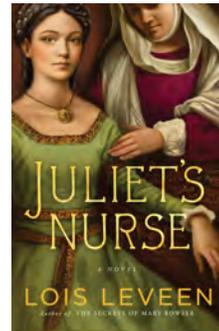


A Curriculum Guide for

*Juliet's Nurse*  
by Lois Leveen



### **About the Book**

*Juliet's Nurse* combines a prequel to *Romeo and Juliet* with a fresh vision of the events in the play, all through the eyes of Juliet's ever-present wet nurse, Angelica. By turns sensual, tragic, and comic, *Juliet's Nurse* gives voice to one of literature's most memorable and distinctive characters, the woman who has the largest number of lines in Shakespeare's play—aside from Romeo and Juliet themselves.

What did Shakespeare see in this intriguing character, who was both insider and outsider among Verona's ruling class? Author and historian Lois Leveen's new novel is the vividly imagined, utterly intriguing answer to this question.

Angelica is mourning her own day-old infant when she must leave her loving husband to enter the household of the wealthy Cappelletti family to care for their newborn baby, Juliet. Angelica takes immense comfort in nurturing Juliet, but she soon finds herself caught up in the intrigue of the powerful Cappelletti family, where sweet, ten-year-old Tybalt, cousin to Juliet, serves as her one ally. But fourteen years later, when the Cappelletti's darkest secrets erupt across five momentous days of passion and loss, Angelica must confront her own deepest grief to find the strength to survive.

*Juliet's Nurse* explores the interwoven loyalties, rivalries, jealousies, and losses only hinted at in Shakespeare's play. Weaving in rich historical details of life in medieval and Renaissance Italy, the novel takes readers beyond the tragic ending of *Romeo and Juliet* into a very different story, revealing the love, loss, and resilience that is the heart of human experience.

### **About This Guide**

This guide includes three types of approaches, classroom activities, and assignments: for teaching *Juliet's Nurse* on its own; for teaching *Juliet's Nurse* along with *Romeo and Juliet*; and that involve interdisciplinary connections across history, science, health, gender studies, and art and visual studies. The guide indicates which Common Core Standards each type of assignment aligns with for grades 9 – 12. Many of the activities and assignments are also appropriate for adoption in college courses.

### **Discussion Questions**

These discussion questions align with the following English Language Arts Common Core Standards: (9–12.1, 2, 3, 4, 5) (SL.9–12.1)

1. After losing her own infant in birth, Angelica becomes a wet nurse for an infant born to Lord and Lady Cappelletti in Verona. Why does she take on this role? How does her husband, Pietro, respond to her new position? Support your discussion with evidence from the text.

2. Discuss how Angelica's relationship with Juliet changes as the child grows. How does the author use flashback to aid readers in understanding Angelica's attachment to Juliet? What does the author learn about Angelica as a child and as a married woman? Discuss how Angelica's childhood experiences and love for her husband impact her decisions. How does the author's use of flashback aid readers in developing empathy for Angelica? For Pietro?
3. Pietro is a beekeeper. What symbolism can you associate with the bees? How does this symbolism take on deeper meaning as the story progresses?
4. The reader sees Lord Cappelletto through Angelica's eyes. Is he a likeable character? Why or why not? How does Angelica's perception of him change as the story progresses? Discuss Angelica's perceptions of him as a father. How do Angelica's perceptions of Lord Cappelletto impact the reader's responses?
5. Who is Tybalt? Identify three key events and discuss how the author uses those events to shape his character and move the plot forward. Is Tybalt a likeable character? Why or why not?
6. Identify two themes and discuss how the author develops these themes. Discuss how the themes relate to each other and how both move the plot forward.
7. Lord Cappelletto names Tybalt (his nephew) as his heir and brings Tybalt's sister, Rosaline, to the city. What role does Rosaline play in the story? Is she a key character? Explain.
8. Angelica bonds with Juliet and can't bring herself to return home to Pietro. What revelation does Angelica have about Juliet and how does this information explain Angelica's unusual commitment to Juliet? How does this revelation explain the intensity of her attachment?
9. On one hand *Juliet's Nurse* is a love story; on another it is a story of endurance and survival. Discuss how Angelica deals with her greatest grief, the loss of her husband. Discuss how Angelica's love for her husband impacts her decision to aid Juliet in marrying Romeo.
10. The author writes, "Suffering exists not in opposition to, but as an inevitable experience of survival." Discuss key events the author uses to develop this concept.
11. The author peppers the story with language and syntax of the fourteenth century. Identify several key words and phrases uncommon in modern language. What impact do these words and phrases have on the story? How does this language contribute to the setting?
12. Many readers will be familiar with the *Romeo and Juliet* tragedy before reading *Juliet's Nurse*. How does the author use foreshadowing to engage readers who may already know plot "spoilers"?

