



my homeschool

Year Ten

A Little Bit of
Shakespeare

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Introduction to Parents

While some parents happily embrace the inclusion of Shakespeare and his plays in their homeschools, others inwardly groan and worry about how they will read his words, let alone understand and enjoy them. Much is known about the value of including Shakespeare's plays and poems and many appreciate that it is a key aspect of English literature, yet few students feel as though they fully grasp his plays and can find the language and poetry difficult to understand.

Throughout the My Homeschool courses parents are encouraged to include Shakespeare plays and resources are also provided to help you read and enjoy some specific plays. This term we step away from reading just one play to look more broadly at Shakespeare and his contributions.

This term your teenager will become more familiar with The Bard. They will learn more about what Shakespearean England was really like to help them better appreciate what his audience was like, which, in turn, helps to give them a deeper understanding of the plays themselves. After all, one-third of Londoners attended the performances at the Globe, so knowing who they were and what they enjoyed is a key part of knowing Shakespeare. By working through ***A Little Bit of Shakespeare*** your teenager will also learn which plays were historical plays and which were tragedies or comedies, a grouping Shakespeare himself devised when printing his first folio. They will delve into the role and purpose of modern re-tellings (including how to pick a good one!) and, always remembering these were plays for the stage, discover some excellent modern reproductions. Moreover, your teenager will better understand the creative genius of this body of work and why it is still important that it is studied and enjoyed today. From classic lines to recite, memorable characters to meet, to famous scenes and endings, this overview is, just as its title suggests: *a little bit of Shakespeare*.

This resource has been created such that there is no need for you to purchase anything further. Your student will require access to the Complementary Links, but there is no need to buy another book. Rather, we've done all the hard work for you, selecting and collating portions from a range of authorities on Shakespeare, all designed to inspire your teenager in these dramatic literature arts. In addition, the family read aloud *An Introduction to Shakespeare* by Marchette Chute, complements this work. You will find a free link to this hard-to-find book and the reading allocations in your Weekly Planner.

Welcome to Students

Does it surprise you to learn that you are not, in fact, reading an entire Shakespeare play this term? Certainly you can if you wish, but for this term we are going to take a little look at many different aspects of The Bard. We will take a glimpse into Shakespearean England and inside the famous Globe Theatre. While we look at his poems and plays, we will do this with a broad view, considering the body of work as a whole and how it can be divided into comedies, tragedies, and historical plays. Since, after all, it was all about watching a play, we will do that too, as well as learn when we should pick up those shorter retellings rather than reading the entire play and why they were written.

For those of you looking to study English literature further, ***A Little Bit of Shakespeare*** will give you a good grounding on this one person who contributed so much to the English language and for those of you with a flair for the dramatic, please do put some portions of his work to memory and enjoy giving a recitation. There are so many little scenes that are just fabulous to put on as a play, so maybe you may be inspired to gather your homeschooled friends together, some simple costumes, and put on a Little Night of Shakespeare for your families and friends to enjoy The Bard too.

Next semester we will study a play penned by Shakespeare along with another play inspired by characters created by The Bard, but this term we are going to approach it a little differently. Think of it as a lush buffet: you can pick and choose from a range of delights, some of which you may absolutely love.

Enjoy sampling Shakespeare and all he has to offer and be sure to record your reflections and what you've learned at the end of each lesson. Notebook prompts are provided for you, but please also include what you feel is important to you too as you work through your Notebook entries.

Lesson 1: Shakespearean England and The Bard

What do you know of Shakespeare the man? Perhaps you recall that he was born in 1564 in Stratford-upon-Avon and died in 1616, and that Queen Elizabeth I enjoyed his plays as he was a playwright, poet, and actor during the Elizabethan and Jacobean eras. You will also know that he is arguably the greatest dramatist in the world and one of the finest poets in history. From enjoying his plays you will also know how brilliantly he made characters and scenes come alive and that he truly understood the human condition. Yet, probably what you will know the most about are the personalities of the characters in his plays, rather than knowing anything much of his own character. In *Echoes of Eden*, author Jerram Barrs writes:

What about William Shakespeare the man? There is not much that can be said with confidence, for Shakespeare was a very private man about whose life we know very little. What can we say? We know a bit about the family he was born into in Stratford, a line of information about his childhood and education, maybe three or four lines about his marriage and family, a paragraph about his personal life in London while he worked in the theater, and another very brief paragraph about his few years in Stratford after his retirement, when he worked on final manuscript versions of his plays...

We can speak with more confidence about Shakespeare's career in the theater. He was an actor, a member of a troupe of actors numbering about seven or eight men and a couple of boys (for the women's parts). This meant that Shakespeare would regularly take part in the plays that were being performed (he played the ghost in Hamlet, for example) while also writing new plays. He was a part-owner of a theater company, together with his fellow actors. This company built its own theater. It also put on plays each season before the royal court; for example, Twelfth Night was shown during the period after Christmas. The royal season lasted about two weeks, beginning on December 26, and four or five plays were performed during that time; there was another brief royal season at Lent with two or three plays performed.

