

1. WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE:

William Shakespeare is the most famous writer in the English language and considered by many to be the best. He wrote thirty-seven plays (that we know of) between 1589 and 1613 and at least one-hundred and fifty-four sonnets.

Shakespeare was born in Stratford-upon-Avon in 1564 and died in 1616 aged 52. It is believed that he may have died on his birthday. In 1582 he married Anne Hathaway; they had three children together - Susanna, Hamnet and Judith. He began his theatre career as an actor.

2. PLAYS

Shakespeare's plays can be categorised under the following three headings.

Comedies - These have happy endings where characters get married, such as *Twelfth Night* and *Much Ado About Nothing*.

Tragedies - These include the death of at least one high-status central character such as *Macbeth* and *Hamlet*.

Histories - These are based on real-life historical figures, such as *Richard III* and *Henry IV*.

3. THEMES

Conflict: The essence of all drama.

Appearance and Reality: People appearing as something/body they are not.

Order and Chaos: Stability giving way to confusion.

Change: Order is restored and characters change outlook.

Ambition: Leading to violence, tyranny and guilt.

Love and Hate: Exploration of extreme emotions.

Fate and Free-will: The decisions of mortals being superseded by Gods.

Sin and Salvation: Redemption or punishment for evil deeds.

Jealousy: Thoughts and feelings of insecurity through a relative lack of power.

8. THE GLOBE THEATRE

Shakespeare lived before TV, radio or the internet at a time when theatre was an extremely popular form of entertainment. The theatre was a huge draw amongst every class of person from the very rich to servants and labourers. Unlike today, audiences could become quite rowdy during performances. The poor people would stand in the open air and, if it rained, they got wet. The richer people sat in the covered gallery.



KS3 Spine Getting to Grips with Shakespeare

4. THE LANGUAGE

Shakespeare is credited with coining over **3,000 words** in Early Modern English. It can often be difficult to read a Shakespeare play due to the fact that he was writing before the invention of the dictionary and before the publication of any scholarly works on grammar. On top of this, many words he used have **shifted meaning** or dropped out of use. It is also worth considering that Shakespeare wrote **dramatic poetry** rather than in prose giving him greater license to manipulate the language. Shakespeare mainly uses **blank verse**, which are lines that don't rhyme with 10/11 syllables per line with 5 stressed beats (**Iambic Pentameter**). Rhyme is used to emphasise important or final lines.

7. CHARACTERS

Shakespeare loved the profession of acting and he created characters with one recurring theme - the human condition - that the world is like a stage and all people make fleeting and brief appearances on Earth to 'play their part.' ***"All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players.
They have their exits and their entrances,
And one man in his time plays many parts..."***

6. DRAMATIC TECHNIQUES/CONVENTIONS:

Shakespeare liked to vary the length of his scenes. **Long scenes** are used to develop key events and to explore characters' feelings. He used **short scenes** to change the mood and to create a sense of purpose and excitement. Shakespeare uses a lot of **Dramatic Irony** to add **suspense** and **tension**. The audience know more about events than the characters on stage and can therefore see them making mistakes and predict when they will realise the truth. This technique helps the audience to feel more involved in the story and care about the characters and outcomes on an emotional level.

5. SOCIAL/HISTORICAL/CULTURAL:

In Elizabethan society, there were people considered extremely wealthy and those who were very poor. Modern society may still be structured this way. However, the rich people of Shakespeare's day were completely oblivious to the plight of the poor and the poor had very few prospects of ever climbing the social ladder.

Despite the fact that Queen Elizabeth was at the top of the social pyramid when Shakespeare was writing, it was illegal for women to perform on the stage and therefore many of the famous female roles - such as Juliet - would have been played by young boys. Shakespeare also lived through two bouts of the plague, which claimed at least two of his siblings; this may have helped build the strong bond between himself and his mother.

