

## Homework

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### 2. Why study Shakespeare?

Shakespeare's influence stretches well beyond the world of literature, reaching all the fields of art, from the cinema to the advertising. Shakespeare is a personality known by rather everybody, since his works and his life are a certain objects of study at school.

What are the reasons why we still study texts written a long time ago? In my opinion, texts written a long time ago are important to understand the present. Indeed "classics" are those texts that deal with problems that don't interest only a specific context or chronological period.

What are the factors that may affect the reading of a text? There are a lot of factors that may interest the reading of a text, for example the chronological period and the social context where the text has been written; but also the specific social position and the experiences of the writer, and many others. To sum up, a text is the result of the encounter of many factors.

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1. Shakespeare is at the centre of the English culture. He is the only compulsory author on nation curricula. His plays are considered the greatest literary texts and he is the best teacher of values. Indeed, he is seen as a font of wisdom and a source of truth about human behavior. Because of this, the play-writer is present both in our language and in our lives.

2. Shakespeare is everywhere in british life. He is quoted in newspaper and adapted in advertising. there is a national theatre company named after him which regularly committed to the revival of his works. Moreover, when you enter Warwickshire you can find a sign saying "Warwickshire: Shakespeare's country".

3. The reason why someone should study Shakespeare's works are summed up in the motto "Shakespeare is not of an age, but for all time" written by Ben Jonson (1572-1637). Shakespeare is the best teacher of values, and he is seen as a font of wisdom and a source of truth about human behavior, both good and bad. That is the reason why everyone can find his own values reflected in Shakespeare.

4. Some of the new ideas about how to approach Shakespeare's works belong to the cultural materialists, critics and thinkers who are mainly interest in the way material factors, like economic conditions and politic struggles, have influenced or even created a text.

1. Family:

William Shakespeare: born on April 23<sup>rd</sup> 1564 in Stratford-upon-Avon; dead on April 23<sup>rd</sup> 1616 in Stratford

Father: successful tradesman who met financial difficulties

Mother: Mary Arden

Wife: Anne Hathaway married in 1682

Education: grammar school in Stratford-upon-Avon

Experiences:

1584: went to London where he first experienced the playhouse

1593: London theatres closed because of the plague and Shakespeare found support in a young nobleman, the Earl of Southampton. When the theatres reopened he became the main playwright of the most successful company of actors in London: the Lord Chamberlain's men.

1599: his company built the Globe Theatre.

First works:

1590 - 1596 Shakespeare wrote historical dramas

1593 - 1600 Shakespeare wrote ten comedies.

Later works:

1595 - 1605 he wrote the great tragedies.

1. What do you think London was like in the 16<sup>th</sup> century?

In the 16<sup>th</sup> century London was a great crossroads, thanks to an active commercial system and to the high techniques of navigation. The city was a dynamic city, inhabited by people of different social classes. London was a really various city, on one hand it was a city of spectacle but on the other hand, in narrow roads, you could see the filthy and hidden part of London.

4.

1 In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, London had spread north of the Thames.

2 Evidence of the traditional trades can still be seen in street names.

3 What was the Londoners' attitude towards the theatre at that time? It was popular with all Londoners.

4 Elizabeth theatres were situated along the south bank of the river.

5 Boy companies at Shakespeare's time were more successful than adult companies.

6 Why was London such a dreadful place to live in at that time? Because it was particularly unhealthy.

7 Why were the London acting companies unwelcome in other towns? Because they might be carrying disease.

8 Overall, London in the 16<sup>th</sup> century could be considered unhealthy and overcrowded.

## 5. Description of the Elizabethan playhouse

Architecture: round or octagonal shape, 12 meters high, diameter of 25 meters, able to seat 3000 people

Structural elements: a rectangular stage; a central area ('the pit'); three roofed tiers of gallery occupied either by the audience and by the musicians; a trap door; the stage machinery; the actors' tiring house at the rear of the stage.

Scenery: there was no scenery.

Scenes: the action was continuous; a scene ended with all actors' exit by the stage; there was a continuity of performance with no break of illusion.

Actors: actors constantly rehearsed new plays and a trained actor was able to improvise; female roles were acted by boys.

The audiences:

Queen Elizabeth I loved watching plays, but these were generally performed in indoor playhouse for her pleasure. She would not be attended the plays performed at the playhouses such as the Globe. The upper-class nobles would have paid for the better seats in the 'Lord's rooms', paying 5p for the privilege. The 'groundlings' were the standing members of the audience. For one penny, that was the price of a loaf of bread, they could stand in the open yard. They used to put the money in a box at the theatre entrance, hence the term 'box office'. The gentry would pay to sit in the galleries, often using cushions for comfort. Rich nobles could watch the play from a chair set on the side of the stage itself. The crowd of spectators ate and drank during the performance and freely expressed their emotions. They loved metaphor and extremes and they deeply moved during long speeches and soliloquies. Horror, macabre scenes and revenge tragedies were really popular, as comedies as history plays where heroic deeds, battles and weapons evoked strong feelings. People used to applaud any notable event during the play, but it was only at the end that they could be really noisy. There was often a 'jig', a comic song and dance story, and the company would announce the next play in the repertoire. The audience would show their approval or disapproval of the choice by calling it, whistling and even throwing things.