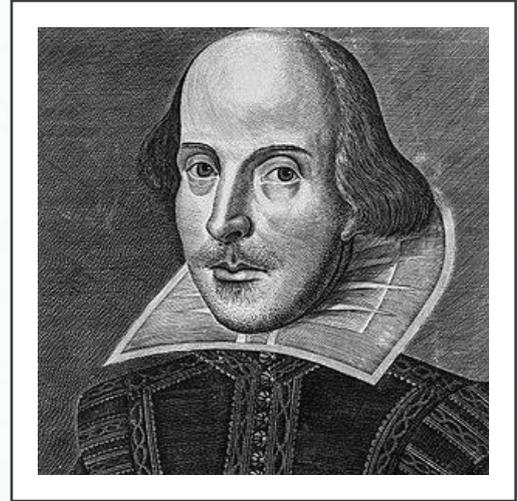


Birth and family

William Shakespeare was born in Stratford, Warwickshire and christened on 26 April 1564. Although historians are unsure about the exact date of his birth, most believe that his birthday was 23rd April – St. George's Day. Shakespeare was born into a relatively 'normal' family: his father (John) was a glove-maker; his mother Mary was the daughter of a farmer named



Robert Arden; and his grandfather was a farmer too. No-one could have possibly imagined the fame and fortune that this young child would soon be achieving!

Childhood and early life

Despite a relatively humble background, John Shakespeare was considered an important man in the town of Stratford and by 1568, he was made mayor. Therefore, he sent William to the town grammar school, where he hoped that his son would receive a good education. At school, the boys took lessons in Latin, Greek and history amongst others. It was expected that they would work hard and if they failed to do this, or were naughty, the teachers would beat them! Most of Shakespeare's educational experience was unexceptional: he played in the fields with his friends, went fishing and swam in the River Avon. It was when Shakespeare was about five that a group of actors came to Stratford and some suggest that perhaps he was taken to see their show and consequently his love of the theatre was ignited. Young Shakespeare left school by the time he was sixteen and unfortunately it is not known what job he had. Perhaps he worked as a teacher. Perhaps he helped his father. In 1582, Shakespeare got married to Anne Hathaway, who was a farmer's daughter and was eight years his senior. Soon they had a family - a daughter Susanna - and in 1585 twins, named Judith and Hamnet.

Later life

Due to the fact that Shakespeare didn't produce an autobiography, little is known about many parts of his life and some of it remains a mystery! Sometime before 1590, Shakespeare left Stratford. But where did he go? Again, it is not clear why although one story suggests it is because he had been forced to run away from home, after poaching deer! Little is known about what he did but eventually he travelled to London, which was the biggest city in England, though much smaller than it is today. London provided opportunities unavailable anywhere else in the country and many poor people went hoping to make their fortunes. Importantly for Shakespeare, London had theatres! The first of these was opened in 1576 and by 1590 there were several 'playhouses' including the Rose, the Theatre and the Curtain.

Initially, Shakespeare became an actor. However, he was soon writing plays too and by 1592, Shakespeare's work was being spoken about. One jealous writer – Robert Greene – wrote rude things about this newcomer and referred to him as an 'upstart crow'. Disaster struck in 1593 when a terrible disease called the plague hit London. Thousands of people became unwell and died and this caused the theatres to shut. Rather than give up, Shakespeare turned to writing poems rather than plays and soon the theatres were re-opened.

Death

By 1598, Shakespeare was rich and famous. He owned houses in Stratford and he also had homes in London, so he could be near the theatres. In 1603, Queen Elizabeth died. The new king was James I, from Scotland. Luckily for Shakespeare, James liked the theatre and his actors became The King's Men; they even walked in the King's coronation procession! It was between 1600 and 1608 that Shakespeare wrote, what are considered to be, some of his greatest plays. These included: Hamlet, Othello, King Lear and Macbeth. Disaster struck again in 1613, when the Globe Theatre, the theatre where Shakespeare performed many of his greatest plays, burned down and he left London for good and returned to live quietly in Stratford. In 1616, at the age of 52, Shakespeare fell ill and died. Bizarrely, he died on 23rd April – his birthday.



QUESTIONS

1. When was William Shakespeare born? Circle one. (1 mark)

21st April 1564

23rd April 1564

26th April 1654

The exact date of his birth is unknown.