Quick Quiz:

1. When was William Shakespeare born?
2. Where was he born?
3. When did he die?
4. Between which two dates was he most productive?
5. How many plays is Shakespeare said to have written?
6. Which three headings can most of Shakespeare's plays be categorised under?
7. Name two plays with a happy ending.
8. Name two characters in title roles who die.
9. Name two historical figures Shakespeare wrote about?
10. Name three key themes featured in his plays?
11. In which theatre were most of his plays first performed?
12. How many words in the OED have been credited to Shakespeare?
13. What term is given to blank verse of ten syllables per line with five stressed beats?
14. Complete this quote... "All the world's a ..."?
15. What theatrical technique did Shakespeare deploy to add suspense and tension?
16. Why would female roles be played by male actors?

"The object of art is to give life a shape?"

William Shakespeare



KS3 Spine **Getting to Grips with Shakespeare**



ACTIVITY

If Shakespeare were alive today, which political leaders or members of the royal family might he base a new historical play around? Explain why. Can you think of which key political events he would have wanted to focus on?

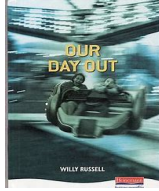
RESEARCH

Try to find information on Shakespeare's contemporaries including Christopher Marlowe, Ben Jonson and John Marston.

In Shakespeare's day, the Theatres were in competition with other London entertainment for an audience. Some of the most popular forms of entertainment were bloodthirsty and gory including cock-fighting and bear-baiting. To maintain large audiences, there was a quick turnover of plays with about 3,000 new plays being written between 1560 and 1640. The plays retold stories from the English oral tradition and incorporated violence, music and humour. If audiences weren't entertained, they could become extremely lively. In 1602, the audience damaged the chairs, stools, curtains and walls of the Swan Theatre and there are records of actors being dragged from the stage and tied to posts.

1. OUR DAY OUT by Willy Russell

The play was originally written for television in 1976 as part of the BBC's Play for Today series and follows the fortunes of 30 children and three of their teachers on a school trip from Liverpool to Conwy Castle in North Wales. It was later adapted into a full length stage musical.



2. THE PLAYWRIGHT

Russell was born in 1947 to a working class family in Merseyside. He left school at fifteen with only one O-level. He shared much in common with one of his most famous characters – Rita from *Educating Rita* – initially training as a women's hairdresser. His real passion though was for writing and, as an adult, he went to night school where he began to write stage plays. Some of his better known works, along with *Educating Rita*, include *Blood Brothers* and *Shirley Valentine*.

3. THEMES

Much of Russell's work focuses on women and the effects of social class. It has been suggested that this could be the result of his own experience, having been brought up in a poor area by female relatives. (He must also have listened to a lot of their stories in those early hairstyling days!) There is also a recurring theme of characters trying (or managing) to 'escape' their backgrounds through different means although there appears to be little hope for Mrs Kay's 'Progress Class'.

8. BLOCKING

Make a simple sketch of the acting area you will be using, together with any furniture or scenery. Use arrows to indicate the direction(s) the audience will be viewing from. When you are deciding on the movements that your character will make during the scene, mark these in your script in pencil. To begin with, these movements might seem rather stilted and/or awkward but, as rehearsals progress, they should gradually become more natural and you will find you are relying on your notes less and less.



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Working with Text: *Our Day Out*

4. CHARACTERS

The main characters include:

The four teaching staff accompanying the trip. Mrs Kay, Mr Briggs, Susan and Colin. (Mrs Kay and Mr Briggs, in particular, have very different approaches to teaching.)

The children include:

Carol, Linda, Reilly, Digga, Ronson and Andrews



7. ACTING SKILLS

Consider the 'tools' you have as an actor – your voice, your face and your body – and how you can use these tools to 'become' the character. As with the majority of Russell's work, most of the characters are from inner city Liverpool so you may need to adopt and sustain a convincing Scouse accent. The characters are also a variety of ages.



6. CREATING A ROLE

When working on a text, it is the actors' (and directors') responsibility to reflect the intentions of the writer and to 'lift the words from the page'. You will need to consider as many aspects of the character as you can – their age, status, personality, social class, ethnic background, relationships etc. Look at what happens to your character during the play and what you think might happen to them afterwards.

