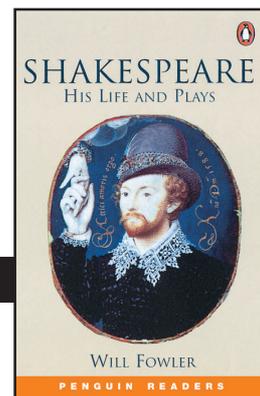


## Teacher's notes

## Shakespeare His Life and Plays

by Will Fowler



## SUMMARY

**I**n *Shakespeare, His Life and Plays*, Will Fowler describes Shakespeare's life from the early times in Stratford, then as an actor and dramatist in London, to his final years.

The introduction explains that not much is known about Shakespeare's life. A picture is built up from the general history of the times. The first chapter covers Shakespeare's childhood, and the second chapter, his marriage. The biggest gap in knowledge about his life is between 1585 and 1592, during which he has already become an actor and playwright. Early plays included *The Comedy of Errors* and *The Taming of the Shrew*.

The following chapters describe his plays, amongst them, *Love's Labour Lost*, *Richard III* and *Henry VI*. We learn about actors, patrons and the state of the theatre. Between 1594 and 1598, Shakespeare wrote the very popular plays, *Richard II*, *Romeo and Juliet* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

Shakespeare stopped acting probably in 1603. Now famous, he spent his time directing his plays and writing. At this time he wrote three tragedies, *Othello*, *King Lear* and *Macbeth* and the Roman histories, *Julius Caesar*, *Anthony and Cleopatra* and *Coriolanus*.

Shakespeare lived in London throughout most of his working life and his family stayed in Stratford. He returned to Stratford in about 1610, when he wrote *The Winter's Tale* and his final play, *The Tempest*.

In the last chapter, Will Fowler discusses how and why Shakespeare's work, (he wrote poetry as well as plays) is still enjoyable for people today.

## ABOUT SHAKESPEARE

William Shakespeare is the most famous writer of plays in the English language. He was born in 1564, in Stratford-upon-Avon. He wrote thirty-nine plays and hundreds of poems. In 1582 he married Anne Hathaway and they had three children. Living in London, while his family stayed in Stratford, he was a member of a theatre company which performed at the Globe and Blackfriars Theatres. His plays were performed for Queen Elizabeth 1 and King James 1. In 1610 he returned to Stratford and continued to write until his death in 1616.

## BACKGROUND AND THEMES

This was an exciting period of history, with wars, plagues, the discovery of new continents, rebellions, and in 1605, the Gunpowder Plot, when Catholics tried to blow up the Houses of Parliament. It was a time when everyone had to please the king or queen if they wanted to succeed. If they didn't, they sometimes lost their lives.

It was a good time for the theatre in England, which helped Shakespeare become a great dramatist. The first public

theatre was built in London in 1576, when Shakespeare was about seven years old. There were many other fine dramatists in his time, such as Christopher Marlowe and Ben Jonson, and famous actors, who were Elizabethan celebrities. Going to the theatre was a very popular form of entertainment. Shakespeare was always experimenting with the style of his plays, responding to fashions and new ideas in the London theatre.

A reconstruction of Shakespeare's wooden theatre, also called the Globe, was built near the original site in 1997. Most of the audience have to stand, as they did in Shakespeare's day.

Shakespeare's work continues to be performed around the world in different media – on television, radio and cinema, as well as in the theatre. The Royal Shakespeare Company, which employs some of Britain's finest actors, is based in Stratford and London. They put on several Shakespeare plays every year. Film directors can add a broad visual interpretation to Shakespeare's beautiful words. They can show things that are difficult to show on stage – battle scenes, castles, forests and the ghosts, in *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* for example.

There are at least five versions of films of *Hamlet* and three of *Othello*. *Romeo and Juliet* was filmed by Baz Luhrmann, who set the story in a violent urban multi-ethnic world of rival street gangs, but he kept Shakespeare's original language. Students may also have seen *Shakespeare in Love*, a film made in 1998 starring Gwyneth Paltrow and Joseph Fiennes as Shakespeare. The film was very successful and won many awards. It recreates Elizabethan London and gives an entertaining visual account of how the theatre worked in Shakespeare's day.

Shakespeare's work has been translated into almost every language, allowing non-English speakers to enjoy his exciting stories and studies of human feelings. But the beauty of Shakespeare's English is a rich part of the experience, and even if the audience don't understand every word or phrase, they can enjoy the sound of the language.

Many English people find Shakespeare difficult to understand. He uses old words and phrases that we no longer use today, his grammar is sometimes very complex, he refers to contemporary events that mean nothing to us now.

Shakespeare's plays mirror today's society with their themes of love, forgiveness, loss, lust for power, deceit and loss.