**Analyzing Literary Devices in *Juliet's Nurse* with *Romeo and Juliet***

These discussion questions align with the following English Language Arts Common Core Standards: (SL.9–12.1, 2) (RL.9–12.1, 3, 5)

1. Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* is a play written in verse; Leveen's novel is in narrative prose. Discuss the opportunities and limitations each genre affords the writer.
2. Because *Juliet's Nurse* is a novel told in first-person narration, point of view is extremely important to the story, but it is also limited to only Angelica's perspective. As a play, *Romeo and Juliet* does not have point of view per se; we learn the thoughts of each character as she or he speaks, but there is no narration to reveal their internal thoughts. Compare and contrast how the presence or absence of point of view functions in both texts. In what way does this presence or absence shape the story? How does it affect character development and the plot? How does it impact the readers' reactions to characters and to events in the story? Identify specific characters and/or scenes across the two texts in which the concepts of point of view and perspective are especially significant.
3. *Juliet's Nurse* builds on a few key lines from *Romeo and Juliet* to imagine a fuller backstory for the protagonist, Angelica. For which other characters do we get new or fuller backstories in the novel? How do these backstories change the reader's understanding of events in the play? How do they influence the reader's reactions?
4. Angelica is undeniably the protagonist of *Juliet's Nurse*. But is she a major or minor character in *Romeo and Juliet*? How do we define major versus minor characters?
5. In the play, the nurse has more lines than any other character except Romeo or Juliet—and Juliet actually speaks more of her lines in the play to the nurse than to Romeo. How is Shakespeare using the nurse in the play? Is there a parallel character who seems minor in *Juliet's Nurse* yet has a major effect on what happens in the novel?
6. How does dramatic irony operate in each text? How does our knowledge of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* contribute to the dramatic irony in *Juliet's Nurse*?
7. Discuss the use of flashback in both texts. For example, how do the novel and the play communicate information to the audience about events that preceded the narrative or play? Why is this use of flashback important?
8. Compare and contrast the opening scenes of both texts. Why does *Romeo and Juliet* begin with the third brawl? Why does *Juliet's Nurse* begin the way that it does? How does a novelist or playwright draw the audience into a story when the characters' lives are already underway?
9. *Romeo and Juliet* is not the only Shakespeare play alluded to in *Juliet's Nurse*. Identify and discuss other references. What do these references contribute to the narrative? How is the author using Shakespeare throughout the novel? What are the effects of these intertextual choices on readers who may or may not know Shakespeare's works?
10. Shakespeare often used other literary or historical works as sources for his plays (for a discussion of versions of *Romeo and Juliet* that predate Shakespeare and that he might have used as direct or indirect sources, see <http://www.rsc.org.uk/explore/shakespeare/plays/romeo-and->

[juliet/sources.aspx](#)). Is Leveen's appropriation of Shakespeare's play like or unlike his appropriation of sources? Why might an author choose to appropriate an existing work? What effect do these choices have on their audiences?

11. Both texts are set in fourteenth-century Verona. How does each work evoke its setting? What anachronisms can you locate in Shakespeare's play? Are any evident in *Juliet's Nurse*? *Romeo and Juliet* has become famous as the story of star-crossed lovers, yet even in Shakespeare's play, Romeo first pursues Juliet's cousin, Rosaline, even trying to "ope her lap to saint-seducing gold," as he tells Benvolio in act 1, scene 1. The effects of this earlier attempt at seduction gets far more prominence in *Juliet's Nurse*, although it is not revealed until late in Chapter 15. Why do audiences overlook it in the play? How does emphasis on it in the novel change your reading of the play? How does it influence your reactions to the character of Romeo?

### **Multiple Interpretations of Key Lines and Scenes in *Juliet's Nurse* and *Romeo and Juliet***

These discussion questions align with the following English Language Arts Common Core Standards: (RL.9–12.1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 10) (SL.9–12.1) (W.9–12.2)

1. In act 1, scene 3, of the play, Lady Capulet tells Juliet and the nurse that Paris wants to marry Juliet. This scene corresponds to Chapter 13 in the novel. Compare and contrast these two scenes in a large group discussion. In small groups, identify one additional scene that is presented in both texts and create a poster board comparing and contrasting key elements of the scene. Present your findings to the class and discuss how the differences in each text contribute to that text's plot. You might also write an essay comparing and contrasting these two scenes.

2. In act 1, scene 2, of the play, Lord Capulet says of Juliet, "Earth has swallowed all my hopes but she," which implies that death has taken other children. How does *Juliet's Nurse* portray these other losses? How does the increased emphasis on those losses shape our view of Juliet's father, and his treatment of her? Discuss how this backstory is represented more fully in the novel.

3. In act 3, scene 2, the Nurse tells Juliet that Romeo has killed Tybalt. The nurse says, "O Tybalt, Tybalt, the best friend I had!" Do we have any sense in the play of what their friendship was like? Why or why not? Discuss how the novel offers a deeper understanding of their relationship. How does Tybalt's friendship with Angelica in the novel enable one to view Tybalt differently?

