

# Study Guide for **Private Romeo**

## An Alan Brown Film

### SYNOPSIS

When eight cadets are left behind at an isolated military high school, the greatest romantic drama ever written seeps out of the classroom and permeates their lives. Incorporating the original text of *Romeo and Juliet*, YouTube videos and lip-synched Indie rock music, **Private Romeo** takes us to mysterious and tender place that only Shakespeare could have inspired.

### CHARACTERS

The characters in the film are all students in a military academy. They are themselves, not the characters in Shakespeare's play, but they find themselves enacting the play and using Shakespeare's language to express what they can't say otherwise.

These are the characters in the film and the parts they find themselves playing.

Sam Singleton – speaks Romeo's lines  
Glenn Mangan – speaks Juliet's lines  
Josh Neff – speaks Mercutio & Lord Capulet's lines  
Gus Sanchez – speaks Benvolio & Lady Capulet's lines  
Omar Madsen – speaks the Nurse's lines  
Carlos Moreno – speaks Tybalt's lines  
Adam Hersh – speaks Friar Lawrence's lines  
Ken Lee – speaks the Prince's lines

Notice when characters are called by their own names and when they switch to the names of the characters in the play.  
Notice that their real names are on their uniforms.

### INSPIRATIONS

In addition to being inspired by Shakespeare, the film was influenced by YouTube lip-sync videos made by soldiers stationed overseas as well as It Gets Better campaign and its accompanying videos.

Watch some of these inspirations on line. Where do you see their influence in the film? Is it aesthetic? Philosophical?

Make your own YouTube video inspired by *Private Romeo*.

### Why Use Shakespeare's Language?

In particularly closed environments, sometimes people aren't able to say everything they mean or express what they want.

For the characters in *Private Romeo*, the text of *Romeo and Juliet* allows them to say the unsayable and perhaps to feel things that they might not otherwise allow themselves to feel.

Are there times you wish you had better words to say something?

Write about a moment in your life where you could have used the eloquence and expressiveness of Shakespeare's language.

A comeback?

A love poem?

A reprimand?

Choose a line from Shakespeare that you wish you could have said to someone.

*Is love a tender thing? It is too rough, too rude, too boist'rous.*

*I have an interest in your hearts' proceedings.*

### Shakespeare and High School

The films below were based on Shakespeare's plays and set in high school.

*O – Othello*

*She's the Man – Twelfth Night*

*10 Things I Hate About You – Taming of the Shrew*

*Get Over It – A Midsummer Night's Dream*

Why do Shakespeare's stories and words seem to translate to the High School environment so much better than any other setting? What do Shakespeare and High School have in common?

What play would be set in your high school? A comedy? A tragedy?

One way *Private Romeo* differs from these other adaptations is in retaining Shakespeare's language. What would it have been like without it?

Many of these other high school adaptations feature gay best friends who principally give make-overs. How does *Private Romeo* expand the image of homosexuality?

### World without Adult Supervision

In Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, the adults in Verona interfere significantly in the lives of its young people. It can be argued that Friar Lawrence, the Nurse and all the parents create the tragedy of the play.

*Private Romeo* has no adults. The students have been left behind at their military school and are expected to take care of themselves.

How would this story be different if there were adults on campus?

Compare other worlds without adult authority. How is *Private Romeo* different from *Lord of the Flies*, for example? What order do the young people create for themselves? Are they liberated or repressed by being on their own?

### ALL MALE

*Private Romeo* has an entirely male cast.

The very first production of *Romeo and Juliet* (sometime in the 1590s) was also performed entirely by men, as in Shakespeare's time, no women were allowed on stage. A woman caught performing could expect to be arrested and probably accused of prostitution.

Shakespeare's company featured men and boys; the boys took on the roles of the women. There are also many contemporary theatre companies that choose to do Shakespeare with all male casts. Propeller (directed by Edward Hall) was at BAM in the spring of 2011 for their all male *Comedy of Errors*. On screen, *Dead Poet's Society* featured an all male *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

How is the all male casting in this film different from Shakespeare's, Propeller's or *Dead Poet's Society*?

*Stand if you be a man.*

### CINEMATIC TECHNIQUES

Color Saturation: how vibrant, deep or rich colors are onscreen.

In this film, the scenes that take place "in Verona" (in other words, the scenes that utilize Shakespeare's words) have a great deal of color saturation and the scenes of their everyday life are greyer and more muted.

Track the colors as the film slips from one reality to another. Which feels warmer? Which feels more realistic?

Hand-Held camera: When the camera is held by a person, rather than supported by a tripod or other base. It gives a film a documentary, spontaneous feeling

Why do you think the filmmakers chose to use Hand-held cameras?

*But soft, what light through yonder window breaks?  
It is the East and Juliet is the sun.*

### BALCONY SCENES

One of the most famous scenes in all of Western drama is commonly called "The Balcony Scene" from *Romeo and Juliet*. It is so called because it takes place on Juliet's balcony. In Shakespeare's time, this was most likely the second level of the Globe Theatre.

Some productions retain the balcony and others set it elsewhere. How does the setting change the scene?

Balcony scenes to watch: (all available on You Tube – just search Balcony Scene Romeo and Juliet )  
Franco Zeffrelli's film of *Romeo and Juliet* (1968)  
Baz Lurhmann's film of *Romeo + Juliet* (1996)  
Royal Shakespeare Company's Stage Production (2011)

Compare each "balcony" to *Private Romeo's* setting. How does the location change the performances and actions?

*The gallant, young, and noble gentleman,  
The County Paris, at Saint Peter's Church  
Shall happily make thee there a joyful bride.*

### Marry Paris?

The actors and director had a disagreement about how to handle the part of the story in which Juliet is forced to marry Paris.

What do you think of this section? What does it mean to you?

Imagine a dialogue between actors and director in which each expresses a different point of view on this plot point.

### ACTIVISM

Writer/Director Alan Brown is also a gay rights activist. He fought for the overturning of Don't Ask Don't Tell and continues to look for ways to help support the gay community.

How does this film support the cause of equal rights for gays? How does it make a difference?

Imagine you are a gay young person. Write a letter to the filmmaker explaining how it might have helped you.

*ROMEO*

*In sadness, Benvolio, I do love a woman.*

*BENVOLIO*

*I aimed so near when I supposed you loved.*

### Giving words new meaning

Some words take on new meaning when said in the film. Watch how the following words are used in the film.

RING  
MARRIAGE  
DEATH  
POISON

Are these words metaphors for something else or are they symbols?

*Give this ring to my true knight.*