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Foreword Review YOUNG ADULT FICTION

## Beatrice Bunson's Guide to Romeo and Juliet

**Paula Marantz Cohen**
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Shakespeare comes to life in Drexel University English professor Paula Marantz Cohen's first novel for young adults, *Beatrice Bunson's Guide to Romeo and Juliet*. The title character, a freshman at Farley High School, is nostalgic for middle school and dreads starting her new class schedule, especially Honors English. That is, until the students meet their long-term substitute, Roger Martin, who opens the class with "let's face it, anything by Shakespeare is kickass." He takes them through *Romeo and Juliet* scene by scene, encouraging them to "savor the lines—like you're eating a good dessert."

To Beatrice's surprise, the Bard has a lot to teach her about a teenager's daily life. Now that her older sister, Jen, and her suddenly popular best friend, Nan, are both totally preoccupied with boys, she's been feeling lonely. When her long-time crush turns out to be a creep, she looks for confidants to share her newfound love of Shakespeare. Luckily, her grandmother reads the sonnets with her at her assisted living facility and introduces her to another resident's grandson, Haverford-bound Adam Fisher, whose conversation is peppered with SAT words.

Cohen cleverly uses the plot of *Romeo and Juliet* as a window onto Beatrice's life and others' dilemmas. Thanks to its timeless questions of class, honor, and gender roles, the play has something useful to say about everything from Twitter rumors to high school feuds. Beatrice concludes that while "reading Shakespeare didn't exactly make you a better person … it helped you figure out what was important and what wasn't." Teens shouldn't be without a copy of this sparkling novel; it will make a good companion for working through the classics.

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