2. "No-one could have possibly imagined the fame and fortune that this young child would soon be achieving" **Why was Shakespeare's success a surprise?** (2 marks)

3. Draw a line between the words and their correct synonyms. (3 marks)

humble

aroused

unexceptional

unremarkable

ignited

modest

4. List three activities that Shakespeare did as a child. (3 marks)

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

5. Which word in the text shows that the author is not sure about whether Shakespeare left Stratford because he poached a deer? (1 mark)



6. Why do you think Shakespeare went to live in London? (3 marks)

7. Why was the plague a disaster for Shakespeare? (2 marks)

8. Shakespeare was very successful. What evidence is there to support this statement? (3 marks)

9. Answer true or false to these statements. (5 marks)

	True	False
Shakespeare owned property in London and Stratford.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The new king did not enjoy the theatre.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Shakespeare stopped writing plays in 1600 and concentrated on writing poetry instead.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Hamlet is considered as one of his greatest plays.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The Globe Theatre burnt down in 1631.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

10. Why was Shakespeare's time of death seen as strange? (1 mark)

ANSWERS

1. When was William Shakespeare born? Circle one. (1 mark)

21st April 1564

23rd April 1564

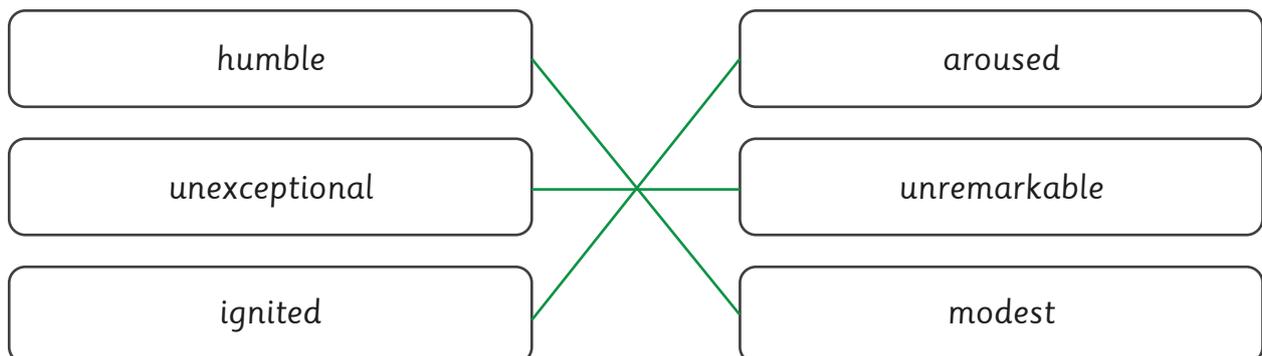
26th April 1654

The exact date of his birth is unknown.

2. “No-one could have possibly imagined the fame and fortune that this young child would soon be achieving” Why was Shakespeare’s success a surprise? (2 marks)

His family were seen as very normal, with very ordinary occupations such as glove-making and farming. These are jobs that you wouldn’t normally associate with great success, fame or wealth, especially as a completely unrelated job like a playwright.

3. Draw a line between the words and their correct synonyms. (3 marks)



4. List three activities that Shakespeare did as a child. (3 marks)

(Choose three of the four activities)

- played in the fields with his friends
- went fishing
- swam in the River Avon
- watched travelling actors perform

5. Which word in the text shows that the author is not sure about whether Shakespeare left Stratford because he poached a deer? (1 mark)

suggests

6. Why do you think Shakespeare went to live in London? (3 marks)

Shakespeare was a lot larger than Stratford and was the biggest city in England so there were likely to be more opportunities for him there.

Shakespeare was more likely to make his fortune here.

He had really enjoyed watching the travelling actors perform and London had many playhouses/ theatres where he would be able to fulfil his love of the theatre.

7. Why was the plague a disaster for Shakespeare? (2 marks)

It forced the theatres to close and so he was unable to work as an actor or have anywhere for his plays to be performed.

8. Shakespeare was very successful. What evidence is there to support this statement? (3 marks)

(Choose three of the following choices)

- He was rich and famous.
- His plays were regularly being performed.
- His acting company's patron was the King of England – Shakespeare's actors changed their name to 'The King's Men'
- He took part in the King's procession.
- He owned houses in Stratford and London.

9. Answer true or false to these statements. (5 marks)

	True	False
Shakespeare owned property in London and Stratford.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The new king did not enjoy the theatre.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Shakespeare stopped writing plays in 1600 and concentrated on writing poetry instead.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Hamlet is considered as one of his greatest plays.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The Globe Theatre burnt down in 1631.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

10. Why was Shakespeare's time of death seen as strange? (1 mark)

It was believed to be the same day as his birthday.

