



Romiette and Julio

Sharon M. Draper

Teacher's Guide

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Synopsis

Chapter 1

Sixteen-year-old Romiette ("Romi") Cappelle is having a terrifying nightmare about fire and water.

Chapter 2

Romiette describes herself in her journal. She is terrified of water and loves big shoes. Her father, Cornell Cappelle, is a well-respected television newscaster; her mother, Lady Brianna, owns an African-American themed boutique. They are very successful people.

Chapter 3

Romi and her best friend Destiny mingle with their classmates as everyone returns to school after the midwinter holiday break. Romi tells Destiny about her nightmare and Destiny is eager to interpret it because she feels that she has psychic powers. The girls see some kids fighting in the corner but ignore it.

Chapter 4

The action shifts across the hall to sixteen-year-old Julio Montague, who is furious about his family having moved from Corpus Christi to Cincinnati. There were two reasons for the move: Mr. Montague had lost his job and Mr. and Mrs. Montague wanted to get Julio away from the crime and the gangs in his Texas high school. Julio hates Cincinnati because he misses his friends, the balmy warmth, the water, and the Hispanic culture. In a flashback, Julio remembers how he called his friend Diego to complain about his new home. Diego is sympathetic, but his father has been out of work for five years, so there are limits to his pity. Filled with rage, Julio punches a student with green hair. Ben Olsen, the green-haired kid, covers for Julio with the principal, saying that he slipped and fell.

Julio and Ben become friends. Julio feels a little better about the move after making a friend.

Chapter 5

Destiny borrows \$45 from Romi for a Scientific Soul Mate System, a bogus mail order item.

Chapter 6

Luis Montague understands his son's anger at the move. The family is Hispanic, from Mexico, and very proud of their lineage. Julio wants to be a reporter.

Chapter 7

Romi and Julio meet in an online chat room, but do not know each other's real identities.

Chapter 8

Romi and Julio go into a private chat room. They described their hopes and fears, goals and aspirations.

Chapter 9

Romi tells Destiny about meeting "Spanish Lover" (Julio) in the chat room. Destiny urges caution because he could be an adult stalker.

Chapter 10

Members of a gang called the "Devildogs" surround

Julio in the men's room at school and menace him by calling him "Chico," a derogatory term for Hispanics.

Chapter 11

In a parallel chapter, Julio tells Ben about meeting Romi ("Afroqueen") in the chat room and explains why he finds her so special.



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Chapter 12

Romi and Julio meet in the private chat room again. They discover that they attend the same school and make plans to meet in person in the lunch room.

Chapter 13

In her journal, Romi describes how she met Julio in the lunchroom. He brought her a bottle of hot sauce and a red rose. She thinks that he is very handsome and kind.

Chapter 14

Romi tells Destiny why she finds Julio so appealing. Nonetheless, Romi is concerned that they will not be accepted because they are a mixed-race couple.

Chapter 15

Julio tells Ben that Romi has only one weakness: she cannot swim. Julio loves the water.

Chapter 16

Romi and Julio talk in the Internet chat room. They are falling in love.

Chapter 17

Julio looks over some treasured objects that he brought with him from Texas. Julio tells his father about Romi. However, his father is displeased that Julio is dating an African-American rather than an Hispanic.

Chapter 18

In her journal, Romi describes the stuffed lion that Julio gave her. She gave him a key chain with her initials, a gift from her parents. She also describes the menace the purple-suited gang members present to them.

Chapter 19

Ben reveals that he gets excellent grades because he reads a lot. Nonetheless, people are put off by his brightly-dyed hair and multiple piercings.

Chapter 20

Romi works at her mother's boutique. This afternoon, Malaka Grimes comes in. She and Romi were friends when they were much younger, but Malaka had become foul-mouthed and "hard-acting." Malaka comes to warn Romi that the gang is against her dating Julio because he is Mexican-American, not black. Romi is furious at the warning and the prejudice behind it.

Chapter 21

Julio tells Romi about all the gangs in his former school in Texas and how difficult it was to get rid of

them because everyone feared them—even the parents and teachers. They discuss the similarities over their names and Shakespeare's play *Romeo and Juliet*. Julio promises to protect Romi, with his life, if necessary.

Chapter 22

Julio tells Ben how much he loves Romi.

Chapter 23

Romi tells Destiny how much she loves Julio.

Chapter 24

Romi and Julio share their feelings for each other and worry over the gang in a conversation in a private chat room.

Chapter 25

Romi has her terrible nightmare again. Her mother comforts her.

Chapter 26

At Destiny's house, Romi reveals that she has fallen in love with Julio. The girls do their homework.

Chapter 27

Julio tells his mother about Romi. A sweet and gentle woman, Mrs. Montague recalls her own feelings of young love and feels happy for her son, in contrast to her husband's fears over interracial dating.

Chapter 28

Julio reveals that he does not have the nerve to ask Romi's father for a job at the TV station.

Chapter 29

Julio and Romi talk about the gang, the Devildogs. Malaka gives Romi another warning, revealing that the gang does not like it that Romi is dating a Hispanic. Malaka has been dating one of the gang leaders, Terrell ("Mr. T"). Malaka likes Terrell taking care of her.

Chapter 30

At lunch, Romi tells Julio that they face a very grave risk from the gang. The kids talk about how their parents react to their racial differences: all but Mr. Montague are understanding and supportive.

Chapter 31

Destiny spends the night at Romi's house, and the two girls talk about Destiny's supposed psychic powers.

Chapter 32

Julio and his father argue about Julio dating Romi. Mr. Montague reveals that he, too, had a wonderful first love, Angelina, but she was killed by a group of African-American thugs. Since that time, he has always feared African-Americans and will not allow his son to develop a relationship with anyone who is black.

Chapter 33

Romi and Destiny use the "Scientific Soul Mate System" that Destiny bought through mail order. They make a series of wishes whenever the numbers on the clock are the same, as in 11:11.

Chapter 34

The next morning, Destiny is sure the system worked, but Romi isn't convinced.

Chapter 35

Romi gives Julio a puppy from the litter her dog had. He calls the puppy "Taco." Romi has a big, impressive house; Julio comes from a much more modest background. Romi and Julio discuss how Destiny and Ben are well suited to each other. Romi and Julio go for a walk, trailed by gang members, who menace them with a gun. They push Romi down in the dirt. Romi and Julio are desperate to find a way to deal with the gang.

