

William Shakespeare

Who was William Shakespeare?

William Shakespeare was a renowned English playwright and poet. He wrote many famous plays, including Romeo and Juliet, Hamlet and A Midsummer's Night Dream.

William's Childhood

William Shakespeare was born in 1564 to John Shakespeare and Mary Arden. John and Mary had eight children, two of whom died as infants. John Shakespeare was a glove maker, but also an important figure in the town of Stratford. Due to John's status, it is likely that he sent William and his siblings to the local grammar school. When he was 18, William married twenty-six-year-old Anne Hathaway. They had three children, Susanna and twins Hamnet and Judith. Hamnet, however, died at 11 years old due to unknown reasons.

Shakespeare's Work

Shakespeare's reputation as a playwright was established in London in 1592, but no-one can be sure of when he went to London. Shakespeare's first poems, 'Venus and Adonis' and 'The rape of Lucrece' were published in 1593 and 1594. He was a founding member of a company of actors, 'The Lord's Chamberlain Men.' They put on about two plays a year. They later became 'The King's Men.' During this time, William wrote many of his famous romances, as well as his famous tragedies, such as Hamlet.

The Globe

The Lord's Chamberlain Men performed in The Theatre up until 1598, when their lease was canceled. The landlord, Giles Alleyn, owned the land, but not the materials used to build The Theatre. And so, in December 1598, the actors, sharers and volunteers took the building apart and transported the materials to their new site in Southwark. In May, 1599, the new theatre was ready to open. It was named the Globe, and a flag of Hercules carrying a globe was placed on the theatre. The flag read in Latin 'Totus mundus agit histrionem', which translates to 'All the world's a playhouse'. However, the Globe tragically burned to the ground during a performance of Henry VIII, when a cannon prop set fire to the thatched roof. The Globe was rebuilt better than before by February 1614. But, in 1642, the Globe was again destroyed, this time by the ordered closure of all London theatres. In 1644-5, the Globe was removed from the land.

Shakespeare's Legacy

Shakespeare made 38 plays, 154 sonnets, two long-narrative poems and seven other poems in his lifetime. A group of actors from Shakespeare's company preserved a number of his works when Shakespeare died. These works were put together to form 'The first Folio', which is made up of 36 plays. Today, Shakespeare's works are enjoyed all over the world, continuing the great playwright's legacy. Shakespeare also invented a number of words which are used in English today, including 'dauntless', 'fashionable' and 'bedroom'!

Did you know... that all the parts in Shakespeare's plays were played by men because women were not allowed to perform!

Shakespeare quotes

"To be or not to be-that is the question."-Hamlet

"Though she be but little, she is fierce."-A Midsummers night dream

"By the pricking of my thumbs, something wicked this way comes."-Macbeth