

William Shakespeare was an English playwright, poet, and actor during the Renaissance. Many people believe Shakespeare was the greatest playwright of all time. Shakespeare is sometimes called the "Bard of Avon." *Bard* is another word for poet. This well-known poet was born in England, in Stratford-upon-Avon, in 1564 CE.

He was the third of eight children. His father worked as a leather merchant and glove maker. During Shakespeare's early years, his father served as bailiff (something like an officer of the law) of their town and the family seemed pretty well-off.

In Shakespeare's time, well-off boys attended school. Girls stayed home. Young Will probably spent long hours learning Latin, Greek, the Bible, and English history. It seems he didn't enjoy school much: in one of his plays, he described "the whining schoolboy, with his satchel . . . creeping like a snail unwillingly to school."



By the time Shakespeare reached college age, his father had become so poor that he owed money, couldn't pay taxes, and didn't show his face in public for fear of being thrown in jail. It's likely that the Shakespeare family didn't have enough money to pay for a college education for William.

What did William do when he finished his schooling? No one knows for sure.

The Lost Years

There's a lot about Shakespeare's life we don't know. No one even knows for sure the exact date of Shakespeare's birthday.

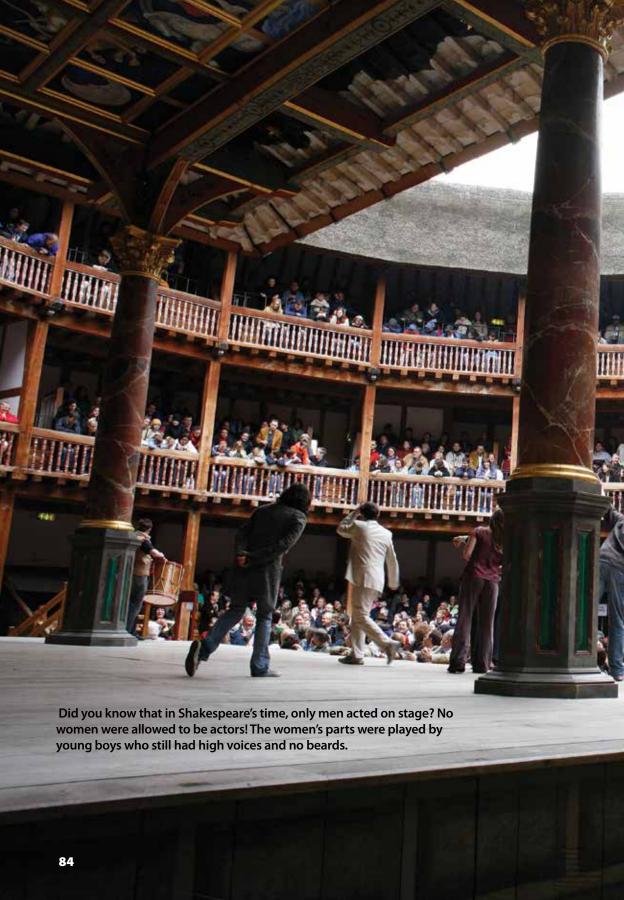
Most of the information we have about Shakespeare comes from the town's official records of baptisms, marriages, and deaths. We also know a little from what his friends wrote about him. Over the years, scholars have closely examined the available documents, as well as Shakespeare's own writings, to put together a picture of the playwright's life. Sometimes parts of the picture are missing, and then scholars have to use whatever evidence they have to make an informed guess.