Chapter 36

Cornell Cappelle and his assistant Nannette Norris discuss gangs on the news, concluding erroneously that they are a minor problem in their area.

Chapter 37

Monday, the kids discuss a plan to stop the gang, which continues to menace them.

Chapter 38

The kids plan to videotape the gang menacing Romi and Julio. Destiny and Ben will trail them in their car for protection.

Chapter 39

Monday at 6:00 P.M., the kids walk through London Woods, where Julio and Romi kiss for the first time. The Devildogs pull up in their Cadillac, but there is no sign of Destiny and Ben, as planned. The gang kidnaps Romi and Julio, knocking them unconscious. The gang puts Romi in the car; Julio in the trunk.

Chapter 40

On the six o'clock news, Cappelle and Nanette again conclude that gangs are not a big problem.

Chapter 41

At 9:00 P.M., Mr. and Mrs. Cappelle return home, disturbed that Romi isn't there. Her note indicates that she would be home at 7:00 P.M. Mrs. Cappelle calls Romi's friends, ending with Malaka. Ironically, Malaka has returned home only briefly to get some duct tape to use to bind Romi and Julio. Malaka lies to Mrs. Cappelle, denying that she has any idea where Romi and Julio are. The Cappelles call the police. Meanwhile, Ben and Destiny go to the Cappelles' home and reveal the plan. Ben's car has broken down because it was out of gas. Everyone is frantic with worry.

Chapter 42

Luis and Maria Montague go to the police station to report that Julio is missing.

Chapter 43

In the police station at 10:00 P.M., the Cappelles and Montagues meet. The parents argue with each other—the men are especially hostile—as they worry.

Chapter 44

The disappearance of Romi and Julio is announced on the news.

Chapter 45

It is midnight and the Cappelles are home waiting for dawn so they can search for the kids. A terrible storm rages.

Chapter 46

It is 2:00 A.M. and Julio's parents are home, waiting for dawn so they can search for the kids. The police pick up the gang. Mrs. Montague and Mrs. Cappelle become friends, but the men are still icy toward each other.

Chapter 47

Malaka reveals what she knows of the kidnapping. The police find a boat missing from the boathouse.

Chapter 48

Ben and Destiny go to Lincoln Woods Lake to search for Romi and Julio in the fierce rain.

Chapter 49

In a flashback, we learn that the gang has put Romi and Julio in a boat and launched them on the lake. They are tied up and unconscious.

Chapter 50

Romi and Julio regain consciousness and Romi realizes that she is living her nightmare. They manage to loosen their bonds. Julio convinces Romi that they must get out of the boat because they will be struck by lightning. They slip in the water and sure enough, the lightning strikes the boat, destroying it.

Chapter 51

Romi drifts to the bottom of the lake.

Chapter 52

Julio saves Romi, pulling her from the lake.

Chapter 53

Captain Escaluski finds the video recorder in the Cadillac's trunk.

Chapter 54

Destiny finds Romi's shoe. Ben and Destiny realize that they like each other.

Chapter 55

Luis and Cornell become friends, bound together by shared adversity.

Chapter 56

The kidnapping is broadcast on the news.

Chapter 57

Insensitive Nannette interviews people who are searching the park and lake.

Chapter 58

At noon, Luis and Cornell find Romi and Julio, unconscious but alive.

Chapter 59

Nannette foolishly reports that Romi and Julio are dead.

Chapter 60

At the hospital, Romi tells her parents that Julio saved her life. Destiny and Ben realize they are meant to be together. Cornell gives Julio a job at the TV station.

Chapter 61

The kidnapping is reported on the news.

Chapter 62

Romi and Julio realize they are soul mates.

Scene Summary of *Romeo and Juliet* by William Shakespeare

Act 1, Scene 1: Two servants of the Capulets, Sampson and Gregory, go out looking for trouble and find it when they meet Abraham and Balthasar, who are servants of the Montagues. Benvolio, a relative of the Capulets and friend of Romeo's, tries to break up the fight, but the scence becomes a mob, as the citizens of Verona enter the fray. The patrirachs themselves try to join the fight, but their wives restrain them. Prince Escalus quells the riot by threatening everyone involed with death. He takes the Capulets with him, leaving Benvolio alone with Lord and Lady Montague. They ask where Romeo is, he replies that he was up before dawn roaming in the woods. The Montagues are concerned about their son, they don't understand his moods of late. Seeing Romeo coming, they ask Benvolio to speak to him alone, tosee if he will confide his problems to his friend. Benvolio discovers that Romeo is suffering with unrequited love. Romeo won't reveal who he is in love with and cannot be consoled by the suggestion to think "there are other fish in the sea."

Act 1, Scene 2: Paris approaches Juliet's father, Capulet to ask for her hand in marriage. Capulet believes Juliet is too young to marry, but encourages Paris to court her, inviting him to a feast that evening. Benvolio is still trying to talk Romeo into considering other ladies when they are interrupted by the Capulet servant, who asks Romeo to read something for him. It is a list of guests at Capulet's feast that night. Thus Romeo discovers that Rosaline, his beloved, will be at the feast. Benvolio challenges Romeo to go to the feast and compare Rosaline with other beauties. Romeo says he will go, but only to rejoice that Rosaline is most beautiful of all.

Act 1, Scene 3: Lady Capulet wants to have a serious conversation with Juliet, but the Nurse interrupts with a long reminiscence. Lady Capulet tells Juliet that Paris wants to marry her, and urges her to look him over and see that he is the husband for her. Servants come to call everyone to the feast.

Act 1, Scene 4: Mercutio tries to persuade Romeo to dance at Capulet's feast, but Romeo insists that he is too love-lorn to do anything but hold a torch. Then Romeo says that it's not wise to go to the feast

at all, because of a dream he had.... Mercutio mocks Romeo's belief in his dream by going on and on about "Queen Mab," but Romeo is sure that some terrible fate awaits him. Nevertheless, he goes into the feast with his friends.

