

## High School English Assignment, Week of October 22

### The Renaissance, Shakespeare and Sonnets!

1. Read "The Life and Times of William Shakespeare" carefully, annotating and demonstrating your thought process as you read.
2. Complete the note-taking chart thoroughly
3. Write a first draft of a sonnet, following directions and examples. The sonnet should be on the subject of love, friendship, honor, or some other virtuous quality.

Remember the iambic pentameter, and the rhyming scheme:

A  
B  
A  
B  
C  
D  
C  
D  
E  
F  
E  
F  
G  
G

# The Life and Times of William Shakespeare



Shakespeare's plays do not reveal much about him as a person. Since the plots are so varied and deal with a myriad of social and political issues, Shakespeare's actual views remain elusive and mysterious.

Shakespeare's birthday is recognized as April 23, 1564. He was born in the small English town of Stratford-upon-Avon. The town's name developed because Stratford was nestled next to the River Avon. Shakespeare's father, John, was a successful Stratford glove maker who dealt in leather goods; and his mother, Mary Arden, came from a wealthy Catholic family.

Not much is known about Shakespeare until his marriage to Anne Hathaway in 1582. He was 18 and she was 26. During their marriage, they had three children—Susanna, born in 1583, and the twins Judith and Hamnet, born in 1585.

From 1585 to 1592, no official records exist on Shakespeare. But by the age of 28, he had moved to London and become an actor with a small company of players. Even as he became a successful playwright, he continued to act in his own and others' plays. Between 1589 and 1594, Shakespeare's first plays, *Henry VI*, *Titus Andronicus*, and *The Comedy of Errors*, were a huge success in the London theatre circuit. Shakespeare soon made a name for himself and attained instant popularity.

London was a very exciting place during Shakespeare's time. Elizabeth I was queen when he began his career. English ships ruled the seas, and English explorers were claiming territories as far away as America and the Far East. Shakespeare incorporated much of the excitement, mystery, and adventure of this time period into his work. Unfortunately, in the early 1590s, the plague in London led to the closing of all the theatres. During this time, Shakespeare began writing poetry, including his famous sonnets. This poetry demonstrates Shakespeare's true artistic skill with verse.

When the theatres reopened around 1594, Shakespeare helped form the acting company known as the Lord Chamberlain's Men. For the next ten years, it was London's most popular acting company. The company also started its own theater—the Globe—and Shakespeare became the primary shareholder. The Globe became a popular entertainment spot for both commoners and wealthy aristocrats.

Shakespeare's greatest writing occurred between 1599 and 1608. During this time, he wrote such popular plays as *Twelfth Night*, *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, and *Othello*. In 1603, with the succession of James I, Shakespeare's company received a royal patent, and they changed their name to the King's Men. They were then able to perform at the royal court several times a year.

Between 1610 and 1611, Shakespeare retired to his home in Stratford. Here he collaborated with John Fletcher on three more plays—*Henry VIII*, *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, and *Cardenio*.

In 1616, Shakespeare died at the young age of 52. Records show that he was buried on April 25, so it's assumed he died on April 23, two days earlier. This date has been suspect since it is also his birthday. No one knows how Shakespeare died, so his death remains shrouded in mystery. Over 20 possible causes of death have been speculated, including writer's cramp, too much alcohol, and murder.

Regardless of what brought Shakespeare to his demise, his incredible life left humankind a prolific treasure in his writings. Shakespeare wrote 37 plays, 154 sonnets, and two narrative poems. His plays fall into three categories: histories such as *Richard III* and *Henry V*, tragedies such as *Macbeth* and *Othello*, and comedies such as *Twelfth Night* and *As You Like It*.

Shakespeare's deep understanding of human nature and his incredible talent for making characters realistic and human make his work uniquely great. Most aspects of human nature haven't changed much from Elizabethan England. One may even find something of him- or herself or a friend in one of Shakespeare's characters. Much as they did in Elizabethan England, these plays can still move audiences to tears or make them roar with laughter. It is these timeless qualities that keep Shakespeare at the top of the literary and theatrical world.



