

Name _____

Date _____

Who Wrote Shakespeare?

The so-called "authorship controversy" surrounding Shakespeare is something of a misnomer: it could only truly be classified as a controversy if the definition of the word were adapted to mean "a disagreement between one sane group and one group propagating ludicrous conspiracy theories." There is simply no credible proof that a man other than William Shakespeare of Stratford-upon-Avon authored the plays attributed to him. To believe that someone other than Shakespeare—whether it be the Earl of Oxford, Francis Bacon, or Queen Elizabeth herself—wrote the plays would require one to strain the very limits of plausibility. One would have to believe that, not only was there a reason for an author to assume a pen name, but that said pen name would belong to an actual person who would allow the plays to be attributed to him without receiving any monetary compensation. One would also have to assume that Shakespeare—the real Shakespeare but not the author—would never remark to another person that he was not the author. Not to mention the fact that the man the theorists claim was too lowbrow and unsophisticated to author the plays would have had occasion to meet someone so sophisticated that he needed to write under an assumed name and could pitch the idea to Shakespeare...



So, where then does such a harebrained idea come from? Well, for starters, the theorists incorrectly assume that the world of Elizabethan England was similar to our own and included copyright laws and such a concept as literary or theatrical fame. Thus, they claim, because Shakespeare's will did not mention his plays, it would be implausible for him to be the author. For another, the theorists falsely assume that an author's only source of information is his own background and studies. Since Shakespeare the man was not educated and was not cosmopolitan, they claim, there is no way he could've written about Verona and Elsinore. This conviction, though, is even more specious. The experiences Shakespeare wrote about are universal, so though he himself did not personally know the setting, he certainly did know the drama. And, at the end of the day, isn't it more important that we understand the drama than the dramaturge?

1) Which of the following pieces of information, if added to the passage, would strengthen the author's argument?

- A. Newly uncovered journals reveal that the Earl of Oxford died years before many of Shakespeare's plays were first performed.
- B. Scholars now believe that Shakespeare toured Europe as an actor in his early twenties.
- C. Shakespeare was very well educated for man of his class in Stratford-upon-Avon.
- D. In the Elizabethan era, it was uncommon for any writer to bequeath his works to another.
- E. Shakespeare scholars are now convinced that William Shakespeare was actually illiterate.

2) Based on its use in paragraph 1, it can be inferred that which of the following accurately describes a **misnomer**?

- A. A popular new restaurant serves a unique brand of frozen yogurt, though most regard this as ordinary ice cream.
- B. Although the alligator is often confused with the crocodile, they actually share numerous striking differences.
- C. Contrary to popular belief, the center of most pencils is actually composed of graphite, not "lead."
- D. Five years have passed since the school burned down; yet, the school crossing sign still stands on the side of the street.
- E. While many believe the diamond to be real, it is, in fact, a Cubic Zirconia and has little to no value.

3) As used in the passage, Verona and Elsinore are most likely examples of

- A. settings of Shakespearean plays
- B. places Shakespeare imagined to exist
- C. European towns to which nobility would have traveled
- D. locations of famous schools in Europe
- E. cities in England in which plays were not performed

4) Which of the following best summarizes the author's main point?

- A. The authorship controversy surrounding Shakespeare relies on faulty reasoning and improper inferences.
- B. To believe that anyone but Shakespeare wrote his plays requires a keen insight and an active imagination.
- C. All available evidence points heavily in favor of Shakespeare having written the plays attributed to him.
- D. The question of who authored the Shakespearean plays is worth asking but impossible to answer.
- E. Shakespeare himself used a penname because he was not sophisticated enough to have written his plays.

5) On which of the following statements would both the author and the authorship theorists most likely agree?

- A. A lot can be gleaned about the life of an author by reading his or her works.
- B. An artist who was not formally trained cannot possibly be the artist of a work of advanced technique or skill.
- C. All works of art should be judged in a historical context.
- D. It is important to know for certain who wrote an important text.
- E. In order to write successfully on a subject, it cannot be foreign to the author.

6) As used in paragraph 2, the word **specious** most nearly means

- A. fantastic
- B. classified
- C. baseless
- D. phony
- E. ridiculous

7) The main purpose of this passage is to

- A. argue a claim
- B. analyze several viewpoints
- C. juxtapose fact and conjecture
- D. refute a line of reasoning
- E. dismiss a hypothesis

8) The the passage asks, "isn't it more important that we understand the drama than the dramaturge?" What do you think? Is it important to know who wrote something? If we were to discover that someone besides William Shakespeare wrote all of his plays, would it change the way you read them or thought about them? Explain your answer.