Act 1, Scene 5: At Capulet's house, Romeo and his friends enter as preparations are being made for the dancing. The musicians are tuning up, and the servants are hurrying to clear away the remains of the feast. Capulet enters, greets the masked strangers, and invites them to dance. Romeo sees Juliet and says to himself that this is the first time he's seen true beauty. Tybalt recognizes Romeo and sends for his sword, but Capulet orders Tybalt to do nothing. Saying that he'll make Romeo pay, Tybalt leaves.... Romeo holds Juliet's hand, and begs a kiss, which she gives him. They kiss again, and then both are called away. As everyone is leaving, they each learn the name of the other, and they each exclaim upon the fate that has made each fall in love with his/her enemy.

Act 2, Prologue: The Chorus tells us that Romeo and Juliet are suffering because they can't meet, but that passion gives them power to find a way to see each other:

Act 2, Scene 1: On his way home from Capulet's feast, Romeo turns back and jumps the wall of Capulet's garden. Benvolio calls for Romeo and Mercutio bawdily conjures Romeo, but he will not appear, and his friends depart.

Act 2, Scene 2: In Capulet's garden Romeo sees Juliet come to her window. He is entranced by her beauty and listens as she tells the night that she loves Romeo and wishes that he had another name. Romeo surprises her by offering to take another name for her love. At first, Juliet worries for Romeo's safety and then she worries that he may be a deceiver, but he wins her over with passionate vows of love. They pledge their love to one another and then Juliet is called away by the nurse. Answering her call, Juliet goes into the house, then comes right back out and tells Romeo that the next day she will send a messenger to find out when and where she is to meet and marry him. Juliet is again called back into the house, and Romeo starts to leave, but Juliet again comes back out, to set a time that her messenger should go to Romeo. Romeo tells her that

the messenger should come at nine in the morning. They say a long goodbye, and after Juliet is gone, Romeo says that he will go to the cell of Friar Laurence to get his help.

Act 2, Scene 3: At dawn Friar Laurence gathers herbs and comments on how -- in both plants and people -- everything has some good, and every good can be abused and turned to evil. Romeo appears and tells Friar Laurence that he has fallen in love with Juliet and wants him to marry them. The Friar criticizes Romeo for jumping so quickly from love of Rosaline to love of Juliet, but agrees to perform the ceremony because he thinks that the marriage may end the hatred between the Capulets and Montagues.

Act 2, Scene 4: Mercutio bawdily mocks the nurse, who tells Romeo that she wants a word in private with him. The nurse complains about Mercutio, receives from Romeo the information about time and place of the wedding, then chatters on about how sweet Juliet is.

Act 2, Scene 5: Juliet impatiently awaits the return of the nurse with news from Romeo. The nurse teases Juliet by finding all kinds of ways to not deliver the joyful news, but finally tells her that she is to go Friar Laurence's cell to be married to Romeo.

Act 2, Scene 6: Just before the wedding, Friar Laurence advises Romeo to love moderately. Romeo and Juliet tell each other how much they love one another, and Friar Laurence leads them off to be married.

Act 3, Scene 1: On the streets of Verona, Tybalt, looking for Romeo, is challenged to a fight by Mercutio, but then Romeo appears. Tybalt challenges Romeo to fight. Romeo refuses, but Mercutio steps forward and fights Tybalt. As Romeo is trying to stop the fight, Tybalt wounds Mercutio, then runs away. Mercutio dies. Romeo is ashamed of himself for letting Mercutio do the fighting, and when Tybalt returns, Romeo kills him. Benvolio has a hard time getting the dazed Romeo to leave the scene. Benvolio tells the Prince what happened. Lady Capulet wants Romeo's life, but the Prince levies fines and exiles Romeo.

Act 3, Scene 2: Juliet longs for the coming of night and Romeo. The nurse appears; she has seen

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Tybalt's corpse and heard that Romeo has been banished. The nurse is so overwrought that her words first make Juliet think that Romeo is dead. When the nurse finally makes it clear that Tybalt is dead and Romeo is banished, Juliet first turns against Romeo for killing her cousin, then defends him for killing the man who would have killed him. Juliet is despairing that she won't see Romeo, so the nurse promise to arrange a visit that evening.

Act 3, Scene 3: Learning from the Friar that he is to be banished, Romeo declares that the Friar is torturing him to death, then throws himself on the floor, moaning and weeping. The nurse brings news that Juliet is in just as bad shape as Romeo. Romeo, wild with guilt at the pain he has caused Juliet, tries to stab himself. Friar Laurence lectures Romeo and tells him what to do -- go to Juliet, then to Mantua until the Prince can be persuaded to pardon him. The nurse gives Romeo the ring that Juliet asked her to take to him. These things put Romeo into a better frame of mind and he leaves Friar Laurence's cell to go to Juliet.

Act 3, Scene 4: On a sudden impulse, Capulet promises Paris that Juliet will marry him the day after tomorrow.

Act 3, Scene 5: Just before dawn Romeo is preparing to leave, but Juliet declares that it's still night, so he can stay. Romeo offers to stay and die, but Juliet urges him to leave. The nurse hurries in with the news that Juliet's mother is coming. Romeo kisses Juliet and leaps out the window. Juliet asks if they will ever see each other again; Romeo is sure they will, but Juliet is full of foreboding. Lady Capulet, assuming that Juliet is weeping for Tybalt, tells her that she's grieving too much, then decides that Juliet must be weeping because revenge has not been taken upon Romeo. Lady Capulet expresses her hatred of Romeo and Juliet appears to agree with her, though what she really means is that she loves Romeo. Lady Capulet then delivers news which she thinks ought to cheer up Juliet -- she is to be married to Paris. Juliet declares that she will not. Lady Capulet replies that Juliet's father is coming, so Juliet ought to tell him that she won't marry Paris, if she dares. Lady Capulet tells Capulet that Juliet has refused to marry Paris. Enraged, Capulet threatens to throw her out of the house if she doesn't change her mind. Juliet pleads with her mother to intervene, but Lady Capulet refuses. Juliet asks the nurse

for advice, and she tells Juliet that she ought to marry Paris because Romeo can never come back and Paris is better looking, anyway. Juliet pretends to accept the nurse's advice but decides that she will go to Friar Laurence for his advice. If he can't help her, she will kill herself.

