

William Shakespeare

William Shakespeare is the most famous writer in the English language. He wrote 37 plays and 154 poems, but we know almost nothing about him or his life.



Early life

Shakespeare was born in Stratford-upon-Avon, a town in the middle of England. His family wasn't rich, but he was able to go to school. In 1852, when he was 18, he married Anne. They soon had three children, so he needed a job.

The 'lost years'

Nobody knows where Shakespeare was between 1586 and 1592. There are no letters or other information about him. We call these the 'lost years'. Many people think he was a schoolteacher in a town near Stratford.

London

In 1592, Shakespeare appeared in London. He had a job as an actor and he was writing poems. He soon started writing plays and acting in them himself. Nobody knows which play he wrote first.

By the time he wrote *Romeo and Juliet*, he was making lots of money. In 1597 he bought the second biggest house in Stratford for his family.

In 1599 he and his friends bought a theatre next to the River Thames. They

called it the Globe, but it burnt down in 1613. An actor used a gun during Shakespeare's play *Henry VIII* and the theatre caught fire.

Back to Stratford

Shakespeare left London in around 1612. He was now rich and famous and he returned to live a quiet life with his family. He died in 1616.

In 1997, an exact copy of Shakespeare's Globe theatre opened beside the River Thames in London. You can watch Shakespeare's plays there in the summer.



Romeo and Juliet



Shakespeare wrote *Romeo and Juliet* in 1595-7 and he acted in it for Queen Elizabeth 1.

Shakespeare didn't invent the story of *Romeo and Juliet*. He borrowed it from a poem that Arthur Brooke wrote in 1562. Brooke's poem is a bit boring, but

Four Facts about Shakespeare

- ➡ He was born and died on the same day: April the 23rd.
- ➡ He wore an earring in his left ear.
- ➡ He never went abroad.
- ➡ *Hamlet* is his most famous play. Shakespeare's son was called Hamnet and died in 1596 at age eleven.

Shakespeare's play is very exciting.

The first film of *Romeo and Juliet* came out in 1908, with more than forty films since then. Baz Luhrmann made *Romeo+Juliet* in 1996, with Leonardo DiCaprio and Claire Danes. He didn't change the words but his story takes place in Verona Beach, a modern day town in California, and the Montagues and Capulets fight with guns. The photographs in this book come from Carlo Carlei's film *Romeo & Juliet* (2013). Douglas Booth plays Romeo and Hailee Steinfeld plays Juliet. Hailee got the part when she was only 14, just a year older than Juliet.

What do these words mean?

You can use a dictionary.

**poem theatre to burn down
to invent modern earring**