

ROMEO AND JULIET: OTHER ENDINGS
A DRAMATIC APPROACH TO PREVENTING YOUTH SUICIDE

Therefore, out of thy long
experienced time
Give some present counsel, or,
behold:
'Twixt my extremes and me this bloody knife
Shall play the umpire, arbitrating that
Which the commission of thy years and art
Could to no issue of true honor bring.
Be not so long to speak; I long to die,
If what thou speak'st speak not of remedy."
Romeo and Juliet. IV.i. 60-67

"Not Knowing where to go next
With whom to pour your heart
When there really is no one.
And where would you say the/moon lies
With winter on its way?/Both walls are cold,
Unblinking off-white.
Teach me how
To defend my needs
From that which is/Life./I ask you what now?
Vivienne: The life and Suicide of an
Adolescent Girl

The cries for help from the fictional 14-year-old Juliet in Renaissance Italy ("Unless thou tell me how I may prevent it" IV.i.51) and Vivienne, a 14-year-old New England school girl ("Teach me how to defend my needs") reflect a need for support and guidance in taking on adult realities.

The tragedy of Romeo and Juliet transcends a classic love story to reflect the reality of contemporary issues facing today's adolescents. Timeless, yet timely in its portrayal of teenage isolation, alienation, and failed communication, the play speaks strongly to today's young people. But more than this, the play addresses a tragic crisis facing our nation--teen suicide--and offers us the opportunity not just to weep for these fictional young lovers, but to learn from their plight.

In response, The Shakespeare Theatre at the Folger and the Youth Suicide National Center have collaborated on a pilot program to raise the curtain of silence surrounding teenage suicide through an innovative approach to the study of Romeo and Juliet. The materials contained here for teachers and counselors to use with their students are the result of that collaboration.