Act 4, Scene 1: As Paris is making arrangements with Friar Laurence to perform the wedding ceremony between himself and Juliet, she appears. Paris tries to tease some sign of affection out of Juliet and reminds her that they are to be married on Thursday. Juliet says that she will kill herself rather than marry Paris, and the Friar comes up with the plan for her to take the drug which will make her appear dead for 42 hours, so that the wedding will be called off and Romeo can come and take her to Mantua.

Act 4, Scene 2: Capulet is making arrangements for the wedding feast when Juliet appears, begs her father's pardon, and tells him that she will marry Paris. This makes Capulet so happy that he moves the wedding up to the very next day, Wednesday.

Act 4, Scene 3: Juliet persuades her mother and the nurse to leave her alone. She agonizes over everything that could go wrong, is terrified by visions of the grave, and drinks to Romeo.

Act 4, Scene 4: The Capulets and their servants are busily preparing for the wedding. Paris' musicians are heard, and Capulet sends the nurse to awaken Juliet.

Act 4, Scene 5: The nurse tries to awaken Juliet, but finds that she is (apparently) dead. Lady Capulet and Capulet come running, then lament their daughter's death. The rest of the wedding party arrives, only to find that Juliet is dead and hear the clamor of lamentation. Capulet, Lady Capulet, Paris, and the nurse go nearly wild with grief, but Friar Laurence takes command of the situation by reminding everyone that Juliet is now in a better place, and telling them proceed with her funeral. As the musicians are starting to leave, Peter rushes in and demands that they play a sad song to cheer him up. They refuse, Peter insults them with a riddle, and they all leave to wait for lunch.

Act 5, Scene 1: Romeo expects good news from Verona, but receives the news that Juliet is dead. He buys poison of an apothecary and says that he intends to return to Verona and join Juliet in death.

Act 5, Scene 2: Friar John explains to Friar Laurence why he was unable to deliver Friar Laurence's letter to Romeo. Friar Laurence sends Friar John to get a crowbar and makes plans to be there when Juliet awakes, write again to Romeo in Mantua, and hide Juliet in his cell until Romeo arrives.

Act 5, Scene 3: Paris comes to Juliet's grave to strew flowers and weep. He sends his page a ways off, to act as a look-out. Paris promises to visit Juliet's grave every night, then the page whistles to warn him that someone is coming. Paris sees a torch and withdraws into the darkness to see who else has come to Juliet's grave. Romeo sends Balthasar away with a letter for Romeo's father, and starts to open the tomb. Paris comes forward and tries to arrest Romeo. They fight, and Romeo kills Paris. As he is dying, Paris asks to be laid next to Juliet. Romeo does this, pledges his love to Juliet, takes the poison, and dies. Friar Laurence comes and finds Romeo and Paris dead. Juliet awakes and Friar Laurence tries to persuade her to come out of the grave, but being afraid of being found there by the watchmen, he runs away. Juliet kills herself with Romeo's dagger. Paris' page brings the watchmen to the monument of the Capulets. Watchmen find Balthasar and Friar Laurence. Prince Escalus arrives, then Capulet, Lady Capulet, and Montague. Friar Laurence tells his story, which is confirmed by Balthasar, Paris' page, and the letter from Romeo to his father. Montague promises to build a golden statue of Juliet, and Capulet promises to build one of Romeo.

Author Sketch

Sharon Draper combines a successful career as a writer with a twenty-five year career as a high school English teacher. Born in Cleveland, Ohio, in 1948, Draper earned her B.A. from Pepperdine University and her M.A. from Miami University in Ohio.



In an interview, Draper explained that she always wanted to be a teacher. She said, "I was an avid reader. I read every single book in the elementary school library, all of them." Draper's literary recognition began when she won first prize in the 1991 *Ebony* magazine Literary Contest, for which she was awarded \$5,000 and the publication of her short story, "One Small Torch."

Among her awards, Draper counts the 1997 National Teacher of the Year, a NCNW Excellence in Teaching Award winner, and Ohio Teacher of the Year. She received the Excellence in Education Award, is a Milken Family Foundation National Educator Award winner, and was the Duncanson Artist-in-Residence for the Taft Museum. In 1998, Draper was elected to the Board of Trustees of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. Her award-winning essay on education, "The Touch of a Teacher," was published by the National Governor's Association in the book, *What Governors Need to Know about Education*.

Critic's Corner

Sharon Draper has become a popular young adult writer for her tales of real-life problems concerning troubled teens, but reviews of her work are decidedly mixed. Writing for *School Library Journal*, Jane Halsall praised *Romiette and Julio* as a "realistic portrayal of the interactions among high school students as well as their relationships with their parents. All of the characters have unique voices and the writing style shifts according to the action. *Romiette and Julio* would be a wonderful curriculum tie-in book, but it also stands alone as a first-rate novel about contemporary teens."

However, Simon Rodberg, writing for the *New York Times Book Review*, said, "*Romiette and Julio* pulls all the right heartstrings, but even its convincing chat room transcripts can't quite pull the story into the 21st century."

Holly Koelling, writing in *Booklist*, criticized the dialogue as "jarring and stilted" and noted that "*Romiette's* father and some peripheral adult characters are overdone." Nonetheless, "Draper has created *Julio's* parents and *Romiette's* mother with sensitivity and has given readers a pair of intriguing, unusual protagonists with the sort of real thoughts and feelings that will make this interracial story satisfying despite its stylistic problems."

Kirkus was especially harsh about the novel's melodramatic ending: "After the two central players ignore several warnings, gun-wielding gang leaders kidnap them, bind them, and cast them adrift in a boat that is struck by lightning, nearly drowning them (and straining credibility). The parallels to Shakespeare's play are often self-conscious and belabored, drawn at odd moments in the story."

Other Books by Sharon Draper

Battle of Jericho (2003)
Before the Dawn (2001)
Jazzimagination (1999)
Not Quite Burned Out but Crispy Around the Edges: Inspiration, Laughter, and Encouragement for Teachers (2001)
Tears of a Tiger (1994)
Teaching from the Heart: Reflections, Encouragement, and Inspiration (2000)
Ziggy and the Black Dinosaurs (1994)
Ziggy and the Black Dinosaurs: Lost in the Tunnel of Time (1996)
Ziggy and the Black Dinosaurs: Shadows of Caesar's Creek (1997)

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Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books, January, 1995, p. 164; June, 1997, p. 355.
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Social Education, April, 1995, p. 215.
Voice of Youth Advocates, February, 1995, p. 338; June, 1997, p. 108.