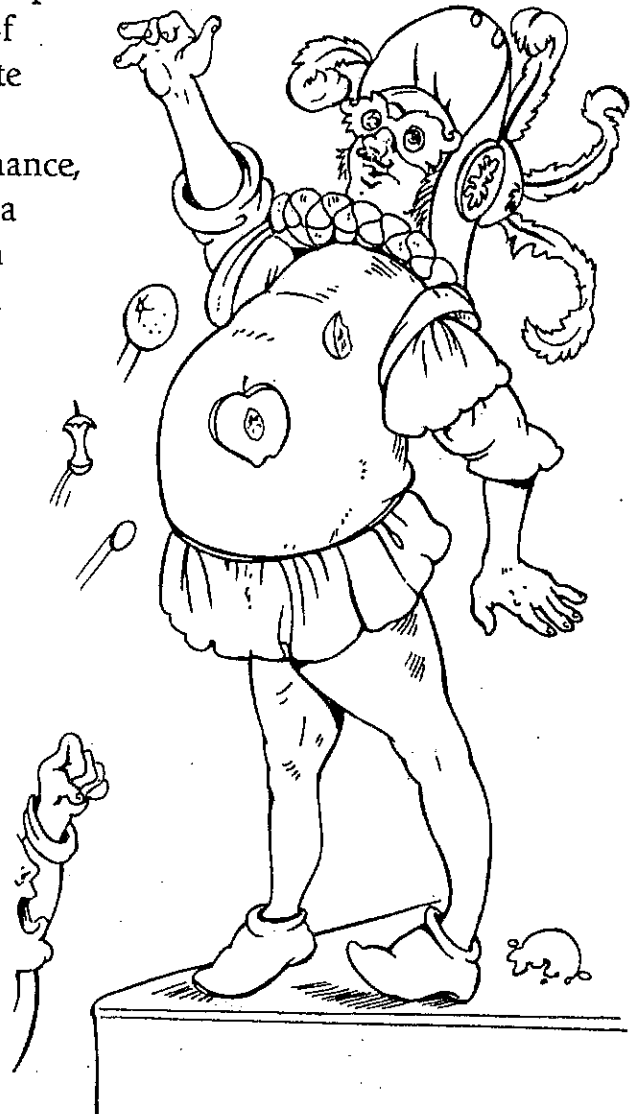
# The Elizabethan Stage

Theatre was an entirely different experience for the Elizabethans than it is for audiences today. The stage was round, so the audience was highly involved in the performance. Actors sometimes spoke to the audience through soliloquies and asides, and audience members often answered back. Elizabethan theatregoers yelled, laughed, taunted, talked, and ate throughout the performance.

During the Elizabethan period, politicians and clergy were opposed to the theatre, claiming it was a dangerous diversion from religion. So, playhouses were banned in London's city proper and forced out to the suburbs in an area known as Southwark. In this "theatre district," patrons could choose between nine different theatres. Strewn among the theatres were pubs, taverns, and bawdy houses as well as pickpockets and thieves, which only added to the theatre's already bad reputation.

When a play was about to begin, it was announced with a raised flag and a trumpeted fanfare. The flag indicated the theme of that day's play—black for tragedy, white for comedy, and red for history. When patrons entered a theatre for a performance, they placed their admission money in a box (or "box office"). They could sit in the "galleries" on wooden benches, on cushions in front of the stage, on the stage itself (for more money), or stand in back with the crowd. The general "mob scene" of the crowd (known as "groundlings") created quite a spectacle. Since few Elizabethans bathed, the theatres smelled of sweat, beer, and garlic. It's no wonder the groundlings were also referred to as "penny stinkards."

Vendors sold beer, fruit, and nuts, and in the often tumultuous, rowdy atmosphere of a play, these snacks would sometimes be thrown at the actors onstage.



Like all other playhouses, Shakespeare's Globe was under the patronage of a nobleman. This patronage provided protection from the Puritans as well as additional financial backing. Shakespeare's company was originally "attached" to Lord Chamberlain, and later to James I, becoming the most prestigious theatre company in London.

Shakespeare wrote specifically for his stage in the Globe. Often referred to as a "wooden O," the Globe may have had as many as 20 sides to provide its circular appearance. The theatre was open to the outside and could hold close to 3,000 people. The stage consisted of three tiers—"heaven," "earth," and "hell." A trapdoor in the main stage, or "earth," was used to raise and lower actors and props into and out of "hell." A canopy over the stage was painted with golden stars to represent the "heavens." Often, pulleys and ropes lowered or "whisked" actors up to and from "heaven." A hut on top of the canopy housed props for sound effects such as thunder and cannon fire. Audiences hooted and hollered with delight when such special stage and sound effects were used.

