

William Shakespeare

Early Life and Family

William Shakespeare was born in Stratford-upon-Avon. His mother was called Mary Arden and his father, who was a glove-maker, was called John Shakespeare. Although his exact date of birth is unknown, it is often said to be 23rd April 1564. This is because he was baptised on 26th April 1564 and babies were usually baptised 3 days after they were born. When he was just 18, Shakespeare married Anne Hathaway, the daughter of a local farmer, and a few months later she gave birth to their first child, Susanna. Two years later, in 1585, twins Hamnet and Judith were born. Sadly Hamnet died at the age of 11.

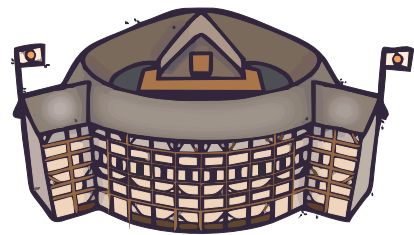


Plays and other works

Shakespeare was still living in Stratford-upon-Avon in 1585. No-one knows when he moved to London and started to get involved with the theatre community there, but by the early 1590s his plays were being performed in the city. Shakespeare is known to have written 37 plays, although there are a few extra ones which he may also have been responsible for. His plays can generally be split into three categories. Many of his earlier plays were comedies, such as *Much Ado About Nothing* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. He also wrote histories at the start of his career, including *Richard III* and *Henry V*. As time went by, he began to write more tragedies. These are plays that feature characters who have a fatal flaw and make terrible mistakes. Some examples of his tragedies are *Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet*, and *Macbeth*. There is a lot of superstition around *Macbeth*. For example, some actors believe it is unlucky to say its name inside a theatre, so they call it "The Scottish Play" instead. In addition to his plays, Shakespeare also wrote several long narrative poems and a collection of 154 sonnets — 14-line poems that usually have 10 syllables in each line.

The Globe Theatre

As well as writing, Shakespeare was a keen actor and a member of a theatre company called the Lord Chamberlain's Men, which later became the King's Men. In 1599, a few of the members of this company built their own theatre — the Globe — on the bank of the River Thames in London, and Shakespeare's plays were performed to large audiences there. Although the original theatre burned down in 1613, a modern replica was built in 1997 which is still used for performances today.



Influence on the English language

Shakespeare is widely regarded as one of the best writers of all time. Although he died over 400 years ago, on 23rd April 1616, his works are still adapted, performed and enjoyed today. Thanks to the enduring popularity of his writing, many of the words and phrases he used have passed into the English language. The exact number of words that originate from Shakespeare is debated, as some of them may have been in use before he wrote them down, but it's believed to be in the hundreds! Without Shakespeare we wouldn't be able to **break the ice** or describe something as **majestic** or **distasteful**, nor could we go on a **wild-goose chase** to find the right word.

William Shakespeare

1. What job did William Shakespeare's father have? Circle your answer.

farmer

actor

builder

glove-maker

2. Explain why it is thought that Shakespeare was born on 23rd April 1564.

.....

.....

3. Number the events in the order they happened.

Shakespeare's daughter, Judith, was born

Shakespeare's son, Hamnet, died.

Shakespeare's daughter, Susanna, was born

Shakespeare married Anne Hathaway.

4. How many plays is Shakespeare known to have written?

.....

5. Draw lines to show which category each play belongs to.

Richard III

Comedy

Romeo and Juliet

History

A Midsummer Night's Dream

Tragedy

William Shakespeare

6. Why do some actors call Macbeth “The Scottish Play”?

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.....

7. What is a sonnet?

.....
.....

8. Before it was called the King’s Men, what was the name of the theatre company that Shakespeare was a member of?

.....

9. When was the Globe Theatre originally built? Circle your answer.

1613

1599

1997

1616

10. What does the word ‘**replica**’ mean? Use a dictionary to help you.

.....

11. Read the last paragraph. Why has the author put some words in bold?

.....
.....

William Shakespeare

Answers

1. What job did William Shakespeare's father have? Circle your answer.

farmer

actor

builder

glove-maker

2. Explain why it is thought that Shakespeare was born on 23rd April 1564.

Because he was baptised on 26th April 1564 and babies were usually baptised 3 days after they were born.

3. Number the events in the order they happened.

Shakespeare's daughter, Judith, was born.

3

Shakespeare's son, Hamnet, died.

4

Shakespeare's daughter, Susanna, was born.

2

Shakespeare married Anne Hathaway.

1

4. How many plays is Shakespeare known to have written?

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Richard III

Comedy

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Answers

6. Why do some actors call Macbeth “The Scottish Play”?

Because they believe that it's unlucky to say its name
inside a theatre.

7. What is a sonnet?

A 14-line poem that usually has
10 syllables in each line.

8. Before it was called the King's Men, what was the name of the theatre company that Shakespeare was a member of?

The Lord Chamberlain's Men

9. When was the Globe Theatre originally built? Circle your answer.

1613

1599

1997

1616

10. What does the word '**replica**' mean? Use a dictionary to help you.

An exact copy of something.

11. Read the last paragraph. Why has the author put some words in bold?

To show that these are some of the words and
phrases that come from Shakespeare's writings.