



Report

6-► SHAKESPEARE

Michael: 'To be or not to be – that is the question.' Those words come from *Hamlet*, a play that William Shakespeare wrote in 1603. Shakespeare is the most famous British playwright in history. People know his name in almost every country in the world. But who exactly was William Shakespeare? That is the question!

Shakespeare was born in this house in Stratford-upon-Avon on 23 April, 1564. Families were big in those days. William had seven brothers and sisters.

But his parent's weren't poor; his father, John Shakespeare, was a successful businessman who bought and sold leather and wool. His mother was the daughter of a rich farmer. Young William went to school here.

William sat at a desk like this. He learnt Latin and studied the literature of Ancient Rome. But he was probably more interested in the groups of actors who travelled from town to town and put on plays in schools, churches, halls and public houses. These plays were very popular and William probably went to see them after school.

When Shakespeare left school, he went to work for his father. But soon after, he met and fell in love with Ann Hathaway, the daughter of a farmer who lived here, in this cottage. They got married in December 1582, and just five months later, their first daughter, Susanna, was born. William was 18. Ann was 25.

What did Shakespeare do for the next ten years? We don't know exactly. We don't know why he gave up a good job in his father's business and

moved to London. We don't know exactly when or why he became an actor and playwright. All we know is that in 1592 he wrote his first play. After that, his plays became popular very quickly, and he made a lot of money.

Four hundred years ago, Shakespeare built a theatre – The Globe – here in the centre of London. It was one of London's first theatres. This is the new Globe Theatre. It will be exactly like Shakespeare's theatre. It was round and had no roof over the centre – like the theatres of ancient Rome. OK in Rome – not such a good idea in cold, rainy London!

The people of London loved going to the theatre. The Globe could hold three thousand people. Some people sat to watch the plays; others stood in the middle, in front of the stage.

The audience were usually noisy, often clapping and cheering, and shouting to the actors – and there were only actors, no actresses. Young boys played the parts of women. It often rained in London then, too. And everyone got very wet.

Michael: In 1610, after about twenty-five years in London, Shakespeare came back here to Stratford. He was rich, and he had a big house where he enjoyed life with his family and friends. But he didn't stop writing plays.

Michael: What can people in Stratford tell us about Shakespeare?

First Woman: I can tell you that he was born on April twenty-third, 1564. I'm unsure about the last date. And he died on the same day.

First Man: I know he was English. He was born in Stratford-upon-Avon. This is his house, right here.

Second Man: He wrote a lot of plays.

Michael: Can you name any of the plays that Shakespeare wrote?

Third Man: *Hamlet* ...

First Woman: *As you like it* ... *Romeo and Juliet* ...

Third Man: *Macbeth* ... *A Midsummer Night's Dream* ...

Second Woman: *Hamlet* ... *Macbeth* ... *Coriolanus*.

Michael: Do you know the name of his wife, other than Mrs Shakespeare?

First Man: No. (No?) No, I'll take a guess ... Guinevere?

Michael: Nearly.

First Woman: Ann Hathaway?

Michael: Can you remember any famous lines that Shakespeare wrote?

First Man: No.

Second Woman: 'To be or not to be'?

Michael: 'To be ...

Third Man: ... or not to be'?

Michael: 'All the world's ...

Second Woman: ... a stage'.

Michael: There are three theatres in Stratford, where you can see one of Shakespeare's plays almost every night of the year. This is the Swan Theatre, which is like a theatre from Shakespeare's day.

What kind of plays did William Shakespeare write? Well, he wrote thirty-nine plays. Some of them are comedies, for example, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *A Comedy of Errors*. They have happy endings. Others are stories from English history, for example, stories about the kings of England. They are very patriotic. Queen Elizabeth I often went to see them. And the others are tragedies, such as *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* – these are sad, dark stories of murder and revenge.

Horatio: *My Lord, it comes!*

Hamlet: *Angels and ministers of grace defend us.*

Ghost: *I am thy father's spirit.*

All of his plays are translated into many different languages and are famous all over the world.

Michael: Shakespeare died on his fifty-second birthday in 1616. He is buried here, in Holy Trinity Church, Stratford. But the characters in his plays are still with us today.

