

A brief history of the audience: shakespeare theatre essay sample

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In Elizabethan times, the theater was a popular source of entertainment. People from all social and economic backgrounds would come to London to enjoy the plays. Inside the theater, conditions were crowded and, by today's standards, very uncomfortable. Still, people would come from all over to be entertained and celebrate.

Most playgoers were craftspeople and merchants, but audiences were often a diverse representation of English society, from noblemen to beggars. Plays appealed to many people because they were inexpensive but entertaining. Poorer people would pay one penny for the right to stand in front of the stage and watch the performance. They were called "groundlings", and were notorious for their rudeness. If a play was bad, or a scene was proceeding too slow, the groundlings would yell at the actors and throw food at them. Theater owners would tolerate them because they accounted for most of the theater's income.

A person could pay two or three pennies for a seat in the galleries. These were slightly more comfortable than ground privileges because one could sit down, but people were still crammed together, shoulder to shoulder. Many people would use this as an opportunity to flirt, while others just fidgeted throughout the play.

The most annoying theatergoers were called "gallants". Fashionable and rich young men would pay six pennies to be able to sit on stools on the stage during the play. It is not known how the practice of sitting on the stage originated, but it is certain that the upper class enjoyed far more privileges than the average person. While on the stage the gallants would talk loudly

and play games without caring if the audience could see past or hear beyond them.

In conclusion, people came from all over to enjoy the Elizabethan theater. Although class distinctions remained, especially in the seating arrangements, the playhouse was one place where thieves and prostitutes could enjoy a show in the midst of nobility.