

## Top Ten Facts About William Shakespeare

Did you know **Shakespeare** would have been 456 years old today? Did you also know that his exact birthdate is unknown? That's right! Although the 'upstart crow' was baptised on the 26th of April in 1564, this was not the day he was born. And the 23rd of April, which is now generally celebrated as his birthday, is actually his death day! If this information is news to you, then here are another ten interesting facts about Shakespeare to test your knowledge!

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1. **He wrote many works** In his lifetime, Shakespeare wrote a total of about 37 stage plays and over 150 poems. However, the exact number of Shakespeare's works is unknown, as some of them have been lost or co-authored by other playwrights.

2. **He was a master of insults.** The next time someone gets on your nerves, be sure to try one of these Shakespearean insults on for size:

- "Thou art as fat as butter."
- "I scorn you, scurvy companion."
- "Thou elvish-mark'd, rooting hog!"
- "Poisonous bunch-backed toad!"
- "Thou lump of foul deformity."
- "A weasel hath not such a deal of spleen as you are toss'd with."
- ""Thou art a boil."

3. **American actress Anne Hathaway was named after Shakespeare's wife.** In 1582, Shakespeare married **Anne Hathaway**, a farmer's daughter with whom he had three children: twins **Judith** and **Hamnet**, and their elder daughter **Susanna**.

4. **Now you see him, now you don't.** Between the years 1585 and 1592, Shakespeare left no paper trail and effectively "disappeared" for a whole seven years. This period of absence is often referred to as "the lost years" by many historians.

5. **He wasn't very popular within the academic community.** Many of William's jealous rivals felt Shakespeare's writing was bombastic and unworthy to be compared to the works of Oxford and Cambridge scholars. Greene, in particular, began calling Shakespeare an "upstart crow," meaning he felt that Shakespeare had climbed his way up the social ladder without possessing the proper knowledge of social niceties. What a three-inch fool!

6. **A West End hitmaker before the concept of a "West End" even existed.** Most, if not all, of Shakespeare's plays became instant hits and frequently took audiences by storm! His works were divided into three categories: comedy (*The Taming of the*

*Shrew; Twelfth Night*), history (*Henry IV; Henry V; Richard III*), and tragedy (*Hamlet; King Lear; Othello; Romeo and Juliet*).

7. **Rich and famous.** Shakespeare's plays helped him amass a great fortune, so much so that he owned houses in both London and Stratford-upon-Avon by the year 1598.

8. **Royally approved.** Shakespeare's work was adored by the royal court, and both Queen Elizabeth I and James VI of Scotland and I of England would hire Shakespeare's company to perform for them, hence why we now have the **Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC)** today.

9. **Shakespeare's Globe was way ahead of its time.** The original Globe, which was built across the river from "The Theatre" by **Lord Chamberlain's Men**, played host to many of Shakespeare's greatest works and was also home to some of the most thrilling special effects of the time. It was not uncommon to see smoke, fire, cannons, trap doors, and even actors hanging from wires at this innovative venue!

10. **A wordsmith even after death.** Shakespeare's gravestone at the Holy Trinity Church in Stratford-upon-Avon has a curse on it written by the late playwright himself. It reads:

- *"Good friend for Jesus' sake forbear,  
To dig the dust enclosed here.  
Blessed be the man that spares these stones,  
And cursed be he that moves my bones."*

It's well worth a visit to Holy Trinity to see his gravestone when things get back to normal!