

The Restoration

The Puritans forced King Charles I of England to give up his power. The new leaders then beheaded the former king. This new government was called the Commonwealth. In 1660 the Commonwealth ended, and the government restored Charles II to power as king. This began the era known as the *Restoration*.

The Restoration began a new and different era in theater history. While Charles II was in exile in France before returning to England, he enjoyed the theater and was often in the audience. When he returned, he brought many changes that influenced theater.

Charles II remained interested in the theater in England. He even personally intervened in some quarrels between actors. Charles II presented royal patents to two of his friends. These royal patents gave permission to establish two official or legitimate theaters. For many years, these were the only two theater groups allowed to perform in London. Writers still use the term *legitimate* to mean live theater. One of these two groups soon built a theater named the Drury Lane. This theater, now in its fourth building, continues in operation today.

Allowing women to appear on stage in England was another major change Charles II brought with him from France. The first actress appeared on stage in England in the 1660s. At first this was controversial. Soon, however, the idea of actresses became quite popular.

Many actors and actresses became famous during this time. Thomas Betterton was the era's most famous actor. Elizabeth Barry, Anne Bracegirdle, and Nell Gwynn became England's first famous actresses. During the eighteenth century David Garrick achieved fame not only as an actor and playwright but also as a theater manager. Historians still refer to Garrick as England's greatest actor.

The audience of the Restoration theater was different from audiences of earlier times. Most members of the audience belonged to the upper class. No longer did all classes of people go to the theater. The authors wrote to please this new, select audience. Many times authors included bits of current gossip in their plays. Many audience members went to be seen, rather than to see the plays. Wealthy patrons often sent their servants to the theater early to save the best seats. They would then usually arrive after the performance began. Ladies attending the theater typically wore masks to hide their identities.

The Country Wife by William Wycherley was one of the first important Restoration plays. Richard Brinsley Sheridan wrote two of the most famous of all Restoration comedies, *The Rivals* and *The School for Scandal*. Other major plays of the era were *The Way of the World* by William Congreve and *She Stoops to Conquer* by Oliver Goldsmith. One of the theater's first woman playwrights, Mrs. Aphra Behn, wrote many popular plays during the era.



Women began appearing on English stages in the 1660s.

Name _____ Date _____

Questions for Consideration

1. What is the period between the reigns of Charles I and Charles II known as?

2. Why is the English era after 1660 known as the Restoration?

3. Where did Charles II live during his exile?

4. What term was used to describe the two official theaters of the time?

5. What major change did Charles II bring with him from France?

6. Who was the first great Restoration actor?

7. Name a famous Restoration actress.

8. Who is known as England's greatest actor?

9. How did wealthy men of the time reserve the best theater seats?

10. What was one of the first famous Restoration plays?

11. Who wrote *The School for Scandal*?

12. Who was one of the theater's first woman playwrights?

Name _____ Date _____

Fact or Opinion?

In the space at the left of each statement, write whether you believe the statement to be a fact or an opinion.

- _____ 1. The Commonwealth had a better government than the Restoration.
- _____ 2. Charles II became king during the Restoration.
- _____ 3. Charles II lived in exile in France.
- _____ 4. Charles II gave royal patents for theaters to two of his friends.
- _____ 5. The first Restoration actresses were not very talented.
- _____ 6. Historians call David Garrick England's greatest actor.
- _____ 7. Sheridan's plays were better than Goldsmith's plays.
- _____ 8. Mrs. Aphra Behn was one of the theater's first woman playwrights.
- _____ 9. Playwrights sometimes included current gossip in their plays.
- _____ 10. English theater in the 1660s did not have to produce good plays to be appealing to their audiences.

