

# Back to the Bard

Or all the things you never knew you wanted to know  
about William Shakespeare

# William Shakespeare (1564-1616)

- ◆ He wrote 38 plays and 154 sonnets
- ◆ Shakespeare is often referred to as an Elizabethan playwright, but most of his plays were written in the Jacobean period.
- ◆ English Renaissance theatre may be said to encompass Elizabethan theatre from 1562 to 1603, Jacobean theatre from 1603 to 1625, and Caroline theatre from 1625 to 1642 when a ban was placed on the theatres.
- ◆ Shakespeare lived through an outbreak of the bubonic plague in London (1524-94) and 1609. The plague also came to Stratford, when Shakespeare was just 3 months old

- ◆ Shakespeare worked as an actor, writer and co-owner of a drama company called the 'Lord Chamberlain's Men' - Later known as the King's Men.
- ◆ In 1599, the company built their own theatre, The Globe on the south bank of the River Thames.
- ◆ Around 1580, when both the Theatre and the Curtain were full on summer days, the total theatre capacity of London was about 5000 spectators.
- ◆ The acting companies functioned on a repertory system: unlike modern productions that can run for months or years on end, the troupes of this era rarely acted the same play two days in a row.

# DID YOU KNOW?

- ◆ His father was an ale tester
- ◆ Upon his death, the only thing he left his wife in the will was the second best bed in the house
- ◆ Two of his plays have been translated into Klingon, the fantasy language of Star Trek
- ◆ One of Shakespeare's plays has been completely lost to history. There is evidence that he wrote a play called Cardenio which was performed in England, but no known copy of the play exists.

# THE WORK

- ◆ Comedies – All's well that Ends Well, Much Ado About Nothing, Troilus and Cressida
- ◆ Histories – Henry V, Richard II & III, King John
- ◆ Tragedies – Romeo and Juliet, Hamlet, Titus Andronicus
- ◆ We can also separate out Roman plays and late plays, if we want...

# Words, words, words

- ◆ Legacy of language - heart of gold, wild goose chase, foregone conclusion, in a pickle, elbow room, tower of strength, wild-goose chase
- ◆ He contributed 1,700 words to the English language because he was the first author to write them down. No dictionaries yet.
- ◆ The plays were written in Verse and prose.
- ◆ Verse: structured poetic way of writing. Set syllables per line, can tell it is verse from the choppy way it appears on the page. ie. Iambic Pentameter
- ◆ Prose: unstructured text that does not have a set rhythm. Appears as a full block of text on the page

- ◆ Watch [https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=301&v=EeM1qUQ9nY&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=301&v=EeM1qUQ9nY&feature=emb_logo)
- ◆ Try the de-dum exercise with the quotes on the next page.
- ◆ Further listening - Michael Pennington talking about poetic language - <https://www.rsc.org.uk/shakespeare/language/>

- ◆ Why, thou clay brained guts, thou knotty pated fool, thou whoreson obscene greasy tallow catch!
- ◆ Villain, I have done thy mother
- ◆ I do wish thou were a dog, that I might love thee something.
- ◆ Thou hast no more brain than I have in mine elbows.
- ◆ Thou art as fat as butter.
- ◆ A most notable coward, an infinite and endless liar, an hourly promise breaker, the owner of no one good quality.
- ◆ Thou art a boil. A plague sore, an embossed carbuncle
- ◆ I do desire we may be better strangers
- ◆ You have such a February face, so full of frost, of storm and cloudiness
- ◆ Out of my sight, thou dost infect my eyes



Try 'To be or not to be, that is the question'.  
What do you notice about the iambic pentameter?

On the next slide, look at how Shakespeare uses  
shared verse in Romeo and Juliet. What's the effect?

ROMEO

Have not saints lips, and holy palmers too?

JULIET

Ay, pilgrim, lips that they must use in prayer.

ROMEO

O, then, dear saint, let lips do what hands do.  
They pray; grant thou, lest faith turn to despair.

JULIET

Saints do not move, though grant for prayers' sake

ROMEO

Then move not, while my prayer's effect I take.



Photograph: Simon Annand



Photograph: John Trammer



Photograph: John Trammer



Photograph: John Trammer

Describe what you see in each picture?  
What is the connection?

# Original Practices

- ◆ This is a term used to describe a production that explores methods used in Elizabethan or Jacobean theatre. Strictly speaking, the term Original Practices defines a particular approach used by the Globe when Mark Rylance was Artistic Director.
- ◆ These practices include:
  - ◆ costume
  - ◆ pronunciation
  - ◆ use of authentic musical instruments and sound effects
  - ◆ all-male companies

# Modern Interpretations

- ◆ Numerous films based on plays:- West Side Story, 10 Things I Hate About You, My Own Private Idaho
- ◆ Numerous film versions of the plays:- Luhrmann's R and J, Ralph Fiennes's Coriolanus (set in Serbia)





# Brainstorm exercise

- ◆ Discuss ideas for a modern interpretation of a Shakespeare play
- ◆ What themes would you highlight?
- ◆ What theatrical style would you use?
- ◆ How could you use costume, set, music?
- ◆ How can delivery of the text help?