



# The World of SHAKESPEARE

Queen Elizabeth reigned over England for forty-five years, from 1558 – 1603. Only twenty-five when she ascended the throne, Elizabeth had already survived a great deal of scandal and danger. England was bankrupt and in a constant state of religious upheaval, as the Protestants and Catholics battled for religious control. Under her, England became Protestant again, but she granted concessions to the Catholics, in the hopes of preventing rebellion. It was not illegal to be a Catholic, but it was illegal to attend mass. Therefore, Catholics had freedom of belief, but were restricted in their practice.

England enjoyed a period of prosperity under Elizabeth's reign. It became a commercial center while sailors, like Sir Francis Drake and Sir Walter Raleigh, explored the new world, bringing great wealth to the country. The middle class was on the rise, as was capitalism. It was now possible for someone who was not born into the nobility to improve his station.

Elizabeth's England also experienced a revolution in education and literacy. With the invention of the printing press the previous century, books became less expensive and more plentiful. Schools were better funded, and more children from the less wealthy families went to school. Still, it was mostly the middle and upper classes who became literate. Only the girls of the nobility were educated.

Elizabeth was a great patron of the arts and a particular fan of the theatre. In fact, during her reign, professional theatres were built for the first time.



Life was hard and often short. Outbreaks of the plague, or the Black Death, were common. The city of London was teeming with life and change – and filth. There was no sewage system and waste was dumped out windows and into the Thames River. People lived in close contact with each other – and with the fleas and rodents that spread this cruel and fatal disease. Shakespeare was said to be terrified of the plague – and for good reason. Outbreaks would shut down the playhouses and kill thousands.

The Elizabethans entertained themselves nonetheless. The theatre was very popular, but so too were dances and feasts, cock fights and public executions. The upper classes participated in fencing tournaments and hunting, and all classes enjoyed bear baiting. For this "sport," a bear was chained to a post and fighting dogs were set upon it to fight to the death. Spectators would bet on the outcome. Queen Elizabeth loved the sport so much that she forbid the performance of plays on Thursdays, a day that was popular for bear baiting.

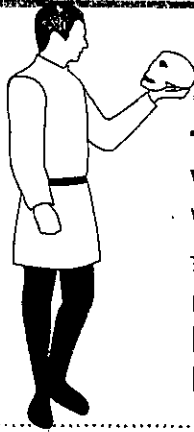
King James, the reigning monarch of Scotland, took over the throne of England upon Elizabeth's death in 1603. A lover of theatre as well, he became a patron of Shakespeare's company, which changed its name to *The King's Men*. Like many people of the time, James was very superstitious, and took a particular interest in the study of witchcraft. He wrote a book on the subject called *Daemonologie*. Shakespeare's first play under James's reign, *Macbeth*, includes witches and other references designed to impress his new king.

# The theatre of SHAKESPEARE

## 1576

THE FIRST REAL  
THEATER IS BUILT BY  
**JAMES BURBAGE**

Before this, plays were  
performed in inn-yards  
and homes of nobles.



## ZERO

THE NUMBER OF  
**WOMEN ACTORS**

Women actors were  
forbidden by law. Fe-  
male roles were played  
by boys whose voices  
had not yet changed.

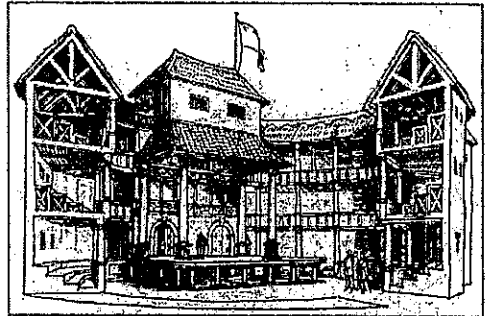
## COMMONERS GENTRY NOBLES ROYALS

All members of  
society enjoyed go-  
ing to the theatre

## LORD CHAMBERLAIN'S MEN THE PLAYING COMPANY THAT SHAKESPEARE

worked with as both a writer, actor, and theatre  
manager for most of his career. In 1603, when King  
James ascended the throne, they were known as

## THE KING'S MEN

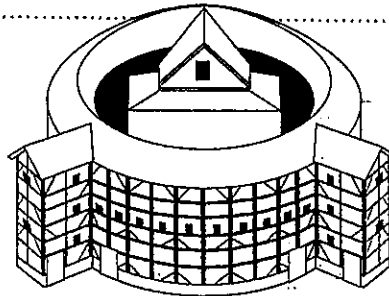


## 1593

## 1603

## 1608

THEATRES CLOSED  
**BUBONIC  
PLAGUE**



## THE GLOBE OPEN AIR CIRCULAR 3 STORIES HIGH

The main stage was five feet  
high. Two side doors were at  
stage level. At the base of the  
stage was "the pit", where the

## GROUNDLINGS

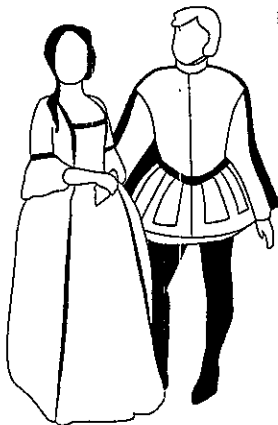
would stand to watch the play  
for the cost of a penny. For  
two pennies, the more well-to-  
do could sit in three levels of

## BALCONIES

In 1613, The Globe went up in  
flames when a canon was used  
for a performance of *Henry VII*. It  
was rebuilt a year later, with the  
straw roof replace by tiles. The  
Puritans closed the theatre in  
1642.