General Objectives

1. To appreciate the difficulty of adjusting to a new home and community
2. To probe the causes and effects of gangs
3. To explore the importance of family communication
4. To understand the novel's title
5. To assess the benefits of friendship
6. To appreciate the author's use of humor and comic relief
7. To understand how a dangerous situation can get out of hand
8. To explore the strength of first love
9. To probe cultural and racial differences, real and perceived
10. To understand the symbolism of fire and water

Specific Objectives

1. To trace the growing love between Romi and Julio
2. To analyze the relationship between the Montagues and Cappelles
3. To understand the relationship between Destiny and Ben
4. To assess the role of personal responsibility
5. To explore how Ben shows his individuality
6. To analyze life inside an urban high school
7. To draw parallels between this novel and Shakespeare's tragedy of Romeo and Juliet
8. To probe Destiny's belief in astrology and psychic intuition
9. To evaluate the novel's melodramatic tone
10. To identify the novel's structure, especially its climax

Literary Terms and Applications

For a better understanding of Sharon Draper's style, present the following terms and applications to the novel:

diction an author's choice of words. In *Romiette and Julio*, Draper uses dialect and slang, different levels of diction, to describe her characters and setting more fully. Dialect shows the way people speak in a certain area. Slang is the language of a particular group. Draper uses the dialect of black teenagers, including the slang "hang with" (spend time with) and "chillin'" (relaxing).

style an author's distinctive way of writing. Style is made up of elements such as punctuation, word choice, sentence length and structure, figures of speech, and tone. To create her style, Draper uses street slang for the gang, everyday diction for Romi and Julio, and Standard Written English for the Cappelles. As a result, Draper creates a rich and varied style.

symbol a person, place, or object that represents an abstract idea. For example, a dove may symbolize peace or a rose may symbolize love. In this novel, the fire and water symbolize anxiety, even terror. They represent Romi's worst fears.

The Importance of Setting

Setting is an important aspect of *Romiette and Julio* because it is so closely intertwined with the novel's symbolism. The primary symbols are fire and water. These symbols appear first in Romiette's nightmare and later in the lightning storm, pounding rain, and lake water.

For these symbols to weave through the novel logically, they must be an integral part of the setting and flow naturally from it. Draper achieves this by setting the novel in Cincinnati, Ohio, an urban area dotted with small parks and lakes. Further, fierce thunderstorms are commonplace in this region.

By marrying the setting and symbols, Draper achieves a unified and logical narrative.

Across the Curriculum

Fiction

Laurie Halse Anderson, *Speak*
Lynne Ewing, *Drive-By*
Lynne Ewing, *Party Girl*
Sharon G. Flake, *The Skin I'm In*
Walter Dean Myers, *Monster*
Rita Williams-Garcia, *Like Sisters on the Homefront*

Drama

William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*

Video/AudioCassettes

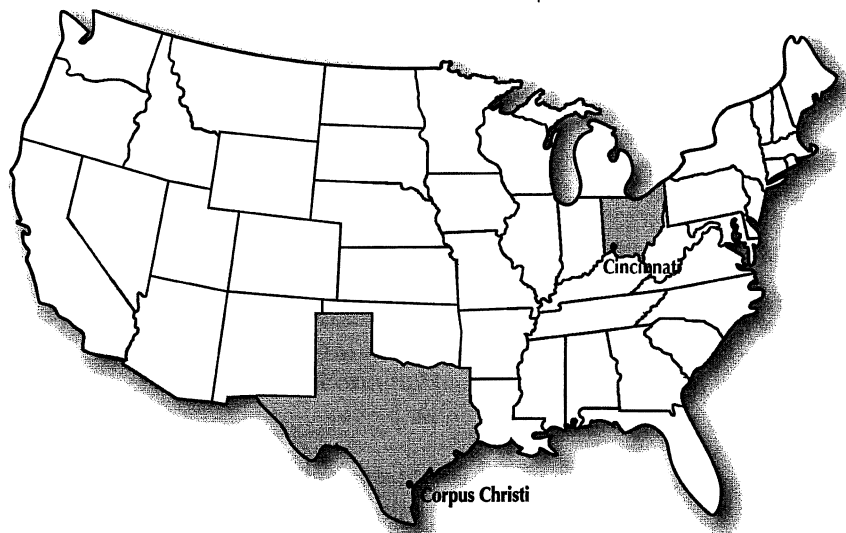
The Battle of Jericho
Darkness Before Dawn
Double Dutch
Tears of a Tiger
West Side Story

Internet

Summary of Romeo and Juliet
<http://www.clicknotes.com/romeo/S11.html>
Sharon Draper's homepage
www.sharondraper.com
Children's Literature Web Guide <http://www.acs.ucalgary.ca/~dkbrown/ala98.html>

Videos/Films

Images & Realities: African-American Children (1996)
The Journey of the African-American Athlete (1997)
Landmarks of Faith: The Heritage of African-American Worship (1999)



Themes and Motifs

A study of the central issues and situations in Sharon Draper's *Romiette and Julio* should include these aspects:

Themes

- astrology
- colors, especially green and orange
- fire
- friendship
- gangs
- love
- nightmares
- poetry
- Shakespeare
- water

Motifs

- appreciating the strength of love
- understanding the difficulty of coping with gangs
- distinguishing between appearance and reality
- recognizing the powerful effect of friendship
- overcoming prejudice and racism
- recognizing parallel pairs of lovers, a stock dramatic device
- appreciating the author's use of comic relief
- grasping the symbolism of water and fire
- setting plans and establishing career goals
- being true to yourself and your beliefs

Meaning Study

Below are words, phrases, sentences, or thought units that have particular meaning in the novel. Explain the meaning of each. Chapter and page numbers indicate the context from which the item is taken.