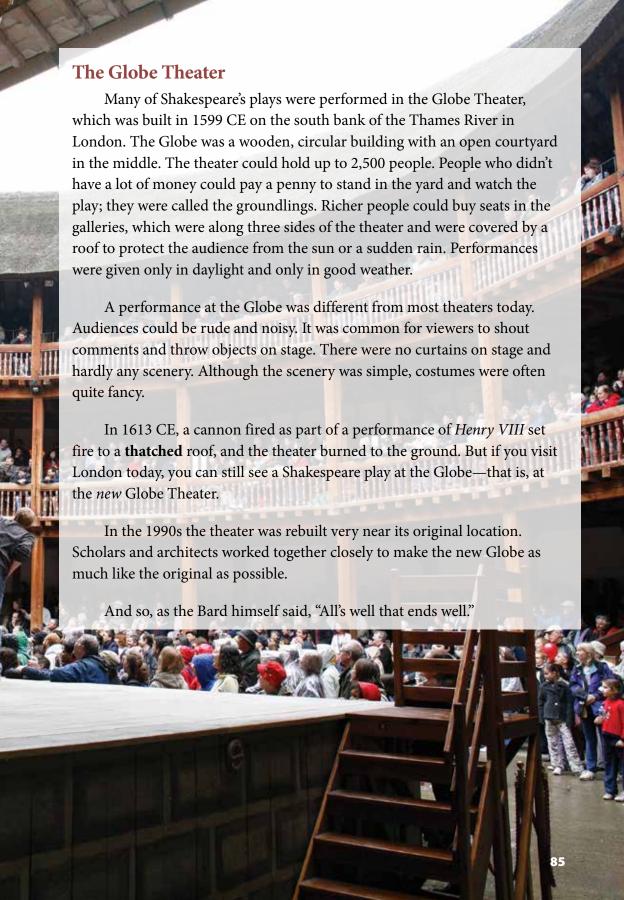
We *do* know that 18-year-old William married 26-year-old Anne Hathaway in 1582 CE. Over the next few years, Anne gave birth to their daughter Susanna, followed by twins, a daughter named Judith and a son named Hamnet.

After the twins were born, Shakespeare did not **linger** very long in Stratford-upon-Avon. We're not certain why he left. Nor does anyone know what Shakespeare did during what are called "The Lost Years" from 1582 to 1592 CE.

We do know that by 1592 CE, Shakespeare had arrived in London and was establishing a reputation as a playwright, actor, and poet. Some of his more highly educated competitors said his plays were "**vulgar**." But the people loved his work, and the royalty also enjoyed them. His acting company frequently performed in the court of Queen Elizabeth and later for King James.



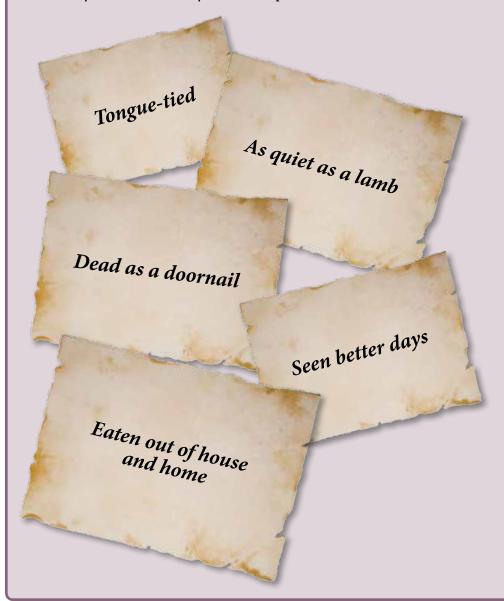




Shakespeare's Words

These phrases and lines come from the pen of the man most people consider the greatest playwright of all time, William Shakespeare. Along with the Bible, the works of Shakespeare have had a greater influence on English language and literature than anything by any other writers.

Have you ever heard any of these expressions?



Have you ever come across any of these famous lines?

All's well that ends well.

A horse! A horse! My kingdom for a horse!

If music be the food of love, play on.

Sweets to the sweet.

Romeo, Romeo! Wherefore art thou Romeo?

Something is rotten in the state of Denmark.

To be, or not to be: that is the question.

Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears.

All the world's a stage and all the men and women merely players.

Shakespeare wrote many poems, but he is best known for writing plays. When Shakespeare wrote his plays, England was ruled by Queen Elizabeth I and later King James I. Elizabeth was a powerful and intelligent leader, and very popular with the English people. The arts thrived during the reign of Queen Elizabeth. She filled her court with poets, playwrights, and musicians.

If you haven't read one of Shakespeare's plays yet, you probably will soon!