## THREE THOUSAND

The number of people who would go to a play.



## THE AUDIENCE

Shakespeare's audience was made up  
of all social classes. They would have  
been more rambunctious than today's  
theatre-goers. The groundlings would  
talk through performances and even  
throw food at the actors. The rich, in  
their seats, were protected from the  
rowdiness of the crowds in the pit. The  
richest nobles had the option of sitting  
on a chair on the side of the stage.  
Outside the theatre, patrons could  
shop at open-air markets.



## Introducing WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Ironically, even though Shakespeare was one of the most prolific writers of all time, very little is written about his life. Even his exact birth date is unknown. However, there is record of his baptism at Holy Trinity Church on April 26<sup>th</sup>, 1564, in a town called Stratford-upon-Avon. Because children were baptized within days of their births, most scholars have agreed that April 23<sup>rd</sup> is a good guess for his birth date.

Shakespeare's father, John Shakespeare, wed Mary Arden, the daughter of a well-to-do farmer. John was a leatherworker, an alderman and a bailiff. Because John was a prominent citizen of Stratford, it is assumed that William attended the town's school, King Edward VI Grammar School, until he was fifteen. There he would have studied Latin, classic literature, grammar, logic, rhetoric, arithmetic and astronomy. His father, at the time, was having financial difficulties, so Shakespeare did not attend university.

When he was eighteen, William married an older woman, Anne Hathaway, who was twenty-six and expecting their first child, Susanna. They later had twins, Judith and Hamnet. Hamnet died when he was eleven. His only surviving descendant, a granddaughter, died childless in 1670. So Shakespeare has no living descendents today.

The seven years following the birth of his children are known as the "lost years," because there is not much known about Shakespeare's activity at that time. We do

know that he eventually left his family and moved to London in the mid 1580's, leaving his family behind.

By the early 1590's, he was working as an actor and a playwright, often performing for Queen Elizabeth. The theatres were closed in 1593 because of the plague, and at this time, Shakespeare concentrated on writing his narrative poems and sonnets.

In 1594, he became a shareholder in an acting company, the *Lord Chamberlain's Men*. The company later changed its name to *The King's Men* after the coronation of King James in 1603. In 1599, Shakespeare built his own theater, which he called *The Globe*. He enjoyed a prosperous career as both a playwright and a business man.

When Shakespeare died – on his birthday – in 1616, he left most of his estate to his eldest daughter, Susanna, as his son had already passed away. He did not leave his wife with nothing, however, for he left her his "second-best bed."

He left the world with a great deal more, penning two narrative poems, thirty-eight plays and one hundred and fifty-four sonnets. He is known as "The Bard of England" because he is widely acknowledged as the greatest poet from that country. As his contemporary Ben Johnson stated, "He was not of an age, but for all time."



# The works of SHAKESPEARE

## 154 SONNETS 38 PLAYS

## COMEDIES

*Some of his comedies are:*

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM  
ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL  
MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING

## HISTORIES

*Some of his histories are:*

HENRY THE IV PART ONE & TWO  
HENRY THE VI PART ONE-THREE  
RICHARD II & RICHARD III

## TRAGEDIES

*Some of his tragedies are:*

ANTHONY AND CLEOPATRA  
ROMEO AND JULIET  
JULIUS CAESAR  
MACBETH  
HAMLET

## WORDSMITH

Shakespeare is said to be responsible for the introduction of 1700 new words into the English language. Words like *amazement*, *eventful*, *majestic*, *hurry*, *generous* and *lonely* originated with The Bard. He also created many phrases that are still in use today. Some examples are: *all that glisters is not gold*, *catch a cold*, *naked truth*, *leap frog*, *breaking the ice*, and *fair play*.



## A SHAKESPEAREAN SONNET

is a fourteen line poem written in iambic pentameter. Sonnets have the following rhyme scheme:

**ABAB CDCD EFEF GG**

## SHAKESPEARE WROTE

two narrative poems when the theatres were closed in 1593: *The Rape of Lucrece* and *Venus and Adonis*.

## AN IAMB IS A METRICAL FOOT OF ONE STRESSED & UNSTRESSED SYLLABLE

Penta is Greek for five. There are five iambs in a line of iambic pentameter.

## IAMBIC PENTAMETER

So long|as men|can breathe|or eyes|can see,  
So long|lives this|and this|gives life|to thee.

*Sonnet 18*

*Iambic Pentameter sounds like:*  
daDUM daDUM daDUM daDUM daDUM.

## THE FIRST FOLIO

published in 1623, seven years after his death, was the first collected edition of Shakespeare's works. It contained thirty-six plays, and eighteen of these had never been published before. The publishers, John Hemminge and Henry Condell, separated the plays into Histories, Comedies and Tragedies.

