William Shakespeare (1564-1616)

England’s genius
1. Why do we study Shakespeare?

Because

- his plays are the greatest literary texts of all times;
- they express a profound knowledge of human behaviour;
- they transmit universal values applicable to all people at all times;
1. Why do we study Shakespeare?

Because

• he is a great poet;
• his plays are full of memorable passages of poetry;
• he is the most quoted, most translated of any author on earth.
2. Studying Shakespeare

Students who have studied Shakespeare

• have a wider view of the world in general;

• have a broader view of important historical events;

• can grasp the concepts of character, plot, universal truth more easily;

• have a greater understanding of human nature (greed, faithfulness, love, power, honesty, popularity, danger, ambition, self-sacrifice);
3. Shakespeare’s life

• Born in Stratford-Upon-Avon, on 23rd April 1564.

• Attended the local Grammar School from the age of 7 to 13.

• Married Anne Hathaway when he was 18.

• In 1592 he went to London; he was actor and playwright.

• Was supported by a private patron, the Earl of Southampton.
3. Shakespeare’s life

- He became a shareholder and the main playwright of the most successful company of actors in London, the Lord Chamberlain’s Men.
- His company built the Globe Theatre.
- Recognised as a genius in his own time.
3. Shakespeare’s life

- In 1610 he retired from the theatre.
- In 1613 the Globe theatre burnt down.
- He died in 1616, near his birthday, April 23rd, at the age of 52.
- He was buried in Stratford, in Holy Trinity Church.

Shakespeare lost much money but was still wealthy; he helped rebuild the Globe theatre.
4. The language genius

- He created
  - visual worlds for theatre audiences through language;
  - new words and phrases we still use today.

- He employed
  - irony, imagery, rhythm and other literary devices.

He established atmosphere, character, and intrigue.
5. The comedian

- Shakespeare’s **comedies** include:
  - disguise;
  - frustrated love;
  - mistaken identity;
  - marital and romantic misunderstandings.

- They end in **multiple marriages**.

- They trace the passage of young people out of their parents’ control and into marriage.
# William Shakespeare

## 5. The comedian

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1592</td>
<td><em>The Comedy of Errors; The Two Gentlemen of Verona</em></td>
<td>1594</td>
<td><em>The Taming of the Shrew</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1593</td>
<td><em>Love’s Labour’s Lost</em></td>
<td>1595</td>
<td><em>A Midsummer Night’s Dream</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1593-1594</td>
<td><em>The Taming of the Shrew</em></td>
<td>1596</td>
<td><em>The Merchant of Venice</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1598</td>
<td><em>Much Ado About Nothing</em></td>
<td>1599</td>
<td><em>The Merry Wives of Windsor; As you like it</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1601</td>
<td><em>Twelfth Night</em></td>
<td>1602</td>
<td><em>Troilus and Cressida; All’s Well that Ends Well</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1604</td>
<td><em>Measure for Measure</em></td>
<td>1608</td>
<td><em>Pericles</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1610</td>
<td><em>Cymbeline</em></td>
<td>1611</td>
<td><em>The Winter’s Tale; The Tempest</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6. The tragic playwright

**In Greek and Latin classical tragedies**

- the **protagonist** acts against inexorable destiny;
- the **action** is limited to one **place** and one **day**;
- the **turning point** is where the goals of the tragic hero seem within reach.

**In Shakespeare**

- real balance between fate and human choices, based on characters’ flaws. Human beings in control of their own destiny;
- Shakespeare **freely breaks the rule of place and time unities**;
- the catastrophe at the end spells disaster for the tragic hero, responsible for his own fall, although his plan was noble.
William Shakespeare

6. The tragic playwright

Shakespeare’s tragedies

1593 Titus Andronicus
1595 Romeo and Juliet
1599 Julius Caesar
1601 Hamlet
1604 Othello
1605 King Lear
1606 Macbeth
1606 Antony and Cleopatra
1607 Timon of Athens
1609 Coriolanus
7. The historian

Shakespeare’s history plays

1. based on serious records like the Tudors’ chronicles, and the civil wars between the Houses of York and Lancaster;

2. gave a portrait of the nation as a whole;

3. were part of a process by which people came to see themselves as belonging to ‘England’ rather than to families, households or local lords.
Shakespeare’s history plays are divided into two ‘tetralogies’ (= a group of four plays).

1. *Henry VI*, Parts One, Two and Three (1590-1592), and *Richard III* (1592-1593).

William Shakespeare

8. The poet

154 sonnets published in 1609, but probably written in the 1590s.

• **Structure:** three quatrains and a final couplet; turning point at the ninth line.

• **Addressee:**
  - a ‘fair youth’, probably Shakespeare’s patron, the Earl of Southampton, in the former section;
  - a dark lady, in the latter section.

• **Themes:** increase, love and its loss, broken trust of friend, forgiveness.