5. PLOT SUMMARY

Mrs Kay takes her illiterate 'progress class' on a day trip to Conwy Castle along with slightly older students, Digga and Reilly (who have now 'graduated' from the class), harsh disciplinarian, Mr Briggs, and two younger teachers. En route, they stop at a roadside café and then a zoo (with hilarious consequences). After visiting the castle, they go to the beach where one of the students, Carol, goes missing. When she is found by Briggs, threatening to jump from a cliff, he manages to channel a softer side and persuades her to re-join the others, suggesting a visit to the fair before returning home.

Take turns to hot-seat different members of your group by asking them questions which they must answer in role as their character. Remember that questions don't all need to relate directly to the play, e.g. you might ask Carol what she had for breakfast this morning.



HOT-SEATING

“Teach them? Teach them what? You’ll never teach them because nobody knows what to do with them. Ten years ago you could teach them to stand in a line, you could teach them to obey, to expect little more than a lousy factory job. But now they haven’t even got that to aim for. Mr Briggs, you won’t teach them because you’re in a job that’s designed and funded to fail! There’s nothing for them to do, any of them; most of them were born for factory fodder, but the factories have closed down.” Mrs Kay

In the television play, the fairground scene is captured in a ‘montage’ of still images representing photographs taken by Mrs Kay.

As a group, create a series of still images which represent some of the most memorable parts of the day. You could include: the stop at the roadside café, the zoo, Conwy castle, playing on the beach, the fair. Choose an appropriate piece of music to accompany your montage.



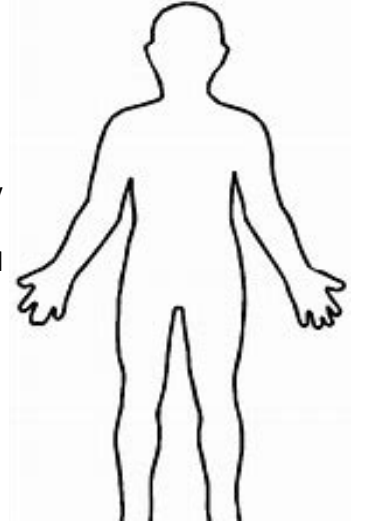
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Working with Text: *Our Day Out*

Written in long hand in only four or five days, Willy found this reality-based drama easy to write. He had taught at Dingle Vale school, one of the locations used in the film and had experienced similar school trips both as a child and a teacher.

ROLE ON THE WALL

Create a role-on-the-wall for your character. Outside of the figure, note any of the outward or visible aspects of the role, e.g. their name, age, physical characteristics, family relationships, social class, occupation, ethnic background etc. On the inside, make notes about their ‘inner self’, e.g. their thoughts and feelings, likes and dislikes, hopes, dreams and ambitions.



WORKING BEYOND THE TEXT

A good way to get to know your characters better is to think about scenes which might happen outside the text, e.g. before or after the play.

For Example: Improvise a scene some days later where Mr Briggs is discussing how the trip went with other members of the school staff.

Improvise the discussion in the pub after the trip when Mrs Kay, Colin and Susan go for a drink or the conversation between Linda and Reilly on their way home.



1. A LOVE STORY THAT ENDS IN TRAGEDY

Probably written in 1595, *Romeo and Juliet* is the most famous love story ever told. The title characters are the son and daughter of two feuding families - the Montagues and the Capulets. Their love blossoms inexplicably despite their parents' hatred of each other. It is told in the stars how the couple will bring the two families together and end the pointless violence but at the cost of their own lives. It is only after Romeo and Juliet commit suicide that the two families consent to end their feud.

2. THE POETRY

At times in the play, Shakespeare uses a sonnet form to cement the theme of love. However, most of the play is written in blank verse. When Shakespeare wants to emphasise an important moment, he uses rhyming couplets. There are some very famous soliloquies in the play which Shakespeare uses to let the audience know more about the inner-thoughts and feelings of certain characters at important moments.

