

## William Shakespeare

William Shakespeare was a hugely clever writer who wrote plays and poems. He lived many centuries ago but people still love and admire his work today. Many people think he was the most talented writer who has ever lived.

### His Life

William Shakespeare was born in 1564 and baptised a few days later on the 26<sup>th</sup> of April in his local church. His father was a merchant called John Shakespeare who made and sold leather gloves and was a town official. His mother was called Mary Arden and was the daughter of a wealthy man. William had two older sisters and three younger brothers and the family lived in a fairly small market town called Stratford-upon-Avon.

It is not known for certain where William went to school but most people believe he learned to read and write at the King's New School in Stratford. It is likely that he learned the ancient Roman language of Latin, and read many books and stories written by Romans.

When William was eighteen years old, he married a woman called Anne Hathaway who was eight years older than him. She was from the nearby village of Shottery and their wedding was held on November 28th, 1582 in the city of Worcester. They had three children together; a daughter called Susanna and a pair of twins called Judith and Hamnet. Sadly, Hamnet died of a mystery illness when he was only eleven years old.

Nobody knows for sure what William did during the seven years after the twins were born, and so experts call these years 'The Lost Years'. But people do know that by 1592 he had travelled the 103 miles to live in the busy city of London while his family remained in Stratford. At that time, London was one of the largest cities in the world, and certainly much larger than Stratford! William made the most of the opportunities found in a big city. He chose theatre as his career path, performing as an actor and writing several plays. He was also paid to write some lengthy poems by a wealthy man called Henry Wriothesley, who was the Earl of Southampton. William became one of the leaders of a group of actors known as 'The Lord Chamberlain's Men'. They became increasingly famous, and when James the First became the King of England they quickly changed their name to 'The King's Men'.

People really enjoyed his witty plays; even Queen Elizabeth the First of England asked to see them at the Royal Court! His writing made him relatively rich and he bought some land near Stratford. The land became worth more and more money, and as he got even richer he was able to buy 'New Place', the second-largest house in Stratford, for his family. He also earned enough money to buy a posh new house for himself in London on a fancy road called 'Silver Street'.

In 1611, William finally moved back to Stratford and spent the rest of his days there until he died in 1616, aged fifty-two. Legend has it that he died on his birthday, but we do not know for certain. By the time of his death, he had written 37 plays, 154 short poems (known as 'sonnets' because of the pattern they always followed) and five long poems.

### His Plays

Some of William's plays are humorous and are known as 'comedies'. They often end with problems being solved and people getting married. Some of them are sorrowful and violent and are known as 'tragedies'. These often end with the death of a main character (or several!). Some of them are dramatic stories about events from the past and are called 'histories'.

Here are some examples of his plays:

**The Comedy of Errors** – This is a comedy about a pair of twin brothers who were separated at birth. Confusingly, their servants are also identical twins who were separated at birth! In the play, they all end up in the same town and get very mixed up! One twin is dragged away by the other twin's wife because she thinks he is her husband! At the end, every problem is solved and everyone is joyful.

**Romeo and Juliet** – This is a tragedy about Romeo and Juliet, a pair of young lovers. They are not supposed to see or marry each other because their families are bitter enemies. They marry in secret but their plan goes terribly wrong and at the end of the play they both end up dying.

**Richard the Third** – This is a historical play about a villainous man called Richard who desires to be the king. He makes lots of evil plots and murders many people, including his brother and his wife! Soon an army rises up against him. At the end of the play Richard sees the ghosts of all the people he has murdered, and they tell him he will die. There is a huge battle the following day and Richard is finally killed.

### His Words

William invented a large number of new words and phrases and was the first person to write down plenty of others. It is thought he made up over 1,700 of them! He was particularly clever with words; people remember things he wrote because he was so good at describing life and the experiences people have. Lots of phrases we say every day were invented by him.

Have you ever heard someone say that 'love is blind'? What about a joke which starts 'knock, knock! Who's there?'. Have you ever heard of someone being sent on a 'wild-goose chase'? If you have, then you already know some of Shakespeare's writing!

All sorts of people enjoy and admire Shakespeare's writing. He was intelligent and witty and his stories are amazingly powerful. His words have the ability to make people laugh, cry, think and wonder.

