

O for a muse of fire

Of for a muse of fire, that would ascend
The brightest heaven of invention,
A kingdom for a stage, princes to act,
And monarchs to behold the swelling scene!

Henry V, Prologue



Welcome to the world of William Shakespeare. If this is your first exposure to Shakespeare, then you are about to embark on an exciting adventure! Shakespeare's plays delve into the most exciting aspects of British and Roman history, fantasy, and tragedy.



In fact the play we are studying, Macbeth, is one of Shakespeare's most famous tragedies filled with unforgettable characters. There are witches and ghosts, heroes and villains, traitors and dedicated comrades. It is a story of war, betrayal, and deceit. Shakespeare's works, whether they be tragedy or comedy, fantasy or history, deal with characters who are larger than life and yet very real. So real in fact, that one cannot help but identify with their fortunes and failures, characteristics and conflicts. There is fire and life in Shakespeare which still burns brightly even after five hundred years. Come closer and you too will feel the passion and the power of his words.

Who Was William Shakespeare?

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We don't really know exactly what Shakespeare looked like. There is no painting, drawing or sculpture that we can say with any certainty is a true likeness of Shakespeare or, indeed, that was made by anyone who knew the playwright. There are a number of pictures that, over the years, people have claimed - or willed - to be a likeness, but proof is hard to come by. The monument to Shakespeare in Holy Trinity Church, Stratford-upon-Avon, where the playwright is buried, may be a likeness. It was possibly commissioned by his son-in-law, John Hall, and Shakespeare's wife, Anne Hathaway, who was still alive at the time the monument was erected (it was in place by 1623). Clearly both these people knew what Shakespeare looked like.

Getting Acquainted with Shakespeare

Using the assigned pages, make notes that will provide you with the answers for the following questions about the Life and Times of Shakespeare.

Overhead 3

- When and where was Shakespeare born?
- What was his father's name and occupation?
- What was his mother's name?
- How much formal education did Shakespeare have? What did he study?
- Who did he marry and when? How many children did they have? What were their names?
- Although Shakespeare was born in Stratford-on-Avon, where did he live for most of his life? Why?
- Shakespeare traveled and performed with what repertory group?
- When and to where did Shakespeare retire?
- On what date and at what age did he die?

Overhead 4

- Besides plays, what else did Shakespeare write?
- What was the specific name for the type of poem he wrote? What was the main theme of these poems? Why did he write so many between the years 1592-1594?

Overhead 5

- Although Shakespeare's plays are very famous today, how did he make most of his money for over 20 years?
- List at least 5 talents an Elizabethan actor had to possess.

Overhead 6

- Today, Shakespeare is known more for his plays. Where did he get his ideas for his plays?
- When were his plays published? How much was he paid per play?
- Who are some other famous writers who wrote plays during Shakespeare's time?

Overhead 7 and 8

- During what historical period did he live and work?
- Who were the Queen and King in London during Shakespeare's time? How did they help Shakespeare's career?
- Why were so many plays performed during this time period?
- Why was he considered to be such a genius? List 2 reasons



The Stage In Shakespeare's Time

"All the World's a Stage" . . .

The Globe Theatre is the most where most of Shakespeare's plays in 1599. The term "wooden O" was shape and implored the audience to and a cast of thousands.



famous theater in history. This is where most of Shakespeare's plays were performed. It opened its doors in 1599. The term "wooden O" was used to describe the building's overall shape and implored the audience to use its imagination to supply scenery.

The Globe probably accommodated all social classes from lords and workers and pickpockets. The "groundlings" stood on three sides of the raised stage and paid the economy admission of a penny for the privilege. More prosperous patrons sat or stood in the three tiers of galleries surrounding the central enclosure

an audience of some 3000 drawn from ladies, trades people to ordinary

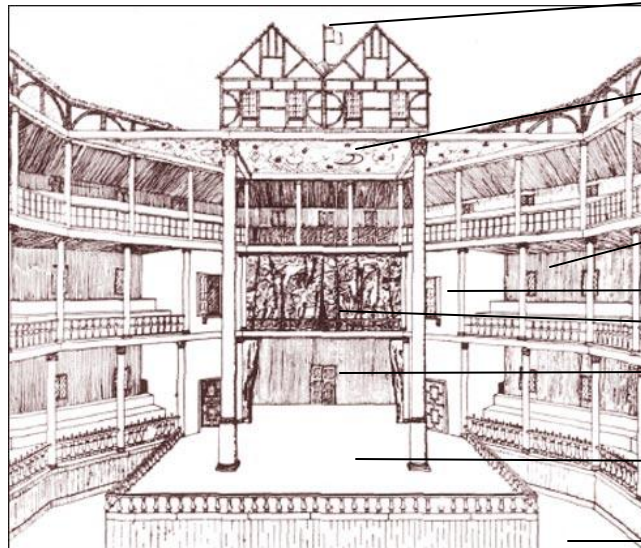
The Globe was open to the sky so gallery patrons and actors were sheltered from the rain but the groundlings simply got wet. The stage protruded out into "the yard" which allowed the actors to work very close to the audience. Two large doors upstage served for entrance and exits and led to the dressing room. On this first playing level, there may also have been a small inner stage at the rear and an upper playing area for special scenes. The front stage is where most of the action took place and had no curtain. The inner stage was separated from the front stage with a curtain and was used for scenes that needed setting up ahead of time.

Flags flew above the theatre to show that a performance would take place. A trumpet rang out from the top of the theatre to announce that the play was starting.

Scenery was minimal and artificial lighting virtually nonexistent. Costumes were created in the style of the day, not for the period the play was set in. Shakespeare's words, the actors' talents and the willing participation of the audience made the experience unlike plays today.

Famous Theatres of the Elizabethan Times

- **The Theatre**
- **The Swan**
- **The Globe**
- **The Rose**
- **The Curtain**



A Show Typically

Lasted 2 ½ hours

Was performed in the afternoon with natural lighting

No ACTS but frequent intermissions

End of scenes indicated by change of actors

No SCENERY but elaborate props and costumes

Many DEVICES such as trap doors and scaffolds to produce or make gods, trees, disappear

No ACTRESSES-men took parts of women

No PROGRAMS

Lots of Action-duels, murders, drinking soldiers, ghosts, witches, gods, etc.