

Introduction to Shakespeare

Context

Likely the most influential writer in all of English literature and certainly the most important playwright of the English Renaissance, William Shakespeare was born in 1564 in the town of Stratford-upon-Avon in Warwickshire, England. The son of a successful middle-class glove-maker, Shakespeare attended grammar school, but his formal education proceeded no further. In 1582, he married an older woman, Anne Hathaway, and had three children with her. Around 1590 he left his family behind and traveled to London to work as an actor and playwright. Public and critical success quickly followed, and Shakespeare eventually became the most popular playwright in England and part owner of the Globe Theatre. His career bridged the reigns of Elizabeth I (ruled 1558-1603) and James I (ruled 1603-1625); he was a favorite of both monarchs. Indeed, James granted Shakespeare's company the greatest possible compliment by endowing them with the status of king's players. Wealthy and renowned, Shakespeare retired to Stratford, and died in 1616 at the age of fifty-two. At the time of Shakespeare's death, such luminaries as Ben Jonson hailed him as the apogee of Renaissance theatre. Shakespeare's sonnets are very different from Shakespeare's plays, but they do contain dramatic elements and an overall sense of story. Each of the poems deals with a highly personal theme, and each can be taken on its own or in relation to the poems around it. The sonnets have the feel of autobiographical poems, but we don't know whether they deal with real events or not, because no one knows enough about Shakespeare's life to say whether or not they deal with real events and feelings, so we tend to refer to the voice of the sonnets as "the speaker"—as though he were a dramatic creation like Hamlet or King Lear.

Themes / Ideas

Romance

Love

Key Vocab

Blank Verse
Couplet
Elizabethan
Iambic Pentameter
Prose
Quatrain
Sonnet
Stagecraft
Stanza
Volta

Reading

Retrieve, Interpret, Infer, Consider
Analyse Methods (language)

Writing

Leaflet: Instruct / Advise
Story: Narrate - (YR7 EXAM HT6)
Prepositions, Conjunctions
Sentences: Clauses (subordinating and coordinating)

Assessment

HT5: Reading: Analyse 1 x Sonnet (method, theme, context)
HT6: Writing: Story: Narrate - (YR7 EXAM HT6)
HT5/6: Spoken English: Presentation

SHAKE-SPEAKES

SONNETS.

Neuer before Imprinted.

AT LONDON
By *G. Eld* for *T. T.* and are
to be sold by *William Aspley*.
1609.