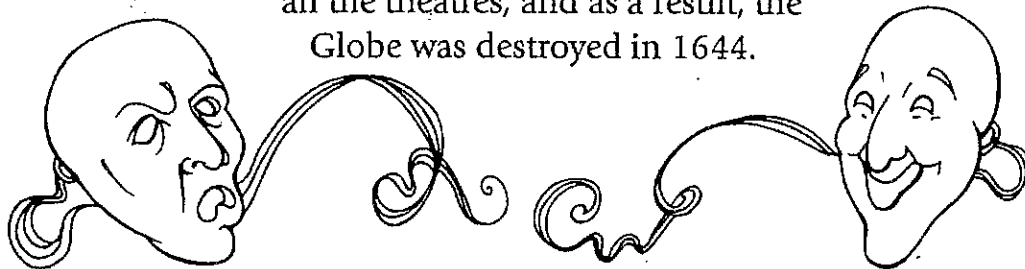
Unlike plays and movies today, scenery and props were limited. To let the audience know what time of day it was or what the weather was like, it was described with an actor's words. For example, when Romeo and Juliet awaken in her chamber, we know it is morning when Romeo says, "It was the lark, the herald of the morn . . . Look, love, what envious streaks do lace the severing clouds in yonder east." Actors also wore elaborate, gawdy costumes and makeup, which were considered sinful by the clergy.

During this time, women were not allowed to act on the public stage, so young boys played the female roles. That is one reason why there are so few women characters in Shakespeare's plays. Not being able to rely on "traditional" feminine beauty for his female characters, Shakespeare created those with amazing intelligence and wit.

Theatres put on a great variety of plays every season. In six months, one company might give about 150 performances of 25 to 30 different plays. Given the quick turnover, rehearsal time was extremely short. Actors only had about a week to learn their parts—up to 800 lines a day for leading roles!

Unfortunately, Shakespeare's revered Globe Theatre burned down in 1613 during a performance of *Henry VIII*. A prop cannon exploded and set the theatre aflame. The theatre was eventually rebuilt, but in 1642, the Puritans finally got their way. The English Parliament passed an ordinance shutting down

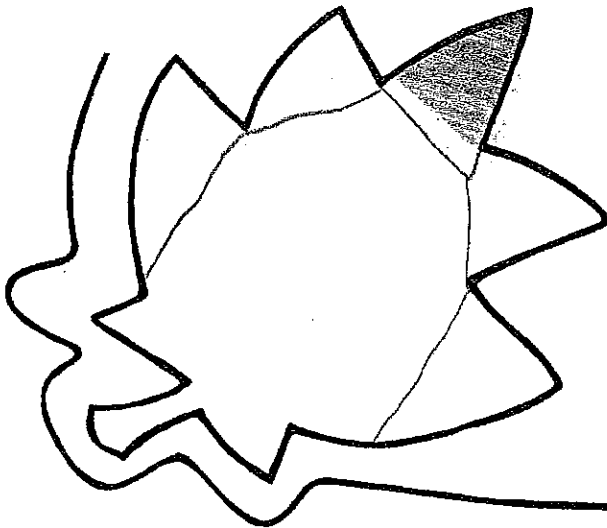
all the theatres, and as a result, the  
Globe was destroyed in 1644.



# Shakespearean Sonnets

116

Let me not to the marriage of true minds  
Admit impediments. Love is not love  
Which alters when it alteration finds,  
Or bends with the remover to remove.  
Oh no! It is an ever-fixed mark  
That looks on tempests and is never shaken.  
It is the star to every wandering bark,  
Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.  
Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks  
Within his bending sickle's compass come,  
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,  
But bears it out even to the edge of doom.  
If this be error and upon me proved,  
I never writ, nor no man ever loved.

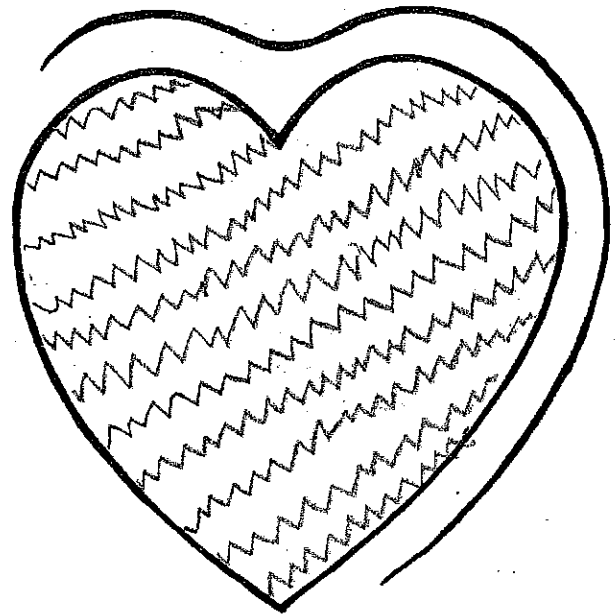


106

When in the chronicle of wasted time  
I see descriptions of the fairest wights\*,  
And beauty making beautiful old rhyme  
In praise of ladies dead and lovely knights,  
Then, in the blazon\* of sweet beauty's best,  
Of hand, of foot, of lip, of eye, of brow,  
I see their antique pen would have expressed  
Even such a beauty as you master now.  
So all their praises are but prophecies  
Of this our time, all you prefiguring,  
And, for\* they looked but with divining\* eyes,  
They had not skill enough your worth to sing.  
For we, which now behold these present days,  
Have eyes to wonder, but lack tongues to praise.