1. "The Family ain't happy about you being here. We know you from that Texas Tejano gang." (Chap. 10, p. 56)
(Tejano is a style of music originating in southern Texas that contains elements of Latin music and country music. The term is being used here as a slur on Hispanics. Ironically, Julio and his family moved from Texas to Cincinnati to avoid the gangs and yet Julio isn't in school a week before he is targeted by a gang. Julio fights back, which displeases the gang members.)
2. "He's Hispanic."
"So?"
"And I'm black."
"So?" (Chap. 14, p. 76)
(Romi is worried that she and Julio will have trouble being accepted as a couple because they are from different races. Destiny does not understand Romi's concerns, arguing that her generation is color-blind. However, Romi's concerns foreshadow the gang's negative reaction to the mixed-race couple. Her worry also shows how Julio's father will object to the mixed-race couple.)
3. "It's not as if you're going to marry this girl." (Chap. 17, p. 89)
(Julio's father does not approve of his son dating an African-American girl but dismisses his concerns because it does not seem that their relationship will last. Ironically, it appears at the end of the novel that Romi and Julio are very much in love and that they are indeed likely to marry when they grow up.)
4. "Yeah, I love it! Here I come—leather jacket, dog collar on my neck, blue or pink or green hair, and all my visible body parts pierced." (Chap. 19, p. 94)
(Ben looks like a drugged-up punk, but he is a serious student and a thoughtful friend. His appearance and behavior embody the author's theme of appearance v. reality: you cannot tell from someone's appearance what they are really like. This truism extends to racial differences as well, the main concern of the book.)
5. "Scary. Like on the news. You got racial gangs? Or mixed, like in *West Side Story*?" (Chap. 22, p. 106)
*(Much of Romiette and Julio is based on a clever twist on Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* and Bernstein's *West Side Story*. Unlike Shakespeare's play, the lovers here are not star-crossed and the ending is very happy. Further, Romi is the girl and Julio is the boy, but Julio's father does not approve of the relationship. Ben is clearly based on Shakespeare's Benvolio. The gangs are clearly modeled on those in *West Side Story*.)*
6. "If he don't learn the rules, he might have to be taught a lesson." (Chap. 29, p. 136)

(Here, Malaka warns Romi that the gang is out to get her and Julio for their interracial relationship. This warning increases the novel's suspense.)

7. "I will never sanction a relationship between you and a black girl!" Luis stood then. (Chap. 32, p. 150)
(In contrast to his wife and Mr. and Mrs. Cappelle, Mr. Montague will not allow his son to date out of his racial background. He bases his prejudice on a dramatic experience he had as a teenager, when some African-Americans killed his girlfriend Angelina.)
8. "Sometimes just being different is reason enough to hate." (Chap. 47, p. 243)
(The novel contains nuggets of truth amid the compelling plot. Here, the author explains a sad truth: sometimes people fear differences and use them as a reason to attack.)
9. He shouted her name, went under again and again, but Romi was deep within the thing she feared the most—the dark, cold water. (Chap. 50, p. 265)
(As the novel builds to its climax, readers wonder if Romi will survive her ordeal in the frigid water, battered by lightning and pelting rain.)
10. "We have found them!" (Chap. 58, p. 297)
(At the novel's climax, Cornell and Luis find their children freezing cold and unconscious but alive. That the fathers found their children alive is a clever twist on Shakespeare's play.)

Comprehension Study

Answer the following questions in your own words. There is not always a right answer. Your judgment is important and you should be ready to defend your answers by referring to passages in the book.

Questions 1-5 (Literal Level)

1. Why does Julio move from Texas to Cincinnati?
(Julio's father has lost his job and the family relocates for his new employment. They also move because the Montagues want to get Julio away from the gangs and violence in his Texas school.)

2. How does the author indicate changes in narrator?
(She changes the font to indicate a change in narrator. The chat room scenes have a different typeface from the scenes in which Romi is writing in her diary, for instance.)
3. How do Romiette and Julio meet?
(They first encounter each other in a public Internet chat room and then meet in a private chat room. They finally meet face-to-face in the school cafeteria.)
4. Why is the gang after Romiette and Julio?
(The gang members object to Romiette, an African-American, dating Julio, a Hispanic. Clearly, the gang members are racist.)
5. What do the gang members do to punish Romiette and Julio?
(The gang kidnaps Romiette and Julio, ties them up, and knocks them unconscious. The gang then takes Romiette and Julio to the lake and puts them in a boat. They launch the boat in the midst of a fierce thunderstorm.)

Questions 6-8 (Interpretative Level)

6. What function do Destiny and Ben serve in the novel?
(They serve as the parallel lovers and provide much of the comic relief.)
7. What does Julio's grandfather mean when he says "Keep the river in your heart and follow it"?
(He means that people should stay close to their roots and honor their heritage. The Montagues have lived in Texas for over two hundred years. They have enjoyed many wonderful family times, including barbecues and weddings on the grandfather's ranch. The grandfather is telling Julio that no matter where he lives, his family and his heritage will always be a part of him.)
8. Compare and contrast the Cappelles and Montagues. How are they the same and different?
(The Cappelles are African-American; the Montagues are Hispanic. Both families are intact and love their children. They both want the best for their children as well. Both families

Romiette and Julio Sharon Draper

also come from large and close-knit families with a rich heritage. However, the Cappelles are highly-successful, members of the upper-middle class. The Montagues, in contrast, are not as well-off.)

Questions 9 and 10 (Critical Level)

9. What does the title symbolize in the novel?
(*The title represents a variation on Shakespeare's tragedy of Romeo and Juliet.*)
10. What is the author's theme or message in this novel?
(*The author condemns racism and discrimination, suggesting that people can overcome their fears and differences by getting to know each other, as the Cappelles and Montagues do.*)

Questions 11-13 (Creative Level)

11. Working with a small group of classmates, discuss some ways that you might have coped with the gang if you had been Romi, Julio, Destiny, or Ben.
12. Interpret Romi's dream in a different way.

Across the Curriculum

Language Arts

1. Create a new title for the novel and explain its significance.
2. Read Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* and compare and contrast it to this novel. How are they the same and different?
3. The characters in this book have creative names. Rename yourself by choosing a name that you think best describes your most important qualities. Be ready to explain how your new name suits your character and personality.
4. Interpret a dream, as Destiny would for Romi.
5. Destiny warns Romi against contacting strangers in Internet chat rooms because they could be predators. She makes a good point. Make a pamphlet explaining how teenagers can protect themselves on the Internet.

