

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE



William Shakespeare was an English playwright, poet and actor. He is widely regarded as the greatest writer in the English language and the world's pre-eminent dramatist. Shakespeare was born in Stratford-upon-Avon, England, in 1564. Shakespeare was christened on April 26 of that year. The day of his birth is unknown. It has long been celebrated on April 23, the feast day of St. George. He was one of eight children born to John Shakespeare, a well-to-do glove-maker and leather worker, and his wife, Mary Arden, an heiress from a wealthy family.

In 1582, William married Anne Hathaway. They had three children together – a daughter called Susanna, and twins, Judith and Hamnet. Come 1585, the mysterious William Shakespeare disappeared from records for around seven years! Historians often refer to this part of the writer's life as '*the lost years*'...Then, in 1592 he suddenly turned up in London as an actor and playwright.

Shakespeare was a prolific writer during the Elizabethan and Jacobean ages of British theatre (sometimes called the English Renaissance or the Early Modern Period). Shakespeare's plays are perhaps his most enduring legacy, but they are not all he wrote. Shakespeare's poems also remain popular to this day. He is often called England's national poet and the 'Bard of Avon' (or simply 'The Bard'). During his lifetime, William Shakespeare wrote around **37 plays** for the theatre and **over 150 poems!** No one can say the exact number, because some of his work may have been lost over time – and some may have been written with the help of other people.

William was part of a theatre company called **Lord Chamberlain's Men**, who regularly performed at a place called '**The Theatre**'. But after a dispute with the landlord, they took the building apart, rebuilt it across the river and named it the **Globe**. Shakespeare's plays were immediately big hits! He wrote different kinds of plays. His plays are of different genres: tragedies, comedies and histories.

Tragedy – including Hamlet, Othello, King Lear and Romeo and Juliet

Comedy – including Twelfth Night and The Taming of the Shrew

History – including Henry IV, Henry V and Richard III

They are among the best-known in English literature and have been translated into every major living language. Shakespeare's plays are performed more often than those of any other playwright.

His plays made him very rich and famous. So much so, that by 1598, William owned houses in London and Stratford-upon-Avon. Shakespeare's plays had the royal seal of approval. Both Queen Elizabeth I and James VI of Scotland and I of England would often hire Shakespeare's company to come and perform at the royal court.

Shakespeare has been credited for adding more than 1700 new words and phrases to the English language-many still in use. Computer searches have found that he may not have invented all of them, but he certainly made them popular.

Towards the end of his life, William lived quietly back in his hometown of Stratford-upon-Avon. He died on **23 April 1616**, aged 52, after falling ill. It's believed he may have died on his birthday, but without an official birth record, no one can be sure!

Today, Shakespeare's work is studied in schools and universities around the world, and his stories are depicted on TV and in films. In 1997, the modern **Globe Theatre** was opened in London. A reconstruction of the original, it's just a few hundred metres from where the original one once stood. People can go to watch plays – just like in Shakespeare's day!