*Shakespeare, His Life and Plays* gives us information about contemporary politics and culture. It helps us to understand what is happening in Shakespeare's plays. It also helps to explain why Shakespeare is still popular today. Many of the themes in his plays are ones we are interested in today. One example is the theme of races through his characterisation of Othello, the Moor of Venice, and Shylock, the Jew in *The Merchant of Venice*.

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## Teacher's notes

## Communicative activities

The following teacher-led activities cover the same sections of text as the exercises at the back of the Reader, and supplement those exercises. Further supplementary exercises covering shorter sections of the book can be found on the photocopiable Student's Activities pages of the factsheet. These are primarily for use with class readers, but with the exception of pair/groupwork questions, can also be used by students working alone in a self-access centre.

## ACTIVITIES BEFORE READING THE BOOK

## Quiz

These questions are best answered by the class after the students have worked on the first activity in the Reader. Ask students why the following might be important in the story of Shakespeare's life.

- Stratford-upon-Avon
- Queen Elizabeth I and King James I
- 1616
- The Globe Theatre
- Anne Hathaway
- King Lear
- Mary Arden

## ACTIVITIES AFTER READING A SECTION

## Chapters 1-4

- Students work in pairs or small groups. They choose three facts about Shakespeare's life from this section that they think were important in Shakespeare becoming a successful dramatist. Compare facts in a class discussion.
- Nobody knows what happened to Shakespeare between 1585 and 1592 (see page 9). Students work in groups and try and explain why this is so. Where does historical information come from? Students may like to start the work by discussing what Shakespeare did in the years after he left for London. (Historical information comes from for example, official records such as marriage certificates, or printed material such as diaries which have survived).

## Chapters 5-8

Students work in pairs. They choose five plays mentioned in this section. They write one sentence describing it, without using the title of the play in the sentence, for example:

An Italian businessman borrows money from a Jew in this play.  
(*The Merchant of Venice*)

Feste sings a song about an actor's life in this play.  
(*Twelfth Night*)

Pairs swap sentences. Which pair can find the correct five titles first?

## Chapters 9-12

Shakespeare used many different sources for his plays, from popular stories to Greek and Roman writers to English history. There are plenty of good stories that Shakespeare didn't use, such as King Arthur or the Norse myths. In pairs or groups, students think of three or four ideas for stories that would have made good Shakespeare plays. They can be old or modern.

Compare ideas with the class. Extend to a discussion of popular source material used by writers like Shakespeare in students' own cultures.

## ACTIVITIES AFTER READING THE BOOK

- Choosing actors. Students work in pairs. They choose one or more famous pairs or groups of characters from Shakespeare, eg Hamlet and Ophelia, Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, Othello and Desdemona, Romeo and Juliet, Antony and Cleopatra and choose modern actors to play the roles. The class can compare choices at the end.
- Discussion. Do we enjoy and understand someone's work more if we know about the details and events of their life? Use examples from the book, such as on pages 24 and 46, to show how details of Shakespeare's life appear in his plays. Widen the discussion to include other artists and writers that students are interested in, for example Picasso, Gaudi, Frida Kahlo, Ernest Hemingway, Madonna.

## Glossary

It will be useful for your students to know the following new words. They are practised in the 'Before Your Read' sections of exercises at the back of the book. (Definitions are based on those in the Longman Active Study Dictionary.)

## Chapters 1-4

**audience** (n) the people who watch or listen to a performance  
**comedy** (n) a funny film, play or other entertainment of that type  
**council** (n) a group of people elected to control a town or area  
**director** (n) someone who gives instructions to actors and other people in a film or play  
**divide** (v) to separate something into two or more parts  
**dramatist** (n) someone who writes plays  
**earl** (n) a man with a high social rank in Britain  
**execute** (v) to kill someone, especially as a legal punishment for a crime  
**patron** (n) someone who gives money to support an artist  
**plague** (n) a disease that spreads quickly and kills a lot of people  
**poet** (n) someone who writes poems  
**publish** (v) making printed information available for people to buy or read  
**rebel** (v) to oppose or fight against someone who is in authority  
**reign** (n) a period of time when a king or queen rules a country  
**revenge** (v) to punish someone who has hurt you  
**rival** (n) a person, team or company that you compete with  
**sonnet** (n) a poem which has fourteen lines and a rhyme pattern  
**source** (n) the thing, place, person or situation that you get something from  
**throne** (n) chair for a king or queen, it also means the position of king and queen  
**tragedy** (n) a play or book that ends sadly, usually with the death of the main character  
**villain** (n) a bad character in a play, the opposite of 'hero'  
**will** (n) a legal document which instructs others what to do with your money and property on your death

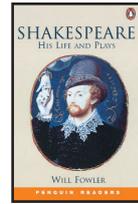
## Chapters 5-8

**coat of arms** (n) a design made of pictures for a family, town, university  
**comic** (adj) funny, amusing  
**the Devil** (n) the most powerful evil spirit, according to some religions.  
**Duke** (n) a high social rank, just below that of a prince  
**Fairy** (n) an imaginary creature, who is very small, flies and has magic powers  
**Heroine** (n) the female main character of a story  
**Mercy** (n) kindness and willingness to forgive  
**Trial** (n) the legal process in which a court of law decides whether someone is guilty of a crime



## Student's activities

# Shakespeare His Life and Plays



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### Photocopiable

Students can do these exercises alone or with one or more other students.

