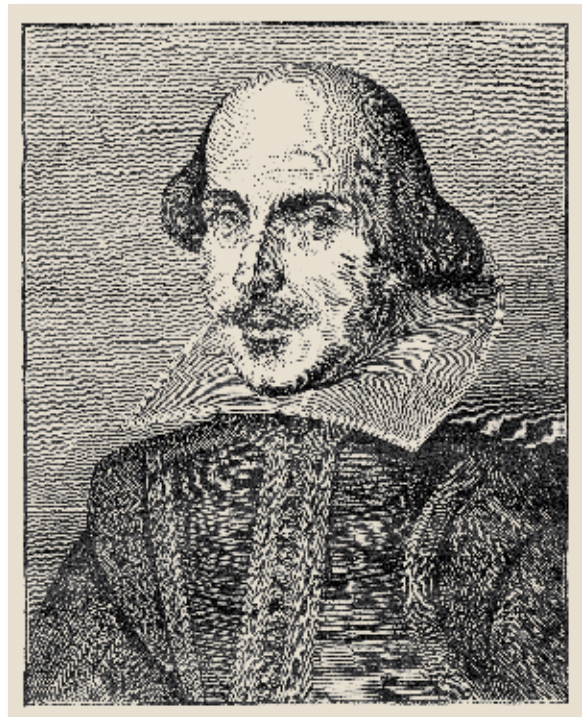


# William Shakespeare

## Before you read

### 1 How much do you know about William Shakespeare? Do this quiz to find out.

- 1 William Shakespeare wrote 154 plays. \_\_\_\_\_
- 2 Shakespeare was also a businessman. \_\_\_\_\_
- 3 He was tall, dark and handsome. \_\_\_\_\_
- 4 He wrote plays with other people. \_\_\_\_\_
- 5 He studied at Cambridge University. \_\_\_\_\_
- 6 He wrote a lot about poor people. \_\_\_\_\_



## Reading

### 2 Now read the text below and check your answers.

**William Shakespeare** (1564-1616) is the greatest writer in the English language and the world's greatest dramatist. His works consist of about 38 plays, 154 sonnets, two long narrative poems and several other poems. His plays have been translated into every major living language and are performed more often than those of any other playwright.

Shakespeare was born and raised in Stratford-upon-Avon. At the age of 18, he married Anne Hathaway, with whom he had three children: Susanna and the twins Hamnet and Judith. Between 1585 and 1592, he left Stratford and began a successful career in London as an actor, writer and businessman.

He wrote comedies, histories and tragedies until about 1608, including *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, *Othello* and *Macbeth* considered some of the finest works in the English language. In his last phase, he wrote romances, and worked with other playwrights, writing plays with John Fletcher. He retired to Stratford around 1613, where he died three years later.

Few facts of Shakespeare's private life survive, and we are not sure about his physical appearance, personality and religious beliefs. Many people believe this man did not write the 'Shakespeare' plays. According to people who believe somebody else wrote the works of Shakespeare, the 'man from Stratford' was ignorant and illiterate. We have no evidence that he went to school and he certainly did not go to University. Where did he get his incredible learning from?

The author of the plays shows detailed knowledge of court politics and aristocratic culture, foreign countries, and aristocratic sports such as hunting, falconry, tennis and bowling. The works are written from an aristocratic point of view and show little sympathy for common people.

Finally, Shakespeare's will does not mention anything about the life of a writer. It makes no mention of personal papers, books, poems, or plays. When the man from Stratford died, nobody said anything about his death.



### 3 Read the text again and write T (true) or F (false).


- 1 Shakespeare was a poet and a playwright. \_\_\_\_\_
- 2 Shakespeare went to London to get married. \_\_\_\_\_
- 3 Shakespeare's last plays were tragedies. \_\_\_\_\_
- 4 We know a lot about Shakespeare's life. \_\_\_\_\_
- 5 Shakespeare went to the best universities. \_\_\_\_\_
- 6 Shakespeare wrote a lot about the aristocracy. \_\_\_\_\_

**4** You are going to listen to Hamlet's famous soliloquy. Before you listen translate these words.

- 1  noble \_\_\_\_\_
- 2  sling \_\_\_\_\_
- 3  arrow \_\_\_\_\_
- 4  outrageous \_\_\_\_\_
- 5  heir \_\_\_\_\_
- 6  perchance \_\_\_\_\_

**5**  **8**  **P** Listen and complete the gaps in this famous soliloquy from Hamlet.

To be, or not to be, that is the question:  
 Whether 'tis nobler in the (1) \_\_\_\_\_ to suffer  
 The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,  
 Or to take arms against a (2) \_\_\_\_\_ of troubles,  
 And by opposing end them? To die, to sleep,  
 No more; and by a sleep to say we (3) \_\_\_\_\_  
 The heart-ache, and the thousand natural shocks  
 That (4) \_\_\_\_\_ is heir to: 'tis a consummation  
 Devoutly to be wished. To die, to sleep;  
 To sleep, perchance to (5) \_\_\_\_\_ – ay, there's the rub.

**6**  **9** Now listen to a lecturer explaining the soliloquy and complete these sentences.

- 1 The most famous words in English literature are: \_\_\_\_\_.
- 2 Hamlet is not talking about his death but about \_\_\_\_\_ in general.
- 3 The speech is about you and \_\_\_\_\_.
- 4 The verb 'be' is in the infinitive; it is very \_\_\_\_\_.
- 5 Hamlet avoids words like 'suicide' and '\_\_\_\_\_':
- 6 Hamlet compares dying to \_\_\_\_\_.
- 7 We can describe Hamlet as a \_\_\_\_\_ character.

**STUDY SKILLS**

**Understanding classic literature**

Shakespeare and other classic writers use words that we no longer use or whose meaning has changed:

- *outrageous* here means 'fierce', 'violent'; today, it means 'shocking', 'unusual';
- *devoutly* here means 'very seriously'; today devout means 'religious', 'enthusiastic';
- *perchance* means 'perhaps', but today it is not used at all in English;
- *rub* here means 'problem', 'obstacle'; it's only used in this meaning today in literature;
- *ay* here means 'yes, indeed'; today it's not used.

**7** Now guess the meaning of the underlined words.

- 1 Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo?  
*(Romeo and Juliet)*  
 a where      b why
- 2 A good deed in a naughty world.  
*(Merchant of Venice)*  
 a horrible      b behaving badly

**Speaking**

**8** A friend of yours who missed the lecture about Hamlet. Using the notes below, explain the main points about the lecture.



*famous speech – famous words about life, existence  
 simple words  
 general questions – not only about Hamlet  
 use of metaphors and images: slings and arrows,  
 sea of troubles  
 death = sleep  
 Hamlet: mysterious character*

**Writing**

**9** Take notes about an author that you like. Use the questions below to help you.

- What is the name of the author?
- Which are his/her most famous books?
- Where was he/she born?
- What do we know about his/her education?
- What do we know about his/her childhood?
- What do we know about his/her family?
- What kind of things does he/she write about?

**10** Use the answers to the questions above to write a Wikipedia entry (about 200 words) for your author. Use the reading text as a model.

