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### **SHAKESPEARE'S LIFE**

Many of the facts about the life of Shakespeare are hazy at best. It is through historical documentation that we do know many key pieces of information. However there are large gaps in our knowledge of Shakespeare and his life. Academics have written many books trying to fill in these gaps of knowledge and the information contained here is a summation of this, the knowledge gained through anecdotes and historical context where factual evidence lacks. William Shakespeare was born in April 1564 to Mary and John Shakespeare, in Stratford-upon-Avon. He was their first son, but their third child and was baptised on 26th April 1564. Most scholars take the date of 23rd April as his actual birth day, though this may be because it is exactly 52 years to his death and St. George's Day. While William's early life has little

record, his family as a whole was well known in Stratford-upon-Avon. His father worked with leather goods and eventually became involved in local government, eventually becoming a town councilor and having a coat of arms. While a prominent family, they also probably had Catholic sympathies; which was an important fact, a potential difficulty in the new Protestant England. As his family had some importance in the town, Shakespeare probably attended Stratford Grammar School and he helped in the family leather business.

The first real record of William Shakespeare himself is of his marriage to Anne Hathaway when he was eighteen in 1582. She was eight years older than him and even more importantly three months pregnant when they married. He had three children in the 3 years, Susanna and the twins Hamnet and Judith. What happened in the next seven years is unknown but he surfaced in London in 1592.

In 1592 Shakespeare is described as an upstart Crow of an actor by Robert Greene. He also starts to gain some notice as both a performer and a writer, including his play trilogy Henry VI (Parts I, II and III). Between 1592 and 1598 he gained in status as a playwright, while continuing to perform in plays as part of the Lord Chamberlain's Men. He averaged writing about two full plays a year. In 1599 the Globe Theatre was re-erected and Shakespeare was listed as one of ten "housekeepers", or shareowners. As he was already a shareholder in another theatre, he started to earn a good sized income on top of the money he made writing plays

and performing. This is reflected in the property he started to purchase back in Stratford-upon-Avon. Around 1600, having mainly written comedies and history plays, Shakespeare started to write the great tragedy plays such as 'Julius Caesar' and 'Hamlet'.

Even the comedies he wrote after this time are so dark that it is hard to realise at times they are defined as comedies (such as 'Measure for Measure'). It was in 1601 that William Shakespeare's father died and whether this was a part of the reason for Shakespeare's change in writing. Another factor might be that Shakespeare wanted to be respected more as a playwright and tragedies were seen as being more important than comedies. However, Shakespeare became even more financially secure when his theatre company became funded by the new King James I (James VI of Scotland) and renamed the company the King's Men. He wrote 'Macbeth' for the King who had had an attempted assassination in 1605, a day that is still remembered through Guy Fawkes.

Around 1608 Shakespeare changed direction in writing, and focused more on romance. He also started to share writing with John Fletcher who it is thought co-wrote 'Henry VIII' and 'The Two Noble Kinsman'. By 1611 Shakespeare had returned to Stratford upon-Avon. While we know little about Shakespeare in his final years, he was fifty-two when he died in April 1616. Seven years later the 'First Folio' was published containing thirty-six plays of Shakespeare, many being published for

the first time. Although there have been question as to whether Shakespeare actually wrote the plays or not, what is important is that we currently attribute authorship to Shakespeare. There are many texts that discuss this that students can research if they want.

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