



## Top 20 Shakespeare Questions

1. Did Shakespeare have brothers and sisters and what were their names?

Yes he did. William was the eldest of six children. His brothers and sisters were called Gilbert, Joan, Anne, Richard and Edmond. William's parents, John and Mary Shakespeare, also had two babies that died before William was born.

2. What did Shakespeare learn at school?

Shakespeare would have studied Latin at school, learning to translate fluently between Latin and English. This might sound dull but there were lots of good stories written in Latin which he may well have enjoyed translating. He also studied History and Rhetoric. You may not know what Rhetoric is but you use it every day! Rhetoric is the art of persuasion, so every time you convince a friend to do something or your parents to let you have something, you are using rhetoric. Shakespeare studied the art of rhetoric because it was considered a useful verbal and written skill.

3. What inspired Shakespeare to write his plays?

No one really knows, but I am sure those stories he read in Latin at school stayed in his mind. I think this because lots of the plays he wrote as an adult have similar themes in them to the stories he read as a boy.

4. What did Shakespeare die of?

No one knows Shakespeare's exact cause of death. Remember that medical science was not as advanced as it is today, so often people died and no one knew why. The most likely thing is that he caught a fever such as typhoid and died as a result.

# HISTORY

5. Did Shakespeare have children and if so how many?

Shakespeare had three children: a set of twins, Hamnet and Judith, and another daughter called Susanna. Sadly Hamnet died when he was just 11.

6. Did Shakespeare get married?

Yes, he married a woman called Anne Hathaway – she was 26 and he was 18 when they got married. He was quite young to be getting married.

7. Who was Shakespeare's best friend?

No one really knows if Shakespeare had a best friend, but we do know people that knew him well. For instance, in Stratford-upon-Avon he knew a family called the Saddlers, and it is thought he named his son Hamnet after a member of this family. In London Shakespeare knew lots of other playwrights and actors. In particular, he spent a lot of time with an actor called Richard Burbage.

8. Did Shakespeare ever act in his plays?

Yes he did, we know he played the ghost in Hamlet. That's a small but quite fun role.

9. How old was Shakespeare when he wrote his first play?

Shakespeare was 26 when his first play was performed – however, we don't know how old he was when he wrote it.

10. Which of Shakespeare's plays was his personal favourite?

No one knows, but there is only one character he wrote about several times; a fat old knight called Falstaff. Falstaff is a coward who cannot seem to tell the truth, but I expect he was very funny to write about.



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# HISTORY

11. What kind of clothes did Shakespeare wear?

When Shakespeare was young he would have worn wool top layers and linen under layers – those clothes would have been quite itchy but he was not wealthy enough to wear fine clothes. When he was an adult and became successful, he would have worn more silks and velvets – fine, bright and beautiful clothes.

12. Which is Shakespeare's most famous play?

It is probably Hamlet or Romeo and Juliet. Hamlet is the most performed play and has been translated into more languages than any other Shakespeare play. However, Romeo and Juliet is a firm favourite and is very well-known too.

13. What was school like for Shakespeare?

The school day was longer than a school day today, although at approximately 11 o'clock the boys went home for dinner. Dinner could last as long as two hours! Boys of different ages were all taught together by a school master, with the older boys helping the younger ones with their work. If the boys were naughty or did not learn their lessons they would be beaten with twigs by the school master. Girls did not go to school.

14. What was Shakespeare's mother called?

She was called Mary Arden and was the daughter of quite a wealthy farmer.

15. Were any of Shakespeare's family in any of his plays?

It is possible that his brother Gilbert, who did act in some plays, performed in some of Shakespeare's plays as he lived in London at the time.



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# HISTORY

16. How many plays did Shakespeare write in a year?

On average he seems to have had about two new plays in a year but we don't know if he wrote one and then another, worked on only one at a time, or if he had lots of plays on the go at once.

17. Why was Shakespeare's garden smelly?

It was smelly because his father used the garden area to treat the animal skins he used to make leather goods. He had to soften the skins, which meant soaking them in a pretty smelly mixture of human urine, dog poo and egg white. Eugh! I am glad I didn't live next door!

18. Why did Shakespeare have to share a bed with his brothers?

Sharing a bed with your siblings was quite normal in Shakespeare's time. The Shakespeares' house was quite small and the family quite large, so they couldn't have a bed each. In the winter it would have helped keep everyone warm.

19. How many plays did Shakespeare write?

About 37 – but not everyone agrees on that number. Perhaps he wrote some plays that no one knows are his, and perhaps he wrote some that haven't been discovered yet!

20. How old was Shakespeare when he died?

He was 52 (he died on or near his birthday).



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