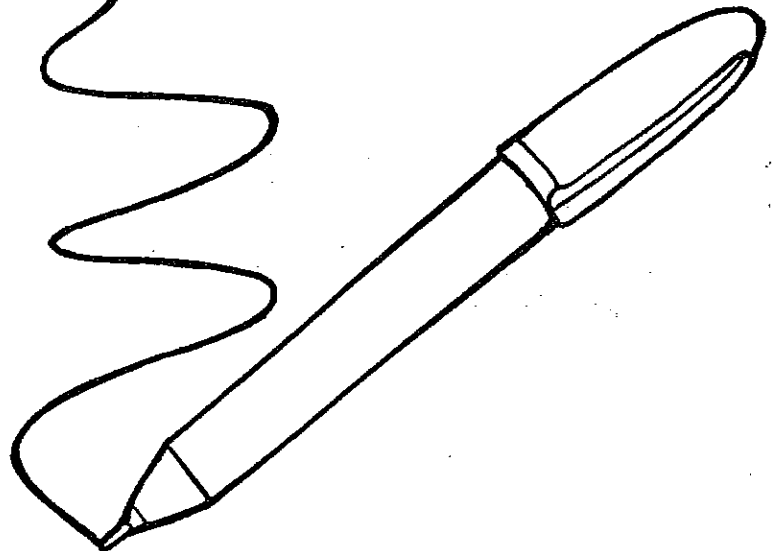
\*choirs: part of a church; wights: men; blazon: praise; for: except that; divining: foreseeing

a  
b  
a  
b  
c  
d  
c  
d  
e  
f  
e  
f  
g  
g



73

That time of year thou mayst in me behold  
When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang  
Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,  
Bare ruined choirs\* where late the sweet birds sang.  
In me thou see'st the twilight of such day  
As after sunset fadeth in the west,  
Which by and by black night doth take away,  
Death's second self, that seals up all in rest.  
In me thou see'st the glowing of such fire,  
That on the ashes of his youth doth lie  
As the deathbed whereon it must expire,  
Consumed with that which it was nourished by.  
This thou perceiv'st, which makes thy love more strong,  
To love that well which thou must leave ere long.



# Elizabethan Sonnets

During the Elizabethan Age an educated person was expected to write poetry and to be able to recite from memory the classical poems of Greece and Rome. A favorite type of poem written in English was the sonnet.

Shakespeare did not invent the sonnet; Petrarch, a 14th century poet did, but Shakespeare has been associated with it for such a long time because of the 154 sonnets he wrote which are considered some of the English-speaking world's most beautiful lines. When the term Elizabethan sonnet is used, it refers to sonnets like those of Shakespeare's. Most sonnets consist of single, fourteen-line poems, but sometimes Elizabethan poets would write whole narrative poems in sonnet form.

Like many types of poetry, a sonnet generally follows a set of rules. The rules for the structure of a sonnet follow.

1. Fourteen lines altogether
  - A. three sets of four lines called quatrains.
  - B. two lines at the end called a couplet.
2. Each line contains ten syllables with every other syllable accented, beginning with the second syllable on each line.
3. The sonnet has a formal rhyme scheme as follows.

**abab**

**cdcd**

**efef**

**gg**

In this rhyme scheme the "a's" rhyme with each other, the "b's" rhyme with each other, and so forth.

4. The sonnet also has a thematic structure. Usually, the first two quatrains set up a problem, the third quatrain begins to answer the problem, and the ending couplet tries to solve the problem.

On page 37 are three of Shakespeare's sonnets. The quatrains, couplets, and rhyme plan are identified for you on the first one. Can you identify the quatrains, couplets, and rhyme schemes of the second and third sonnets?

**Analysis/Response to "The Life and Times of William Shakespeare"**

Facts I learned about Shakespeare, the Renaissance and/or theatre during the Elizabethan period	Personal reaction, question, comment or reflection.