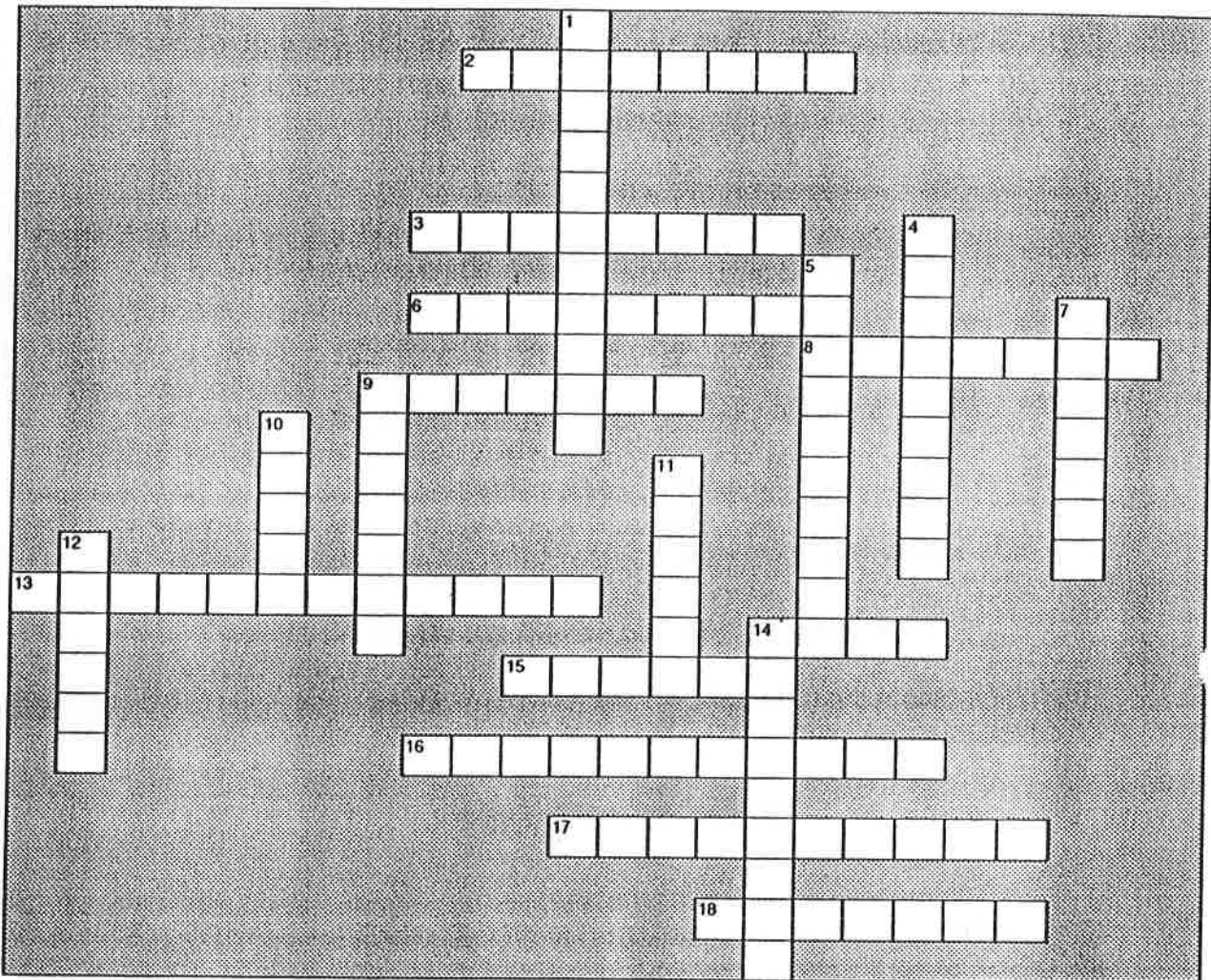
Write a Letter

Pretend that you recently attended the theater in Restoration England. Write a letter to King Charles II either in support of or opposition to allowing women to appear on stage for the first time. Give at least three reasons to support your point of view. Continue on the back of this sheet or use your own paper if necessary.

Name _____ Date _____

Crossword Puzzle

Use the clues below to complete the puzzle. Answers may be found in the narrative about theater during the Restoration.



ACROSS

2. This group was instrumental in the formation of the Commonwealth.
3. He wrote *The Way of the World*.
6. A famous theater of this name was first built in the Restoration. (two words)
8. Considered to be England's greatest actor
9. The name of the kings of England before and after the Commonwealth
13. The name of the government before the Restoration
14. She was a Restoration playwright.
15. The king brought many ideas from this country where he stayed in exile.
16. A period that brought many changes to theater
17. During the Restoration, audiences consisted mostly of this type of people. (two words)

DOWN

1. A noted Restoration actress had this unusual last name.
4. These first appeared on English stages in the 1660s.
5. The first two official theaters (granted patents) were called this.
7. Sheridan's play titled *The School for _____*
9. *She Stoops to _____* was a famous Restoration play.
10. One of England's first famous actresses
11. Only two theater groups were allowed to perform here for many years.
12. Many playwrights included some of this in their plays.
14. The most famous Restoration actor