to Juliet is one of the reasons why Selby chooses to stay in the play and help her out?
3. **Duty and honour:** A theme explored in *Romeo v Juliet* is honour, often tied to reputation and social standing, lineage and masculinity. With the Montague and the Capulet families feuding, Romeo

and Juliet are expected to carry out their duties and stay loyal to their families. This makes pursuing their love difficult. R. A. Spratt makes a similar comparison with Selby and Dan. Selby is trying to do her best at school to appease her parents, while Dan cares for his dad.

- Identify other characters bound to duty and honour in the story. How does Selby point out the hypocrisy of this in chapter 15? What does this say about blindly pursuing honour?

Language

1. Many phrases coined by Shakespeare are still in use today some 400 years later. A list of phrases that were first expressed in *Romeo and Juliet* is below. What do you think they mean, and why do you think they are still in use today?

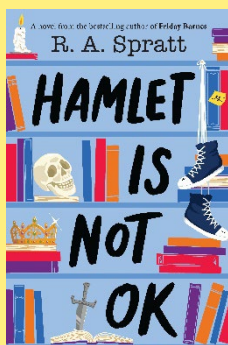
- Star-crossed lovers
- These violent delights have violent ends
- Parting is such sweet sorrow
- A plague o' both your houses!
- O Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou, Romeo?
- What's in a name?
- Thus with a kiss I die
- Do not swear by the moon, for she changes constantly
- Those who rush stumble and fall
- Love is a smoke raised with the fume of sighs
- What must be shall be
- Ready to go, but never to return

2. Do you feel differently about a story when listening to the words being read aloud? Shakespeare's plays were intended to be acted, with the drama and pageantry of the stage. How does the act of reading Shakespeare compare to watching a live performance of it, or listening to a reading? What are some favourite audiobooks, radio plays or podcasts?



Teacher's Resources

Further reading from Penguin Random House



Hamlet is Not OK by R. A. Spratt

Selby hates homework.

She would rather watch TV – anything to escape the tedium of school, her parents' bookshop and small-town busybodies.

So Selby didn't plan to read Hamlet. She certainly never planned to meet him.

This novel transports Selby, and the reader, into the cold and crime-ridden play itself. Here she meets Hamlet: heavy with grief, the young prince is overthinking and over everything. Selby can relate. But unlike Hamlet, Selby isn't afraid of making decisions. In her world, Selby is used to feeling overlooked. But in the bloody, backstabbing world of Shakespeare, Selby's good conscience and quiet courage might just save some lives . . . hopefully before Hamlet stabs one of her classmates.

Teachers' Resources available.



Friday Barnes 1: Girl Detective by R. A. Spratt

The eagerly awaited new series from the author of the bestselling Nanny Piggins series.

When girl detective Friday Barnes solves a bank robbery she uses the reward money to send herself to the most exclusive boarding school in the country, Highcrest Academy.

On arrival, Friday is shocked to discover the respectable school is actually a hotbed of crime. She's soon investigating everything from disappearing homework to the Yeti running around the school swamp. That's when she's not dealing with her own problem – Ian Wainscott, the handsomest boy in school, who inexplicably hates Friday and loves nasty pranks.

Can Friday solve Highcrest Academy's many strange mysteries, including the biggest mystery of all – what's the point of high school?

Teachers' Resources available.



Beth is Dead by Katie Bernet

After a New Year's Eve party, Beth is found dead.

All the March sisters wonder who could have killed their sweet little sister. And – why?

The March sisters have always been close, but will Beth's murder bring them closer together, or tear them apart?

As each of the girls' motives are uncovered, it becomes clear that Meg, Jo, Amy – and even Beth – might not be quite as sweet as they seem . . .

'A timely and twisty reimagining of a classic that sees the beloved March sisters embracing their flaws and taking charge of their story.' Margot McGovern, author of *This Stays Between Us* and *Neverland*.

Louisa May Alcott's cult classic *Little Women* meets Karen M McManus's *One of Us is Lying*.

Teachers' Resources available.



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Order form

TITLE	AUTHOR	ISBN	SCHOOL YEAR	RRP	QTY	TOTAL
<i>Romeo v Juliet</i>	R. A. Spratt	9781761349744	7+	\$16.99		
<i>Hamlet is Not OK</i>	R. A. Spratt	9780143779278	7+	\$16.99		
<i>Friday Barnes 1: Girl Detective</i>	R. A. Spratt	9781760890735	6+	\$16.99		
<i>Beth is Dead</i>	Katie Bernet	9781761355431	9+	\$24.99		
TOTAL						

NAME: _____

SCHOOL: _____

ADDRESS: _____

STATE: _____

POSTCODE: _____

TEL: _____

EMAIL: _____

ACCOUNT NO.: _____

PURCHASE ORDER NO.: _____

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