

## A Little about Shakespeare

Is knowing about William Shakespeare important in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century or is it *Much Ado About Nothing* (the title of one of his famous plays)? William Shakespeare lived in England from 1564 until his death in 1616. Shakespeare did not come from a prominent family; his father was a glovemaker. As was typical of the times, Shakespeare left school at age fifteen and began working for his father.



Shakespeare married when he was eighteen and ten years later he was making a living as a well-known actor and playwright in the London theatre. The plays he wrote were hugely successful in his lifetime. Thirty-eight of his plays are published today, nearly 400 years after they were written and first performed. Experts expect that Shakespeare wrote more plays but copies no longer exist. Since the plays were new, only copies for the actors were made. Many historical records and copies of plays were destroyed when the theatre Shakespeare worked with burned in 1613.

Shakespeare's thirty-eight existing plays fall into several major categories. The histories are based upon historical events focused on kings, wars and power struggles among the ruling class of England. Three historical plays are known as the Roman plays because they are about rulers of Ancient Rome; one play is entitled *Julius Caesar* and another is *Antony and Cleopatra*.

Twelve of Shakespeare's plays are classified as comedies. These comedies are not like the light-hearted comedy movies we watch today. Shakespeare's comedies utilize mistaken identity, love at first sight, or some form of trickery as the comedic theme but also contain tragic parts set in complicated plots. The comedies are still performed frequently, especially for summertime theatres.

The tragedies are Shakespeare's most powerful works; each tragedy centers around one major character who has a fatal human flaw like jealousy or pride. *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, and *Romeo and Juliet* continue to be favorites even now. Actors and actresses find it a challenge to play these well-known characters.

Shakespeare remains popular because his plays center on the flaws of human nature and timeless conflicts.