

# **Shakespeare and The Globe Theatre**

## **Background Notes**

### **Shakespeare:**

- Was born in Stratford Upon Avon on (or about) April 23rd 1564 to John, a prosperous glove-maker, and Mary Shakespeare.
- He attended grammar/primary school, but it was unlikely that he went to a university.
- His writing was inspired by nature and life in the country as well as traveling acting troupes.
- In 1582, at age 18, he married Anne Hathaway (8 years older than him).
- They had two daughters, Susanna and Judith and son, Hamnet.
- He received 10% of the profits of each performance at the Globe and had a 20% stake holding in the Lord Chamberlain's Men
- Acted in some of the plays

### **The Theatre:**

- Built in 1597 (finished in 1598)
- Could hold several thousand people.
- Round shaped theater
- Open to the elements
- Dependant on daylight for light

- General public (commoners/groundlings) paid a penny to stand in the “Pit” at the base of the stage.
- The wealthy and gentry could pay more to sit in the galleries.
- Both men and women attended the plays
- Was the most famous playhouse in Elizabethan England and was hugely successful.
- Patrons were expected to react to the events in the play and shout their excitement or grievances

### **The Productions:**

- A flag was used to advertise when and what kind of play was being performed (ex. Black meant tragedy, and white meant comedy)
- The acting troupe that performed at the Globe was the Lord Chamberlain’s Men
- Plays could be used as a means to criticize society, religion and politics
- Queen Elizabeth patronized some troupes, making some “royal” acting companies, which deterred criticism of her.
- Use of massive props (fully working cannons, fireworks, ‘flying’ entrances created by pulley systems, trap doors)
- Music was also used to enhance plays

**Actors:**

- Only male actors
- Usually got their lines as the play was in progress (many got the wrong lines)
- Parts usually assigned the day of performance.

**Elizabethan Theatre:**

- Lots of rivalry between the playhouses.
- Constant demand for new material
- Hosted huge productions to make lots of money.

**Play Day Event(s):**

- Was reputed as being used as a brothel and a gambling house.
- Days when plays were performed were viewed as an exciting time
- Outside the playhouses merchants sold their wares in stalls
- Refreshments were also sold.

**The Downfall of the Theatre:**

- Theatres, including the Globe, were closed when there were outbreaks of the Bubonic/Black plague.
- The Puritans and “respectable society” criticized the theatre and plays and theatres were banned within city limits

- The Globe burnt down by cannon fire gone awry, but was rebuilt (Referred to as Globe 2)
- Globe 2 was demolished by the Puritans in 1644.