3. THEMES

Religion: Society was controlled by the rules of the church

Conflict: The Capulets and Montagues are at 'war'

Fate and Free-will: Only the children's deaths can bring an end to the conflict

Family: Usually a positive thing but used here to create conflict

Love: Romeo and Juliet fall in love instantly

Honour: Characters must defend their family honour

Feuds: Violence escalates because of the feud

8. THE SETTING

To create a sense of the exotic for an Elizabethan audience visiting the theatre in London, Shakespeare decided to set the play in the Italian city of Verona. The events take place in the Public Square, the Capulet's Mansion, Friar Lawrence's Cell and the Capulet's Tomb. The only action beyond Verona's walls takes place in the small village of Mantua where Romeo is banished for avenging Mercutio's death.



KS3 Spine Romeo and Juliet

4. IMAGERY

Simile - A direct comparison, "It pricks like a thorn!"

Metaphor - An indirect comparison, "It is the East and Juliet is the sun". (Shakespeare uses a number of epic-similes and extended metaphors to develop the audience's understanding of specific characters' feelings and emotions.)

Personification - Giving inanimate objects human characteristics. "O mischief! Thou art swift to enter the thoughts of desperate men."

7. CHARACTERS

Romeo Montague A hopeless romantic but strong and passionate

Juliet Capulet Young, headstrong, beautiful and clever

Tybalt Juliet's cousin; an aggressive troublemaker

Benvolio Romeo's cousin; peaceful and honest

Mercutio Romeo's best friend; a joker and relative of The Prince

The Prince Wields absolute power in Verona but can't end the feud

Friar Lawrence A wise holy man who Romeo confides in

The Nurse Close and affectionate with Juliet

6. SYMBOLISM

Light - Throughout the play, Shakespeare uses light as a symbol of Romeo and Juliet's love for each other.

Darkness - However, as their relationship is destined to end in tragedy, he also uses the contrasting image of darkness to foreshadow their demise.

Religion - Religious symbolism is used throughout the play to show Romeo and Juliet's idolatry of each other.

5. SOCIAL/HISTORICAL/CULTURAL

When Shakespeare was writing, the church had a huge influence on society and helped dictate how most people lived. It was a general expectation that everyone had to attend church and families could be fined if they missed a Sunday sermon. The church had a lot of power; more than the law. It is because of this that Romeo and Juliet rush into marriage as that is the only option they have if they want to be together. They also know that divorce is not an option and therefore their families will not be able to part them. Juliet is only thirteen and her being married at such a young age would not be permissible in society today; this makes her actions all the more shocking. Also, in a time when women had no rights, Juliet's behaviour in defiance of her family shows a strong rebellious nature.

Quick Quiz:

1. In which year was Romeo and Juliet probably written?
2. What are the surnames of the two feuding families?
3. What 'must' happen before the feud can end?
4. How do Romeo and Juliet die?
5. Why does Shakespeare use the sonnet form?
6. Why does Shakespeare use rhyming couplets?
7. Why is religion such a constant theme throughout the play?
8. Where is the play set?
9. To where is Romeo banished?
10. Give an example of a simile used in the play.
11. Give an example of a metaphor used in the play.
12. Give an example of personification used in the play.
13. How is Tybalt related to Juliet?
14. How is Benvolio related to Romeo?
15. In whom does Romeo confide?
16. What is 'light' used to symbolise?
17. What is darkness used to symbolise?
18. How old is Juliet when she marries Romeo?

