

Macbeth**Informational Text: Author Biography*****William Shakespeare***

William Shakespeare is widely believed to have been the greatest playwright in history. His plays are continually produced and students around the world read his works in school. Shakespeare is known for his ability to depict the depth of human character and for his skill in illustrating issues to which, for hundreds of years, people around the world can relate.

Shakespeare's father, John Shakespeare, was a wealthy business owner and active citizen of Stratford-upon-Avon in England. He married Shakespeare's mother, Mary Arden, in 1557, and William was born on April 23, 1564.

During the sixteenth century, waves of the Black Plague ravaged England and William was lucky to have survived. Two of his sisters, Joan and Margaret, died from the affliction. William's younger brother, Gilbert, fortunately escaped the deadly epidemic and had a long and successful career as a tradesman. Later, John and Mary Shakespeare had four more children: Joan (named after their firstborn), Anne (who died at age eight), Richard, and Edmund, who eventually followed in William's footsteps as an actor.

Shakespeare began his education at the age of six or seven at the Stratford grammar school, known as the King's New School of Stratford-upon-Avon. His lessons were primarily in Latin, but William also likely learned in English. Shakespeare was taken out of school at about the age of thirteen, due to his father's financial problems at this time. It is believed that William continued his studies on his own, however, educating himself as much as possible. The events of William's life between the age of thirteen and when he emerged in London as an actor, is generally unknown. However, it is recorded that in 1582, at the age of eighteen he married Anne Hathaway, who was eight years older than him and pregnant at the time.

Shakespeare's first child, Susanna, was born in 1583. In 1585, twins Hamnet and Judith were born. In 1596, Hamnet died of unknown causes. The loss was said to have affected William deeply. Shakespeare's grief and loss is said to be expressed in his writing.

Little is known about Shakespeare's life during the years of 1585 to 1592, before he appeared as an actor in London. It is believed he spent this time perfecting his craft as an actor and playwright. By 1592, Shakespeare was already an established and respected actor in London. Productions of *Henry IV* and *The Comedy of Errors* were performed by Pembroke's Men, a popular acting troupe who often performed for

Name _____ Period _____

Queen Elizabeth. In 1594, Shakespeare joined another acting troupe, Lord Chamberlain's Men, and it was while he was with this group that Shakespeare wrote *Romeo and Juliet*, *Richard II*, *King John*, and others.

Although Shakespeare was never wealthy, he lived a comfortable life, buying a home in Stratford in 1597. He became part-owner of the most popular theater in London, the Globe Theater, in 1599, and the Blackfriars Theater in 1603. Shakespeare continued to act until 1613, when he returned to Stratford to retire. Shakespeare is believed to have died on April 23, 1616, exactly 52 years to the day of his birth.

Comprehension Check: Author Biography

Directions: Answer the following questions using complete sentences on a separate piece of paper.

1. When and where was William Shakespeare born?
2. Write an original thesis statement that best summarizes the article.
3. How old was Shakespeare when he married Anne Hathaway? Why might his marriage be considered controversial?
4. Rewrite the following paragraph to improve cohesion and logic:
Shakespeare's first child, Susanna, was born in 1583. In 1585, twins Hamnet and Judith were born. In 1596, Hamnet died of unknown causes. The loss was said to have affected William deeply. Shakespeare's grief and loss is said to be expressed in his writing.
5. Besides writing plays, what else did Shakespeare do in London?
6. What is significant about the date of Shakespeare's death?
7. Does this article primarily contain *facts* or *opinions*? How do you know?
8. How is the information in this article arranged: problem/solution, cause/effect, compare/contrast, or chronological? How can you tell?
9. If you were given an assignment to find out more information about the life of William Shakespeare, what 3 questions would you like to find answers for in your research?
10. Some critics believe that author biographies are sometimes helpful in understanding what a person wrote. Many other critics, however, feel that an author's life should not be brought into the analysis of a piece of literature. In other words, they feel we do not need to know about Shakespeare in order to understand or appreciate *Macbeth* or any of his other works. Do you feel it is important to know an author's life history in order to understand his work? Explain your response.