6. Ben is learning about Walt Whitman in English class. Report on Whitman for your class.

Drama/Speech

1. Role-play a scene between *Romiette and Julio* in which they express their feelings about each other.
2. Write and deliver a speech about ways to get rid of gangs in schools.
3. In a monologue, explain how you would cope with a move to a drastically different environment, as Julio must cope with the move from Texas to Cincinnati.
4. Sharon M. Draper has been accused of writing melodramatic books. First define "melodrama" and then argue that *Romiette and Julio* is or is not melodramatic. If it is, does this quality detract from the book or add to its appeal?
5. Practice a random act of kindness and a senseless act of beauty, as Destiny's bumper sticker proclaims.
6. Broadcast an on-the-scene TV report of the disappearance of Romi and Julio.

Art and Music

1. Design a poster for a movie version of *Romiette and Julio*.
2. Divide a piece of paper in half lengthwise. On the left, draw Julio's life before he moved to Cincinnati; on the right, draw his life after the move.
3. Make a collage of real newspaper articles about gangs in schools. Display this in your school.
4. Choose a dramatic scene from the novel and select background music. Play the music for the class as you read the scene.
5. Julio likes jazz. Choose a recognized jazz master and play one or more of his/her songs for the class. Explain the person's reputation.

Geography and History

1. Romiette wants to know if there was ever a continent named Atlantis. Find out if there was and share your report with the class.
2. Make a travel brochure for Cincinnati, Ohio, or Corpus Christi, Texas.
3. Julio has a special box of memories. Make a box like this for yourself, including at least six items that have special historical meaning for you.
4. Cornell Cappelle is a newscaster. Julio wishes to become a newscaster. Find out what education and training a person needs to become a television newscaster.

Science and Health

1. Romiette says that her grandmamma Essie makes the best rice and beans this side of the Mississippi River. Red rice and beans is a very nutritious food. Explain what vitamins and minerals this dish provides and why it is good for you.
2. Romiette and her mother are unusually tall. Make a chart showing the height range of males and females in your age bracket.
3. Destiny is obsessed with astrology. Define "astrology" and argue that it is or is not an authentic science.
4. The Cincinnati schools are built to withstand tornadoes and other fierce storms. Research the cause of tornadoes. Make a booklet showing how to protect yourself and your property during a tornado.

Math

1. Make a chart or graph showing the percentage of students in your town who are members of a gang.
2. Romi and Julio meet in Internet chat rooms. Find out what percentage of Americans have home access to the Internet. Then choose any three other countries and find out what percentages of their populations have home access to the Internet. Compare your findings on a visual display.
3. Make a chart comparing the populations of Cincinnati, Ohio, and Corpus Christi, Texas.

Alternate Assessment

1. Explain the symbolism of fire and water in this novel.
2. Perform a skit to convince teenagers not to join gangs.
3. Using scenes from the novel, create a mural that shows its main themes.
4. Read another book by Sharon M. Draper. Compare and contrast it to *Romiette and Julio*. Show how they are the same and different.

Vocabulary Test

Complete the puzzle by unscrambling each vocabulary word and writing it in the puzzle. When you are all done, another vocabulary word will read down.

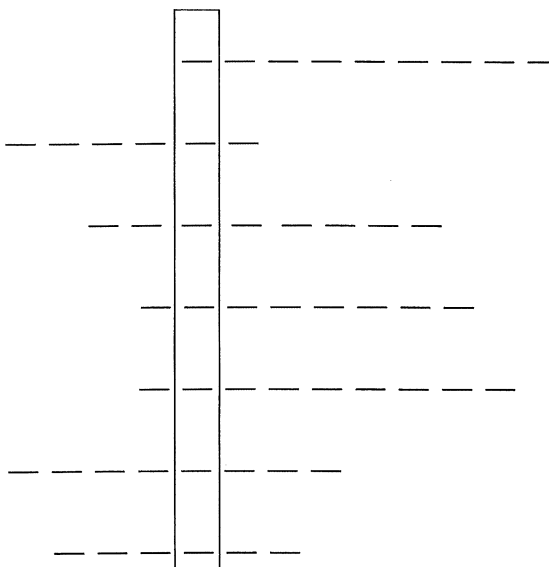
Word Box

- | | |
|----------|-----------|
| derision | artifacts |
| boutique | rascal |
| generic | guerrilla |
| sullen | mandolin |

Vocabulary Definition

- | | |
|--------------|-----------------------|
| 1. erilargul | rebel fighter |
| 2. ulesln | moody |
| 3. nmdolian | musical instrument |
| 4. ondeisir | scorn |
| 5. tsafacrti | antiques |
| 6. biqueotu | small specialty store |
| 7. lrcas | scamp |

Puzzle



reading down: _____

Comprehension Test A

Part I: Matching (20 points)

Complete each of the following descriptions with a name from the list that follows. Place the letter of your answer in the blanks provided.

- | | |
|---------------------|-----------|
| A. Cornell Cappelle | F. Diego |
| B. Romiette | G. Lady |
| C. Julio | H. Luis |
| D. Destiny | I. Malaka |
| E. Ben | J. Taco |

- ___ 1. The Hispanic teenager who moves to Cincinnati and falls in love with Romi
- ___ 2. The young man who falls in love with Destiny
- ___ 3. The female gang member
- ___ 4. Romiette's mother, a boutique owner
- ___ 5. Romiette's father, a newscaster
- ___ 6. Julio's puppy
- ___ 7. Julio's father
- ___ 8. The African-American teenager who falls in love with Julio
- ___ 9. Romi's best friend
- ___ 10. Julio's best friend in Texas

Part II: True/False (20 points)

Mark the following statements T if they are true or F if they are false.

- ___ 1. Sixteen-year-old Romiette is having a terrifying nightmare about being attacked by big dogs.
- ___ 2. On his first day in school, Julio punches Diego and ends up in the principal's office.
- ___ 3. Destiny borrows \$45 from Romi for a Scientific Soul Mate System, a bogus mail order item.
- ___ 4. "Spanish Lover" is Julio's screen name.
- ___ 5. Members of a gang surround Ben in the men's room at school and menace him by calling him "Gomez," a derogatory term for Hispanics.
- ___ 6. Julio tells Ben that Romi has only one weakness: she cannot swim.
- ___ 7. Julio's father is very happy that Julio is dating an African-American because his first girlfriend was an African-American.
- ___ 8. Destiny and Romi make wishes on the hour, when the clock reads 1:00, 2:00, etc.
- ___ 9. Ben plans to videotape the gang menacing Romi and Julio. Destiny and Ben will trail them in their car for protection.
- ___ 10. Ben and Destiny go to Lincoln Woods Lake to search for Romi and Julio.