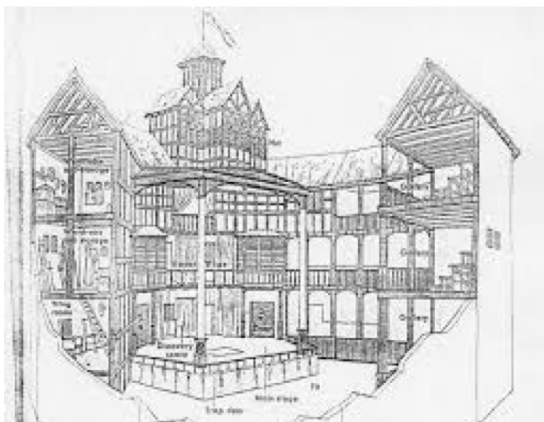
“Romeo, Romeo, Wherefore art thou Romeo?”

William Shakespeare



KS3 Spine

The Origins of Theatre



ACTIVITY

Name as many films, TV dramas and soap opera storylines that have used the same premise as Romeo and Juliet?

RESEARCH

The Guelphs and Ghibellines of twelfth-century Verona are the families on whom the Montagues and Capulets are based. The story of the 'two noble lovers and their piteous death' was passed down via oral tradition throughout Italy from the 13th century and put to paper in 1531 by Luigi Du Porto. All the details in Shakespeare's play can be traced back to Du Porto's. There are a number of versions of 'The Unlucky lovers' that precede Shakespeare's. Research who wrote them. Why might Shakespeare have decided to carry on the tradition?

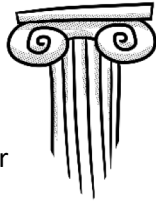
PRECIS

Two families of similar wealth and status living in the Italian City of Verona, where the play is set, have been at war for years. Because of this blood-feud, fresh fighting erupts, civilised people are drawn into the conflict and innocent people die.

The youngest son and daughter of the two families are destined to fall in love before committing suicide when their plan to be together goes horribly wrong. It is only following the tragic deaths of their children, Romeo and Juliet, that Lord Capulet and Lord Montague see the error of their ways and call a truce.

1. ANCIENT GREECE

Theatre has its origins in Ancient Greece where plays were performed to honour the Gods - in particular, the god **Dionysus**. Every Greek city would have its own theatre - a large semi-circular structure, open to the elements, with excellent acoustics, where festivals would take place over a number of days and prizes would be awarded for those judged to be the best. Theatre was so important to the culture of the Greeks that the state would pay for the poor to attend.



8. THEATRE TERMINOLOGY

Much of the theatre terminology/vocabulary which we still use today has its roots in the theatre of Ancient Greece, e.g. **proscenium, scene, chorus, orchestra, prologue, protagonist, antagonist, tragedy**



7. THE GREEK CHORUS

The chorus was a group of actors who described and commented upon the main action of a play with song, dance and choral speech. Originally, the group comprised 50 men dressed as satyrs who danced and sang **dithyrambs** which were lyric hymns in praise of Dionysus. When Aeschylus added a second actor to the plays in the 5th century BC, the chorus was reduced from 50 to 12.

2. EARLY ACTING

The earliest recorded actor was a man called **Thespis** (from whom the term **thespian** originates). He was a winner of the first theatrical contest held in Athens. Thespis was the first person to appear on stage as a **character** rather than himself and is often described as the inventor of tragedy.



KS3 Spine

The Origins of Theatre

3. SCALE

Greek theatres were huge (the entire community would attend the festivals) – more like sports stadiums or concert arenas than a theatre you might visit today. Some held up to 14,000 people. The naturally good acoustics would enable the actors' voices to be heard but everything else had to be bigger. The actors wore padded costumes and raised sandals (**corthurnus**). They also wore masks to let the audience know whether they were a comic or tragic character. These masks remain a well-known symbol of theatre today.



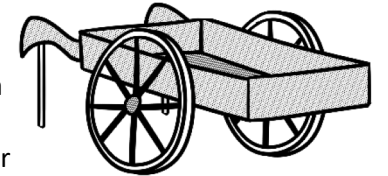
4. PLAYS AND PLAYWRIGHTS

Plays were written in trilogies or cycles. The three best known and remembered writers of tragedies were **Sophocles (497-405 BC)**, **Euripedes (480-406 BC)** and **Aeschylus (525-456 BC)**. **Aristophanes (446-388 BC)** was best known for his comic plays.