### Activities before reading the book

Complete these sentences using information from the Introduction on page v.

- ... give us most of the information we have about Shakespeare's life.
- Shakespeare did not leave a ... giving his opinions about theatre and politics.
- He wrote poems called ... about his love for a man and a woman.
- Shakespeare was an ... as well as a dramatist.
- The ... in Shakespeare's plays still seem real to us 400 years later.

### Activities while reading the book

#### CHAPTERS 1-4

##### Chapter 1 pages 1-5

Answer these questions.

- What percentage (%) of the population of Stratford-upon-Avon died in the plague of 1564?
- What did John Shakespeare's business make?
- Why was it unusual for Mary Arden's father to make her responsible for his will and to leave her his best property?
- What three languages do we know that Shakespeare could read as well as English?

##### Chapter 2 pages 5-9

Match the dates and numbers to the sentences.

3 8 150 1581 summer 1582 November 1582 1586

- Shakespeare began a relationship with Anne Hathaway at this time
- the number of years age difference between Shakespeare and Anne
- the number of sonnets published by Shakespeare
- the year that Anne Hathaway's father died
- the month when Shakespeare and Anne married
- the number of children that Shakespeare and Anne had
- the year when Shakespeare probably left Stratford for London

##### Chapter 3 pages 9-13

Circle the mistakes in these sentences. There may be more than one in each sentence. Write the correct words.

- Robert Greene liked Shakespeare because he had been to university.
- Like writers in Hollywood, dramatists in Elizabethan London usually kept control over their work.
- All of Shakespeare's plays were published before he died.
- Shakespeare was the only good dramatist of his time.

- Shakespeare's early plays are all in the same style.
- The Taming of the Shrew* is very popular with modern audiences.

##### Chapter 4 pages 13-18

Use these names to complete the sentences.

Anna of Denmark	Lord Burghley
Christopher Marlowe	the Earl of Essex
James Burbage	the Earl of Southampton
James I	

- In some of his sonnets Shakespeare describes his love for a handsome young man. Some people think that the young man is ...
- ... was put to death by Queen Elizabeth I in 1601.
- The next king of England after Queen Elizabeth died was ...
- ... was the wife of King James I.
- ... wanted the Earl of Southampton to marry his grand-daughter.
- ... was killed in a pub in London in 1594.
- Philip Henslowe and ... ran rival theatre companies.

#### CHAPTERS 5-8

##### Chapter 5 pages 18-25

- What types of play are these – tragedy, comedy or history?
  - Romeo and Juliet ...
  - A Midsummer Night's Dream ...
  - Henry V ...
  - The Merry Wives of Windsor ...
  - Richard II ...

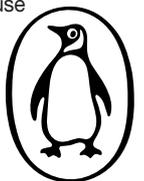
- Write the name of the play next to each of these sentences.

- A fairy king and queen make life difficult for two pairs of young lovers.
- Falstaff is the hero of this funny play. It has many characters with silly accents.
- This play is set in Italy and the famous villain is a Jew.
- In this play a cousin of the king rebels and takes the throne.
- Love between two young people from rival families ends in tragedy.

##### Chapter 6 pages 26-29

Put these events in the order they happened.

- Shakespeare became a partner in the Burbage theatre.
- They carried their theatre, piece by piece, outside the city walls and across the river.
- They built a new theatre - the Globe.
- The Burbage theatre company was not allowed to use their theatre inside the city of London.
- In 1598 there was a cold winter.



## Student's activities

**Chapter 7 pages 29–35**

1 Match the names and the descriptions of these characters from Hamlet.

- |              |              |
|--------------|--------------|
| (a) Horatio  | (d) Gertrude |
| (b) Laertes  | (e) Hamlet   |
| (c) Claudius | (f) Ophelia  |
- (i) son of the king, nephew of Claudius  
 (ii) Hamlet's uncle, who murdered Hamlet's father and married Hamlet's mother  
 (iii) Hamlet's friend  
 (iv) Polonius's daughter  
 (v) Polonius's son  
 (vi) Hamlet's mother

2 Use these words to complete the sentences.

against executed friends people perform rebel  
 The Earl of Essex and the Earl of Southampton were close (a) \_\_\_\_\_ Essex was sent to stop the Irish rebellion (b) \_\_\_\_\_ the English in 1599. In 1601 Essex decided to (c) \_\_\_\_\_ against the queen. Before he rode to her palace, he watched Shakespeare's company (d) \_\_\_\_\_ Richard II. (e) \_\_\_\_\_ in the country did not support or follow Essex. He was (f) \_\_\_\_\_ by Queen Elizabeth. Shakespeare and his company were (g) \_\_\_\_\_ that the queen (h) \_\_\_\_\_ the theatre so much.