The main work of the company was the two London seasons held each year, one in spring and the other in autumn. The company's practice was to present a different production each weekday afternoon and then to introduce a new play into their repertory every two weeks. This meant a vast amount of hard work for the actors, who were constantly learning new parts and playing several different roles at the same time. Shakespeare himself was always writing new plays at the same time as helping with the current productions.

These plays and their stage presentations had to be of good quality, for at the time about one third of the population in London attended the theaters. This was perhaps the best theater-educated audience that any group of actors has ever had to play before. They also had to be quality plays and presentations as there were several other competing companies offering their productions to this very discerning population. In addition to these seasons in London and at the royal court, the company traveled around the country during the summer, putting on their plays in rural cities.

To fill in some of those few personal details about William Shakespeare, we know that he was the son of John Shakespeare and his wife Mary (nee Arden). John was an affluent glove maker, tanner, and wool dealer and based in Stratford. Mary was the daughter of a successful farmer, growing up nearby. They had four daughters and four sons, William being the eldest of the sons. Around the time William was entering his teens, his father suffered financial difficulties and it is understood that William left school not long after this. During school it is believed that he received extensive tuition in Latin, evidenced by his plays in terms of writing and influence by classical drama, particularly Roman poetry and stories.

In 1582, William Shakespeare married Anne Hathaway. He was 18 years old and she was 26 years old. Like his mother, she was the daughter of a successful farmer. Anne's family home, known as Anne Hathaway's Cottage, still stands in Shottery and more information about this historic place can be found in the Complementary Links for this lesson. In 1594 Shakespeare became a founding member of the company named "Lord Chamberlain's Men", later renamed to "The King's Men" when James became King of England after the passing of Queen Elizabeth I. This company performed in Court more than any other company. They first performed in The Theatre and later at The Globe.

As noted by Barrs, there is little information about Shakespeare, causing some to refer to "the lost years" when there is no evidence or information about his life. There are some details of land that he purchased and possessed and evidence to suggest that, when he died in 1616, he was a wealthy man. He was buried at Holy Trinity Church in Stratford 25 April, 1616 and his widow, Anne, was buried beside him in 1623.

While his works have remained popular over hundreds of years and continue to be reinterpreted and performed, to fully appreciate Shakespeare's works it is crucial to go beyond key dates of his life and to understand life more generally during Shakespearean England. This was the era where Elizabeth I firmly established the Church of England, founded by her father, King Henry

VIII, and the time that Sir Francis Drake circumnavigated the globe. In economy and trade, the arts, extending colonies, and naval prowess, England was becoming very strong and had a preeminent position in the world. London was the centre of commerce and culture, and it was this London that Shakespeare was a part of. Today, nearly 9 million people live in London. During Shakespeare's time the population was around 200,000, having grown by over 400% during the 1500's. To better understand what London looked like at this time, please refer to the resource included in the Complementary Links, which includes observations from a Venetian envoy who, when describing the shops, particularly the goldsmith shops, of London remarked:

... that in all the shops in Milan, Rome, Venice, and Florence put together, I do not think there would be found so many of the magnificence that are to be seen in London

Along with frequenting these shops, residents liked to attend the theatre, watch bull and bear baiting, gamble, dance, and attend fairs for entertainment. This was a city alive with merchants, apprentices, poets, writers, actors, and artists and between the 1560's and 1620's nearly ten outdoor playhouses were built. The Elizabethan Era is considered to be akin to an English Renaissance and along with Shakespeare, other writers such as Christopher Marlowe, John Webster, Thomas Middleton, Ben Jonsson, and Thomas Dekker were also popular.

While the 45 years of Elizabeth's reign saw much English literature and poetry being penned, and the upper classes of the nobility and gentry still dominating the social structure, some aspects of society and culture were beginning to shift. The class of thriving merchants and apprentices started to expand, particularly in cloth, weaving, and textiles, which saw a change in both society and commerce. Remember, at this time in England your class determined how you could dress, where you could live, the kinds of jobs you could do, and the type of education your children could attain. While in court you could expect to see glittering gowns and displays of wealth and power, merchants lived comparatively quiet lives. However, they may aim to be elected as aldermen or even mayor of London, which did give them sufficient power to stand up against the monarch. For example, in 1593 the Mayor declared that the theatres should close on account of the plague in the city, while the Queen preferred them to stay open. These merchants supplied the drama companies with cloth and other supplies for their extensive costumes required for each play, as well as items for sets and props.

In London of Shakespeare's time wealthy merchants and nobles had riverside mansions and London was spreading fast in all directions. Bankside was

becoming London's main entertainment centre and was located on the south bank of the Thames River, while the old part of the city was north and still surrounded by medieval walls. It was a bustling, noisy, dirty and crowded place, with thousands of country people moving to this great city and a far cry from Stratford. This was the largest city in northern Europe and ten times bigger than any other English town.

Businessmen saw an opportunity to make some money from this influx in residents and their penchant for entertainment, building London's first playhouse, the Theatre, in 1576 and then, in 1577, the Curtain was built.

Notebook Entry

Please prepare a Notebook entry highlighting aspects of London during Shakespeare's time. Also include an overview of his life and add any key dates to your Book of Centuries. For those artistically inclined, you may like to include a drawing of Anne Hathaway's Cottage in your book.