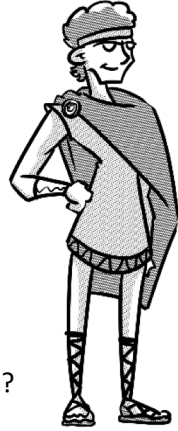
5. FASCINATING FACTOID!

As the Greeks were not allowed to show death on stage, they would use a cart (or wheeled platform) called an **ekkyklema** on which to wheel on bodies to display in **tableau** form after they had been 'killed' off-stage!



Quick Quiz:

1. Name four of the best known Ancient Greek playwrights.
2. Which God was honoured by the Greek Drama festivals?
3. Who was the first known actor?
4. What is a **dithyramb**?
5. How did the audiences show they were enjoying the play?
6. And how did they show disapproval?
7. Name two groups of people able to attend the festivals when you might not have expected them to.
8. How many men were originally in the **chorus**?
9. What type of plays was **Aristophanes** best known for?
10. Who is often described as 'the inventor of tragedy'?
11. What were **corthurnus**?
12. What basic shape was the Greek theatre?
13. How were the chorus dressed?
14. List three theatrical terms which have their roots in Ancient Greek theatre and which we still use today.
15. What was the purpose of an **ekkyklema**?
16. Which playwright added a second actor to the plays?



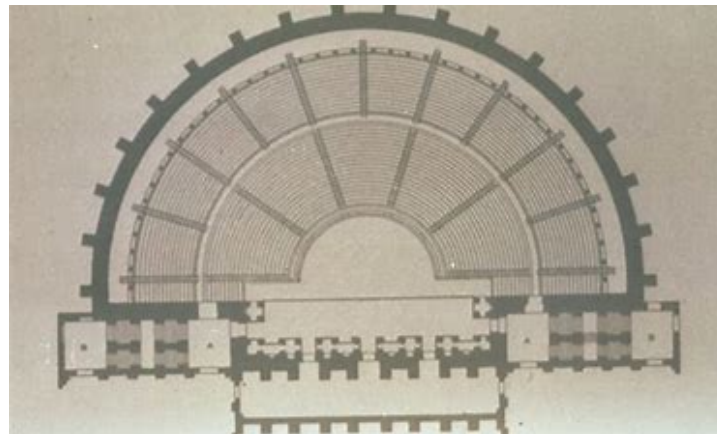
“Life is like a theatre; often very bad people occupy the best seats.”

Euripedes



KS3 Spine

The Origins of Theatre



ACTIVITY

Greek tragedies tended to focus on historical characters – often kings or military leaders – whereas comedies often satirised politicians and well-known people of the time. Can you think of any current situations and/or personalities that the writers of Greek comedies may have focused on?

KNOWLEDGE/RESEARCH

Sophocles wrote over 120 plays during his lifetime but only 7 have survived in their complete form. For almost 50 years, Sophocles was the most celebrated playwright in the dramatic competitions of Athens that took place during the religious festivals of the **Lenaia** and the **Dionysia**. He competed in 30 competitions and won 24. Aeschylus won 13 competitions while Euripedes won 4. Aristophanes, also known as **‘the father of comedy’** wrote 40 plays of which 11 remain virtually complete. They provide the most valuable examples of a genre of comic drama known as **old comedy**. Try to find out the names of at least one play by a) Sophocles; b) Euripedes; c) Aeschylus and d) Aristophanes. What would be the challenges to theatre-makers today in presenting these plays?

What would it have been like to attend performances in Ancient Greece? It is difficult to know for sure, but it would certainly have been very different from visiting the theatre today. The festival lasted for seven days and celebrated the beginning of Spring. Alongside the performances of the plays, there were grand processions, animal sacrifices, good citizens were honoured and slaves were freed. The event may have been a religious one (priests sat on the front row of the theatre in throne-like seats) but the atmosphere was far from solemn. Greek audiences were talkative and unruly.