

Shakespeare's early life

[Literature](#), [William Shakespeare](#)



Although we have many records of his life as a citizen of Stratford, including marriage and birth certificates, little is known about William Shakespeare's early life and formal education. Due to his success, many would assume that Shakespeare was born and raised in a wealthy noble family but he was actually raised in what would have been considered a middle class family in their time. He was born to middle class parents who lived in Henley Street, Stratford. His father, John, a local businessman made a living as a glove maker and owned his own leather shop.

He was a well-known and much respected man that held several important local governmental positions including that of Borough ale-taster to bailiff, the highest public position of office in Stratford. William spent most of his childhood in the small English town of Stratford-upon-Avon. In the sixteenth century, the town was an important agricultural center and market place. " It is safe to assume that Shakespeare attended the local grammar school that was built and maintained expressly for the purpose of educating the sons of prominent citizens with the sons of burgesses attending free.

" The King's New School was staffed with a faculty of teachers who held Oxford degrees, and whose curriculum included mathematics, natural sciences, Latin language and rhetoric, logic, Christian ethics, and classical literature. " 2 As well as a strong grounding at grammar school, the other significant educational opportunity afforded all middle-class Elizabethans was the mandatory attendance at church where they read either the Geneva or the Bishops' Bible. The 'Authorized' or King James Bible was not studied by William, as it was not published until the year 1611.

Shakespeare did not continue his education and attend the university, since university education was reserved for prospective clergymen and was not a particularly mind-opening experience. However, the education he received at grammar school was excellent, as evidenced by the numerous classical and literary references in his plays. More impressive than his formal education, however, is the wealth of general knowledge exhibited in his works, from a working knowledge of many professions to a vocabulary that is far greater than any other English writer.

William Shakespeare married his wife, twenty-six year old Anne Hathaway, at the age of eighteen. Their first daughter, Susanna, was baptized only six months later, which has given rise to much speculation concerning the circumstances surrounding the marriage. In 1585, twins, Hamnet and Judith Shakespeare, were born to the couple. Hamnet died at the young age of eleven by which time Shakespeare had already become a successful playwright. Around 1589, Shakespeare wrote his first play, Henry VI, Part 1. Sometime between his marriage and writing this play, he and his wife moved to London, where he pursued a career as a playwright and actor.

In London, he formed an acting company in which he was shareholder, actor, and playwright. " 1 In 1594 Shakespeare became a charter member of The Lord Chamberlain's Men, a group of actors who later changed their name to The King's Men when they gained the sponsorship of King James I. Just a few years later he was considered the " principal comedian" for the troupe and then later became the " principal tragedian. " Despite the fact that during

this time acting and playwriting were not considered noble professions; successful and prosperous actors were relatively well respected.

Shakespeare was, in fact, very successful in his career and he became quite wealthy in the process. He invested his money in Stratford real estate and was able to purchase the second largest house in Stratford, the New Place, for his parents. In 1596, Shakespeare applied for a coat of arms for his family, in effect making himself into a gentleman, and his daughters married successfully and wealthily. William Shakespeare lived until 1616 while his wife Anna died in 1623 at the age of sixty-seven. He was buried in the chancel of his church at Stratford.

While Shakespeare is best known for his plays, he also wrote some of the most beautiful sonnets ever produced in the English language. " His sonnets employ-and occasionally mock-such traditional Petrarchan themes as blind devotion, the value of friendship, and love" s enslaving power. " 1 Together Shakespeare" s plays and sonnets have had an enormous influence on the development of the Modern English language. More famous than his sonnets, Shakespeare" s plays constitute the most significant corpus of dramatic literature in the world.

Secular drama was Renaissance England" s most original contribution to the humanistic tradition. Shakespeare took the plots for most of his plays from classical history, medieval chronicles, and contemporary romances, but he used such stories merely as springboards for the exploration of human nature-the favorite pursuit of all Renaissance humanists. " 1 Love, sex, jealousy, greed, ambition, and self-deception are among the definitive

human experiences Shakespeare examined in his plays. It can be concluded that Shakespeare's drama is the first Western Literature to probe the psychological focus that motivates human action.

His plays communicate a profound knowledge of the wellsprings of human behavior as revealed in his masterful characterizations of a wide gamut of humanity. The skillful use of poetic and dramatic means to create a unified aesthetic effect out of a multiplicity of vocal expressions and actions is recognized as an achievement unequalled in other literature. Finally, Shakespeare's employment of poetry within the plays to express the deepest levels of human motivation in relation to individual, social, and universal situations is considered one of the most astounding accomplishments of the human intellect.