### Shakespeare Today

William Shakespeare's plays and poems are still enormously popular today. They are widely read, still performed regularly and a large selection of them have been turned into films. His plays are seen all over the world and actors are always thinking of clever and interesting new ways to perform them. In Stratford-upon-Avon, Shakespeare's home town, there is a theatrical group called 'The Royal Shakespeare Company' who have their own theatre on the bank of the River Avon. Famous actors and actresses from films and television programmes come and perform Shakespeare's plays with them all year round. William's writing is now celebrated worldwide. Not bad for the son of a leather merchant from Stratford!

People are keen to study Shakespeare's plays and poetry. He wrote about love, life, death, loss and a full range of emotions and experiences. People enjoy carefully considering what he wrote and what his stories say about the world and the way people are. Many clever researchers wonder about his life and try to find out facts about him.

Now you can too!

## William Shakespeare

Match the information to the place where you find it in the text.

Romeo and Juliet

His Words

words we use were made up by Shakespeare

Shakespeare today

Shakespeare bought a new house in London

His Plays

Shakespeare's plays have been made into films

His Life

What had happened by 1592?

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Find and copy the names of Shakespeare's children.

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Was Hamnet a boy or a girl? How do you know?

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Which of the three plays would you most like to see? Give a reason for your answer.

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Which section was the most interesting? Why?

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How old was Anne Hathaway when she got married?

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Who is the 'son of a glove maker from Stratford'?

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What sort of text have you just read? Underline one.

- A. play
- B. instructions
- C. information
- D. story

Do you think the author admires Shakespeare's writing? Find and copy a phrase from the text which supports your answer.

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Read the last two paragraphs. What do you think the author wanted to achieve by writing this text?

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What does 'legend has it' mean?

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Here are four extra pieces of information. Each one would make sense in a different section of the text. Which section would you put each of them in?

- A. Millions of copies of his writings are sold each year around the world in over 100 languages!
- 
- B. Some words from his plays are so famous people know them off by heart, even if they have never seen the play!
- 
- C. William's land ended up earning him sixty pounds per year, which was a lot of money at that time.
- 
- D. Some of the plays are sometimes called 'tragicomedies' because they are both funny and sad.
- 

Where would you expect to find the same type of text as the one you have just read? Tick TWO answers.

- A. on an informative website
- B. in a biography
- C. in a book of poetry
- D. in a novel

Circle the word which best describes the author's tone in the sentence below.

*'Not bad for the son of a leather merchant from Stratford!'*

- A. angry
- B. disappointed
- C. hopeful
- D. impressed

## William Shakespeare

Match the information to the place where you find it in the text.

Romeo and Juliet	<del>His Words</del>
words we use were made up by Shakespeare	<del>Shakespeare today</del>
Shakespeare bought a new house in London	<del>His Plays</del>
Shakespeare's plays have been made into films	<del>His Life</del>

What had happened by 1592? **Shakespeare had gone to London and was working as an actor and playwright.**

Find and copy the names of Shakespeare's children. **Susanna, Judith and Hamnet**

Was Hamnet a boy or a girl? How do you know? **A boy, because the author says 'he' died aged 11.**

Which of the three plays would you most like to see? Give a reason for your answer.

**Various answers; must be justified.**

Which section was the most interesting? Why? **Various answers; must be justified.**

How old was Anne Hathaway when she got married? **Twenty-six years old**

Who is the 'son of a glove maker from Stratford'? **William Shakespeare**

What sort of text have you just read? Underline one.

- A. play
- B. instructions
- C. information**
- D. story

Do you think the author admires Shakespeare's writing? Find and copy a phrase from the text which supports your answer. **The author does admire it. Various justifying quotations are possible, but must be positive and relating to Shakespeare's writing or works.**

Read the last two paragraphs. What do you think the author wanted to achieve by writing this text? **The author was hoping to give facts and information about Shakespeare in order to enable and encourage readers to participate in the activities described in the penultimate paragraph.**

What does 'legend has it' mean? **It means that what you are saying is a commonly held belief or idea but that no one knows for sure if it is true.**

Here are four extra pieces of information. Each one would make sense in a different section of the text. Which section would you put each of them in?

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**Shakespeare Today**
- B. Some words from his plays are so famous people know them off by heart, even if they have never seen the play!  
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- C. William's land ended up earning him sixty pounds per year, which was a lot of money at that time.  
**His Life**
- D. Some of the plays are sometimes called 'tragicomedies' because they are both funny and sad.  
**His Plays**

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*'Not bad for the son of a leather merchant from Stratford!'*

- A. angry
- B. disappointed
- C. hopeful
- D. **impressed**