### **Interdisciplinary Connections**

These questions align with the following English Language Arts Common Core Standards: (RL.9–12.1) (SL.9–10.1) (SL.11–12.2) (W.9–12.2, 7, 8)

**History:** *Juliet's Nurse* is set in the late fourteenth century, a time when fashion became increasingly important for larger segments of the population. Aside from spices (which were grown far away and thus were very expensive to import), textiles were considered the most desirable luxury goods in Italy. Clothing was valued over jewelry, and fashion was considered even more important for men than for women. This was an era in which full-length mirrors didn't exist, so people only know what they looked like from staring into a puddle, a pail of water, or a

well-polished silver tray—but fashion wasn't about self-perception. What families were shaped how others perceived them. How does *Juliet's Nurse* reveal this emphasis on fashion? How does fashion shape the actions of characters in the novel? Does personal appearance shape how others view us today? Why or why not?

Teachers and students may want to use an excerpt from *Gilding the Market: Luxury and Fashion in Fourteenth-Century Italy* by Susan Mosher Stuard (University of Pennsylvania Press), or this excellent summary of it <http://ir.uiowa.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1779&context=mff>

**History/Health/Science:** Mercutio's dying words, "A plague o' both your houses!" and the reference to "the infectious pestilence" that prevents Friar Lawrence's letter from being delivered to Romeo in Mantua indicate that *Romeo and Juliet* is set sometime after 1348, when the plague first came to Italy. The effects of the plague are shown throughout *Juliet's Nurse*.

Have students research the plague and prepare a media presentation on the causes and impact of the plague in fourteenth-century Italy. One helpful resource includes "The Plague" found at [http://www.brown.edu/Departments/Italian\\_Studies/dweb/plague/](http://www.brown.edu/Departments/Italian_Studies/dweb/plague/). This site contains several pages about the cause and impact of the plague in Italy, including accounts from those who lived through it. How do these first-person accounts help readers understand the characters of Angelica, Pietro, and Lord Cappelletto, who are all survivors of the plague?

**History/Health/Science:** "CSI: Italian Renaissance," which can be found at <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/csi-italian-renaissance-4796118/?all>, shows how modern forensic techniques are used to figure out if Cangrande Scaligeri, a member of Verona's ruling family, was murdered or died of natural causes. What does this article reveal about how science can help us learn history? What does it reveal about the physical effect of living conditions during the fourteenth century? Choose a scene from the novel and revise it by adding action, dialogue, or narrative descriptions to incorporate some of what you learned from "CSI: Italian Renaissance" regarding life in this period.

**Health/Science:** When Tybalt is wounded in a fight, he asks the nurse to apply honey to the cut. Honey was used as an antibacterial remedy even before people knew what bacteria was. The article "The Science Behind Honey's Eternal Shelf Life," which can be found at [http://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/the-science-behind-honeys-eternal-shelf-life-1218690/?utm\\_content=bufferfd494&no-ist](http://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/the-science-behind-honeys-eternal-shelf-life-1218690/?utm_content=bufferfd494&no-ist), explains why honey is effective. Have students use this resource or other resources they find on their own to research how honey was used historically and what purposes it served. Students can create poster boards or a Powerpoint presentation to present what they learn to the class.

**History/Analyzing Visual Sources:** During the fourteenth century in Italy, it was common to give "parto gifts" to women who were pregnant or who had recently given birth. Often these gifts were decorated with images of "parto rooms," spaces set aside in upper-class households for giving birth. Similar scenes claiming to depict the birth of Jesus or other religious figures were painted in chapels. Two examples can be found online at [http://www.wga.hu/html\\_m/b/bartolom/fruosino/descol.html](http://www.wga.hu/html_m/b/bartolom/fruosino/descol.html) and at

[http://www.wga.hu/html\\_m/u/uccello/2prato/03prato.html](http://www.wga.hu/html_m/u/uccello/2prato/03prato.html). Compare these visual representations with Angelica's description of her own labor, and of the parto room at Ca' Cappelletti. What do they reveal about ideal representations of childbirth compared to how childbirth might have been experienced by actual women in this period?

**History/Gender Studies:** Angelica becomes Juliet's wet nurse after losing her own daughter. This practice was quite common in the fourteenth century. In April of 1397, a woman named Margherita Datini wrote her husband to say that she had found a potential wet nurse, a woman whose own child was very sick, who would come for work "as soon as it is buried" (quoted in *The Merchant of Prato*, Iris Origo). Discuss in small groups how the presence of a wet-nurse shapes the idea of motherhood and family. How does it compare to religious images of the era, which often show Mary nursing Jesus? (see for example <http://www.wga.hu/frames-e.html?file=html/m/maso/various/madonna.html&find=nursing>) What other resources can students use to conduct a mini-research project on women's roles in the fourteenth century? Have students deliver a class presentation using technology to support their research.

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Invite Lois Leveen to make a "virtual visit" to your class using Skype, Google Hangout, or other technology by emailing: [booking@loisleveen.com](mailto:booking@loisleveen.com)