

William Shakespeare's Background



A Fill in the Blank Exercise

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William Shakespeare's Background

William Shakespeare, who is often referred to as the **Bard**, which merely means poet, was born in the year **1564** in **Stratford-upon-Avon**, which is a town in **England**. William Shakespeare's dad **John Shakespeare** was a merchant. Because of his father's social standing. William was able to attend Stratford Grammar School until the age of fourteen for free.

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Here he studied Latin and Greek. Historians lose track of what happened to William Shakespeare after school until he marries **Anne Hathaway**. There is another time for which historians cannot account, these years are known as the "**lost years.**"



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William Shakespeare eventually leaves his family behind and arrives in **London** where he joins **Lord Chamberlain's Men**, a successful theater company.

This company changes its name to **The King's Men** in 1603. Shakespeare stays a member of this company until he **retires** in 1610. While in the company, Shakespeare made his living three ways: he was part owner of the **Globe** theatre, he was an **actor**, and he was a playwright. During this time very little **Scenery** was used on stage, but was accomplished by **Dialogue** or conversation between characters.



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Shakespeare was alive during the late **Renaissance**, which in England is referred to as the **Elizabethan** Era. This Era is named after Queen **Elizabeth I**, who was Britain's first female monarch. She was the daughter of Henry VIII, who had her mother's head chopped off for not producing a male child.

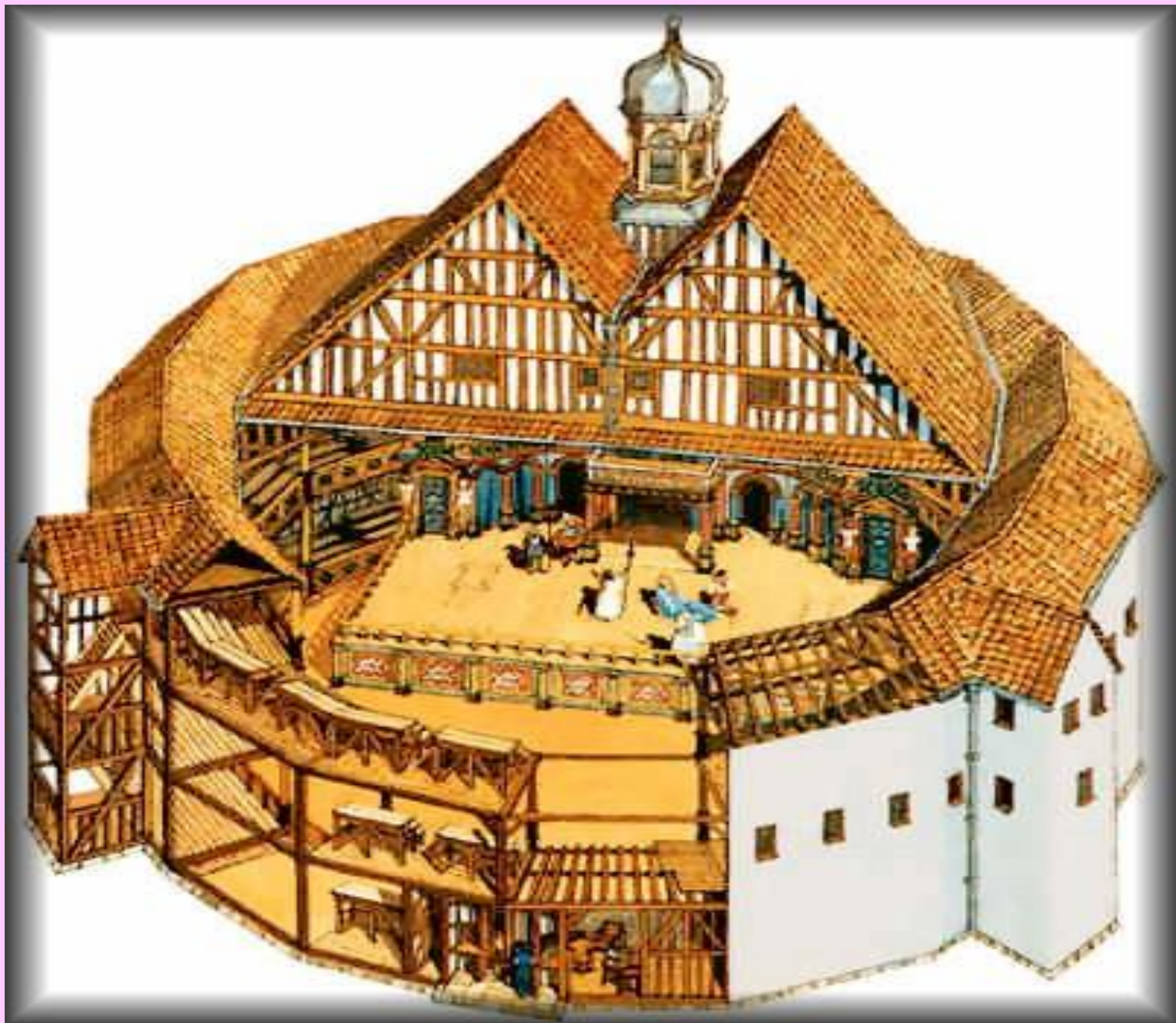
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Shakespeare and his fellow theatre colleagues were fortunate that the Queen enjoyed theatre because the theatres were constantly closed because of the **Bubonic Plague** and the queen was good about having the theatres reopened. Otherwise, some would have liked to see these theatres, such as the Globe, which held about 2,500 to 3,000 spectators, closed for good

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When we study William Shakespeare's plays, we usually categorize them into three genres: comedy, tragedy, and **history**. Shakespeare was well known for his **Word Play**, which is a technique that uses vocabulary that has more than one meaning. Romeo and Juliet, which was written in Shakespeare's early years, is considered a **tragedy**.





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Romeo and Juliet, however, is not an original story; Shakespeare retells a story that can be dated back to as early as fourth century Greece. Shakespeare uses a narrative poem called "Tragicall Historie of Romeus and Juliet," which is written by Arthur Brooke, to get most of his information for his play. Shakespeare sets his Romeo and Juliet in Verona, **Italy**.

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In **1599** the Burbage brothers, who were the first male actor's, built the Globe Theatre, of which William Shakespeare owned **ten** percent. This theatre, like most theatres, had a flag on the top of it, which indicated to people that there would be a play that day, the color of the flag would indicate the type of play. Plays were performed during the afternoon because they needed to take advantage of the **sunlight**.



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People called “**Groundlings**” sat in the cheap seats. Like all other theaters in Elizabethan England, it had only **Men** perform on stage because **women** were not allowed to act. Most Female roles were played by **adolescent boys**. Like all other theatres in Elizabethan England, it had only **men** perform on stage because **women** were not allowed to act.

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In 1613 the theatre burned down during a performance of Henry VIII. A canon was accidentally shot into the thatched roof and the whole theatre was set ablaze. The theatre was rebuilt in 1614 without Shakespeare, for he had retired. Shakespeare dies in **1616** at age 52. About 30 years later, Puritans assume power in England and have the theatre torn down.