



# Meet William Shakespeare

“He was not of an age...but  
for all time!”

-Ben Johnson

# Just the facts...Ma'am!

- Born – April 1564
- Born – Stratford-upon-Avon
- Son of glove maker – John Shakespeare & Socialite – Mary Arden.
- Oldest of 8 Children.
- Attended public school. Learned Latin.
- Knew the classics...

# His Inspiration

- Acting Companies toured his village.
- 1582 – (18) Married Anne Hathaway.
- 2 daughters & a son.
- Left family- London – To ACT.
- 1592 – Successful actor/playwright.
- 1592 – Plague hit...Theatres closed...Shakespeare wrote.
- 1594 – Plague lessened – Theatres reopened...Shakespeare joined acting troupe.

# His Plays

- One of first plays...*Romeo & Juliet*.
- 1598 –Part owner of THE GLOBE THEATRE.
- VIRTUAL TOUR OF GLOBE
- Many plays for the Globe (including *Midsummer Night's Dream*).
- 1613- Globe burned down. Retired to Stratford with Family.
- Wealthy from play years. Lots of land and nice home.
- 1616-Died. Seven years later first collections of plays published.

# Midsummer Night's Dream

- Written toward the beginning of career.
- Comedy of two pairs of lovers lost in a dark wood who fall under the power of playful spirits.
- Title a clue (romance, magic, madness). This night spirits most powerful.
- Flowers gathered on Midsummer Night can work magic. People dream of lovers and sometimes go insane.
- Based on Classical Greek drama structure.
  - Old father blocks love affair.
  - Complications and confusions.
  - Lovers eventually united.

# The Plot Thickens

- MSND set in Athens.
- Humorous how fast lovers change feelings...but seem very sincere.
- Profound questions...
  - What is love?
  - How/why do people fall in love?
  - How is love part of identity?
  - Can lovers control their feelings?
  - What is more real (daytime – reason OR nighttime – passion?)

# Midsummer & 17<sup>th</sup> Century England

- Drama popular. Queen Elizabeth I loved Shakespeare's plays.
- Companies traveled Europe
- BUT...some city authorities hated it...it drew large crowds creating crime, spread of disease, and controversial ideas.
- Some religious people said ideas were evil. Shut theatres down in 1642.

# Shakespeare's Themes

- Drama itself.
  - Entertainment OR Truth of Human Experience.
  - Midsummer Night's Dream...A play within a play.
    - Shows clumsy writing
    - Poor staging.
    - Cheap costumes
    - Awful acting.
    - Mad Director (Oberon)
    - Tribute to magic in the world.



# Shakespeare's Style

- Blank Verse – New in 1500's.
- Flexible rhythm pattern.
  - Unstressed syllable followed by stressed syllable.
    - *Four days will quickly steep*
    - *Themselves in night;*
    - *Four days will quickly dream*
    - *Away the time.*
- Iambic Pentameter
- Different Writing Styles for different Characters.
  - Low characters = Prose
  - Spirits = Complex poetry = beauty/magic of spirits.

# Before we begin...

- Characters: From Greek mythology.
  - Theseus (National Athenian Hero...Friend of Hercules)
  - Hippolyta (Queen of Amazons...female warriors). Theseus took her prisoner and married her.
- Renaissance (Rebirth of interest in art, architecture, Classics): Started in 1300's...Italy...spread through Europe.