

1. Violence begets violence

- Each “fray” causes more anger which perpetuates the violence
- Sword fight in Act 1 feeds that in Act 3, causing Mercutio’s death, which in turn causes Tybalt, so on so fourth.
- Anger feeds off of anger

2. In life, as in love affairs, moderation is the best policy

- Romeo falls too hard, too fast
- The couple rushes things - wedding, return from exile, death
- “Wisely, and slow. They stumble that run fast.” (II.iii.94)
- Patience is a virtue; think before you act
- Romeo and Juliet do not and as a result, suffer the consequences
- Their families and friends are also subject to the consequences

3. Disobedience to recognized authority inevitably brings punishment

- Obedience to one’s parents (especially if female) was expected
- Also unquestioning loyalty to the crown
- Because Romeo and Juliet disobey their parents, and the Capulets and Montagues disobey the prince, trouble and punishment are expected
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4. Things are not always as they appear

- The characters in the play have a tendency to take things at face value and not look any further
- The most obvious example is Romeo when he discovers Juliet (supposedly) dead. He is quick to jump to the conclusion that she is passed and does not bother to investigate further
- This theme is strengthened by the presence of dramatic irony, as the audience is, from the very opening lines of the play, aware that the story does not end happily

5. The Inevitability of fate

- Romeo and Juliet’s romance is destined to fail from the opening act
- Their families are at odds, and while there is a central goal to end the feud, even Romeo and Juliet themselves subconsciously acknowledge this is not possible

- Fate continues to work against them in terms of timing - Romeo not receiving any of the intended correspondence and arriving when he does to find Juliet's body, Juliet waking up right after Romeo ends his life, etc