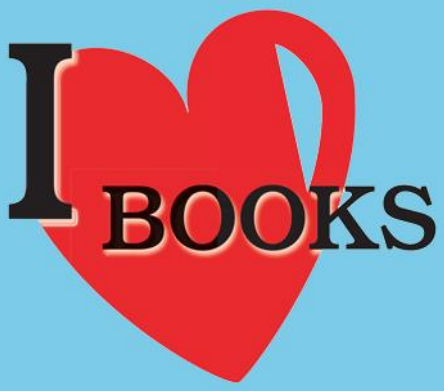


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Opening extract from

See Inside the World of Shakespeare

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Shakespeare's London

Shakespeare came to London in the early 1590s, to make his name as an actor and playwright. The sights and sounds of the bustling city had a big effect on his writing.

London was by far the largest city in England. Around 200,000 people lived within its medieval walls, and in bustling Southwark across the River Thames.



This map shows London in 1588, around the time Shakespeare began working there as a playwright.

London's taverns – known as tippling houses – were rowdy places.

The dirty streets were perfect places for diseases, such as smallpox or typhus, to spread.

Science and magic

Science and magic weren't that different in most people's minds. Scientists, known as alchemists, searched for ways to turn lead into gold, while astrologers studied the stars to see the future.



An alchemist at work

A crowd gathers to watch a criminal being hanged. People were used to seeing grisly things in public, even the brutal torture of convicted criminals.

Religion was a big part of everyone's life – there were around 100 churches in London.

Fights in the streets were common. Shakespeare's plays often show fighting and murder.

Backstage

Backstage at a playhouse was a busy place. Members of the acting company rushed around, changing costumes or preparing props for the next scene.

The backstage area was called the 'tiring house', because this was where players changed their 'attire' (costumes).

Who's who



Acting companies were all boys and men.



Boys played all the female characters.



The bookkeeper looked after the script. He whispered lines to forgetful actors on stage.



The tireman made and looked after the costumes.



The stagekeeper prepared props for the play.

There is no scenery on the stage. Instead props and costumes brought the drama to life.

A cannon is fired during battle scenes.

Costumes, props and texts of old plays are kept in the storeroom.

At the end of the play, all of the actors perform a jig – a comic song and dance – and they announce the next play.

The roof above the stage is called 'the heavens'.

Musicians play from the balcony. The acting company has a big collection of instruments.

The tireman prepares and mends costumes in his workshop.

For fight scenes, actors stuff a sheep's bladder filled with blood down their costume.

Actors beneath the stage add sound effects to the play.

There's a trap door hidden on the stage...

Doors, covered by curtains, lead to the stage.

Bookkeeper

Shakespeare

Tragic tales

Shakespeare wrote at least 38 plays. His 'tragedies' are dark stories about flawed characters, doomed romances, jealousy, madness and power.

The heroes of Shakespeare's tragedies usually have flaws, such as greed or ambition, which cause their misfortunes, and eventually their death.

Hamlet

A ghostly figure appears high in a Danish castle. It is the spirit of Prince Hamlet's father. He tells the young prince the dark truth about how he died – murdered by Hamlet's uncle, Claudius. Hamlet vows to get revenge...





Macbeth

Returning from a battle, Scottish lords Macbeth and Banquo meet three witches. The witches tell Macbeth that he will become king, but also that Banquo's children will rule one day too.



King Lear

Old King Lear plans to divide his kingdom between his three daughters, but first they must say how much they love him. When the daughter Lear loves the most, Cordelia, refuses to take part, Lear banishes her from his kingdom. Her sisters then plot against the King, and against one another.



Julius Caesar

Shakespeare wrote four plays set in Ancient Rome. In *Julius Caesar*, Roman senators (politicians) fear that war hero Julius Caesar might become too powerful. They hatch a plot to murder him and seize power. But their crime sparks a bitter struggle for control over the Roman Empire.





Romeo and Juliet

Romeo and Juliet are in love, but their families – the Montagues and the Capulets – are sworn enemies. In the play's best-known scene, Romeo secretly visits Juliet beneath her balcony at night, in the Italian city of Verona.

Unlike some of Shakespeare's tragedies, the main characters in *Romeo and Juliet* don't cause their own downfall. Instead, they are innocent victims, caught up in secrets and lies.







Tragic elements

Often, heroes in Shakespeare's tragedies give solo speeches, called 'soliloquies'. They help the audience understand what's going on in a character's mind.

Several tragedies contain supernatural characters, such as ghosts and witches.