**Chapter 8 pages 35–41**

Who are these people?

- (a) This is a man who does not understand what real love is. He dies of a broken heart with his dead daughter in his arms.  
 (b) This is a man who loves his wife but does not understand why she loves him. He believes the lies of his evil officer about his wife.  
 (c) This is a woman who really loves her father. Her sisters love only his money and land.  
 (d) This is a man who wants power and will perform any crime to get it.  
 (e) This is a very clever man who loves to tell lies.  
 (f) This is a woman who loves her husband more than herself.

**CHAPTERS 9–12****Chapter 9 pages 41–46**

Answer these questions.

- (a) Which people from the past did Elizabethans admire most?  
 (b) What dead language did schoolboys learn?  
 (c) Who played the women's parts in Shakespeare's plays?  
 (d) Who does Plutarch blame for the failure of Mark Antony?  
 (e) Why does Cleopatra kill herself at the end of Shakespeare's play?  
 (f) What job did Coriolanus have before he becomes a governor of the city of Rome?  
 (g) What did Shakespeare publish for the first time in 1609?

**Chapter 10 pages 47–49**

Find the correct second half for each sentence.

- (a) The Blackfriars theatre was different from the Globe  
 (b) The new fashion in plays in 1607–8  
 (c) Shakespeare's most successful play in this new style  
 (d) The Winter's Tale is about an imaginary love affair  
 (e) In this play we can find events  
 (i) is The Winter's Tale.  
 (ii) like those in Shakespeare's own life.  
 (iii) because it had a roof.  
 (iv) mixed tragedy with comedy.  
 (v) between Leontes's wife and his best friend.

**Chapter 11 pages 49–52**

Answer these questions.

- (a) What is the title of the last play that Shakespeare wrote by himself?  
 (b) What is a tempest?  
 (c) What has Prospero learned from his books?  
 (d) How does Prospero bring his enemies to his island?  
 (e) Who do many writers think that Prospero is meant to be?  
 (f) What happened to the Globe theatre in 1613?  
 (g) Why did Shakespeare leave his 'second-best bed' to his wife in his will?

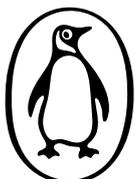
**Chapter 12 pages 53–55**

Why is Shakespeare still so popular nearly 400 years after his death? Which of these reasons does the writer give in this chapter?

- (a) Because his plays are funny.  
 (b) Because his views on politics and religion are the same as ours.  
 (c) Because his writing helps people to understand life better.  
 (d) Because he was an actor and wrote plays that make good theatre.  
 (e) Because he understood that ordinary people suffer in the same way as kings and queens.  
 (f) Because he set his plays among ordinary people in small towns.

**Activities after reading the book**

- 1 Look at the photographs on pages 12, 22, 25, 39, 43 and 51. Choose one or more adjectives to describe the emotions that these characters are experiencing. Use your knowledge of the plays as well as the expressions of the actors. Find any words you need in your dictionary.  
 2 What does the book tell us about the lives of women in Elizabethan England? Write down some ideas.



The next record of Shakespeare life is his marriage to Anne Hathaway, a daughter of a wealthy yeoman, in 1582. On 26 of May, 1583, their first child, Susanna, was baptized, followed in February of 1585 by the twins, Hamnet and Judith. After the birth of the twins we know absolutely nothing about Shakespeare's life for the next seven years. Shakespeare wrote and staged comedies, tragedies, historical plays and dramas. With time he became rather rich, wrote less and less, and in 1613, after the Globe had been destroyed by fire, Shakespeare retired to Stradford, where he died three years later, on 23rd of April, 1616, and was buried in the same Holy Trinity Church, where he was christened. His last work contains an angry personal attack on Shakespeare. We learn from it that Shakespeare was an actor. He had also certainly written three plays and probably as many as seven or eight. He had therefore worked in the theatre for a number of years and had started writing plays not long after he joined a theatre company. Greene attacks Shakespeare for two reasons. At that time, plays were usually written by men like himself who had been to a university. In the same way, during the twenty-five years of Shakespeare's life in the theatre, plays were not 'literature'. Shakespeare probably accepted the general opinion. He published his poems, which in his opinion proved his ability as a writer. His first plays show that he was still learning.