Comprehension Test A (Page 2)

Part III: Motivation (20 points)

Complete each line below with a reason or explanation.

1. Destiny is interested in Romi's nightmare because
2. Julio's family moved to Cincinnati because Mr. Montague lost his job and because
3. Destiny is concerned when Romi tells her that she met a boy on the Internet because
4. Romi is concerned that she and Julio will not be accepted by everyone because
5. Many people are repelled by Ben because
6. Romi is no longer friends with Malaka because
7. Malaka dates Terrell because
8. Romi and Julio don't tell their parents about the gang menacing them because
9. The police cannot search for Romi and Julio over night because
10. Romi and Julio jump from the boat to the lake because

Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences on the essay response page.

1. Which characters in *Romiette and Julio* do you find most admirable? Why?
2. In keeping with their Shakespearean counterparts, Romi and Julio are thwarted in love. Explain how the lovers are kept apart.
3. Analyze whether or not the novel presents a realistic portrait of people and their problems. If not, what events are sensationalized?
4. Explain what you learned about friendship from this novel.

Comprehension Test B

Part I: Sentence Completion (20 points)

Complete each sentence with the correct word or phrase.

1. Romi's screen name is _____.
2. Romi's father works as a television _____.
3. When Ben and Julio first meet, Ben's hair is _____ in color.
4. When Romi first meets Julio, he brings her a red rose and a bottle of _____.
5. In her journal, Romi describes the stuffed toy _____ that Julio gave her.
6. Julio and Romi talk about the gang, whose name is the _____.
7. Romi and Destiny use the dating system called the _____ that Destiny bought through mail order.
8. Julio tells Ben that Romi has only one weakness: she cannot _____.
9. Julio and Romi must get out of the boat because the _____ will destroy it.
10. At the lake, Destiny finds Romi's _____. Destiny knows it is Romi's because she lent it to her.

Part II: Matching (20 points)

Match the following descriptions with names of characters from the list below. Place the letter of your response in the blank provided at left.

- | | |
|---|------------------|
| ___ 1. The teenager with green hair and piercings | A. Lady Cappelle |
| ___ 2. The teenager who claims to have psychic powers | B. Luis Montague |
| ___ 3. Romi's father, a newscaster | C. Julio |
| ___ 4. Julio's puppy | D. Romiette |
| ___ 5. Julio's best friend in Corpus Christi, Texas | E. Destiny |
| ___ 6. Julio's father | F. Malaka Grimes |
| ___ 7. The female gang member | G. Diego |
| ___ 8. Romi's mother | H. Ben |
| ___ 9. The teenager who loves Romi | I. Taco |
| ___ 10. The teenager who loves Julio | J. Cornell |

Comprehension Test B (Page 2)

Part III: Identification (20 points)

Explain why each is important in the novel.

1. astrology

2. fire

3. water

4. gangs

5. Shakespeare

Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences on the essay response page.

1. Describe the different parenting styles shown in the novel.
2. Trace the novel's plot. Include the rising action, climax, and resolution.
3. Analyze the novel's title and explain its meaning.
4. Describe the author's theme or message in this novel.

Answer Key

Vocabulary

1. guerrilla
2. sullen
3. mandolin
4. derision
5. artifacts
6. boutique
7. rascal

reading down: generic

Comprehension Test A

Part I: Matching (20 points)

- | | | | | |
|------|------|------|------|-------|
| 1. C | 2. E | 3. I | 4. G | 5. A |
| 6. J | 7. H | 8. B | 9. D | 10. F |

Part II: True/False (20 points)

- | | | | | |
|------|------|------|------|-------|
| 1. F | 2. F | 3. T | 4. T | 5. F |
| 6. T | 7. F | 8. F | 9. T | 10. T |

Part III: Motivation (20 points)

1. Destiny likes to interpret dreams and thinks she has psychic powers
2. the Montagues wanted to get Julio away from the crime and the gangs in his Texas high school
3. Destiny is afraid the boy is really a stalker
4. they are a mixed-race couple
5. of his appearance: he has many piercings and multi-colored hair
6. Malaka has joined a gang and become hard and tough
7. he protects her; she likes his power from the gang
8. they are afraid the gang will harm their parents and them; they do not think their parents will be able to do anything to stop the gang
9. a terrible storm is raging
10. Julio realizes that it is not safe to be in the boat because it will be hit by lightning

Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Answers will vary.

Comprehension Test B

Part I: Sentence Completion (20 points)

- | | |
|---------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. Afroqueen | 6. Devildogs |
| 2. newscaster | 7. Scientific Soul Mate System |
| 3. green | 8. swim |
| 4. hot sauce | 9. lightning |
| 5. lion | 10. shoe |

Part II: Matching (20 points)

- | | | | | |
|------|------|------|------|-------|
| 1. H | 2. E | 3. J | 4. I | 5. G |
| 6. B | 7. F | 8. A | 9. C | 10. D |

Part III: Identification (20 points)

1. Destiny believes in astrology, that she can predict the future with the help of the stars and their alignment. There is no proof of this in the novel, but it does echo some key beliefs of the Renaissance, important in Shakespeare's canon.
2. One of the key motifs in the novel is fire. It first figures in Romi's dream. The motif is picked up again at the end, when the tiny boat is hit by lightning and burns up. Romi is terrified of fire.
3. As with fire, water is the other primary motif in the novel. Romi cannot swim and water terrifies her. Romi's worst fears are realized when Romi and Julio end up in the lake in the midst of a fierce thunderstorm.
4. Julio's family moves to Cincinnati in part to escape from the gangs in Texas. However, Cincinnati has gangs of its own, most notable the Devildogs. The gangs depicted in the book are vicious and cruel.
5. Sharon M. Draper uses Shakespeare as a jumping-off point for *Romiette and Julio*. The names are a reversal of the characters in *Romeo and Juliet*: Romiette is a girl and Julio is a boy. Ben is based on Benvolio. As with Shakespeare's lovers, Romi and Julio are teenagers who fall deeply in love. However, unlike Shakespeare's heroes, the lovers are not "star crossed" and the story has a happy ending.

Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Answers will vary.

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