

## William Shakespeare (1564–1616)

William Shakespeare is the most important playwright the world has ever known. Theaters throughout the world perform his plays more often than any other playwright's, living or dead.

Shakespeare was born in the small village of Stratford-upon-Avon. Stratford is about 75 miles northwest of London. Shakespeare's father was a glove maker. His father also served as alderman and mayor of Stratford. Young William likely attended the grammar school in Stratford. Only the sons of prominent families could attend the schools of the time. William would have been eligible to attend, due to his father's elected office.



The details of Shakespeare's childhood remain a mystery. At the age of 18, William married Anne Hathaway. They had a daughter named Susanna. Two years later, Anne gave birth to twins, a boy, Hamnet, and a girl, Judith. Shakespeare left Stratford soon after the birth of the twins. No one knows what Shakespeare did from the time he left Stratford until he became known in London seven years later. Historians refer to this time as the "lost years."

The first record of Shakespeare in London appears in 1592. By 1594 he was a member of a theatrical troupe, The Lord Chamberlain's men. Shakespeare wrote at least 37 plays and several poems from 1590 until 1608. According to legend, Shakespeare worked as an actor as well as a playwright for the company.

In 1599 Shakespeare and his associates built the Globe Theater. They built the Globe on the south bank of the Thames River, just opposite the center of London. The Globe was an open-air theater. The company performed in the Globe in the summers. During the winters, they also performed in The Blackfriars, an indoor theater.

Shakespeare's plays became popular, and his company often performed for Queen Elizabeth I and her court. They later performed for King James I. The King issued a patent to Shakespeare's company, and the name was then changed to The King's Company.

Shakespeare gradually retired from the theater. He built a home in Stratford, which he named New Place. He died in April 1616 and was buried in the crypt of the Holy Trinity Church in Stratford.

Shakespeare wrote comedies, tragedies, and histories. No other playwright has matched his fame or influence. He is noted for his wonderful use of language; his plays contain beautiful poetry as well as prose. His plays also contain many jokes, puns, and other language tricks. Many of Shakespeare's lines are still quoted today. His plays are also famous for their important characters. Shakespeare was very observant of human nature. His characters are remarkable human beings. Numerous stage, film, and video productions of his works bring the genius of Shakespeare to new audiences in each generation.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Questions for Consideration**

1. What town was the birthplace of William Shakespeare?

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2. What was his father's occupation?

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3. What was the name of William Shakespeare's wife?

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4. What was the name of Shakespeare's son?

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5. What do historians call the time between when Shakespeare left his home town and when he appeared in London?

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6. What year did Shakespeare first appear in records in London?

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7. What was the name of Shakespeare's troupe?

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8. What name did they use under the reign of King James I?

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9. What was the name of Shakespeare's open-air theater?

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10. How many plays did Shakespeare write?

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11. What river runs through London?

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12. What was the name of Shakespeare's indoor theater?

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13. Where was Shakespeare buried?

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