

Bitesize KS3 English Literature – Shakespeare

About Shakespeare – Performance transcript

MALE PRESENTER

All the world's a stage. Argh! Except for this bit, this is in fact a road, though ironically, up until Shakespeare's time, out on the road was where most stages were found, as bands of actors would tour the country putting on what were intriguingly called Mystery Plays.

In fact, they weren't very mysterious, just seriously dull and a bit preachy until, thankfully, the plague came along.

KEN

Hello.

MALE PRESENTER

Which was bad news for people like Ken, but great news for the theatre.

Have you really got the plague?

KEN

Yeah, (coughing) don't kiss me.

MALE PRESENTER

I wasn't going to.

You see, to help stop the plague spreading, travelling players were banned and the touring theatre was replaced with places like this. Ah, hang on a minute.

How about this.

You see, the playhouses themselves became hugely popular, with some companies putting on ten different plays in just two weeks, with the actors playing several roles in each one. Must have been confusing.

FEMALE MEMBER OF PUBLIC

Ah, it's Romeo and Juliet tonight.

MALE MEMBER OF PUBLIC

It's definitely Midsummer Night's Dream.

MALE PRESENTER

You're both wrong, it's Hamlet. The original production of Hamlet starred Shakespeare himself, presumably as Hamlet.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

No, I was the ghost.

Bitesize

MALE PRESENTER

Really?

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Well it was either me or Todd and Todd can't act.

TODD

Whooooo!

MALE PRESENTER

Oh.

The playhouses themselves had no backdrops or scenery, although the actors would wear pretty lavish outfits that would befit of nobles and royals, but they weren't allowed to leave the theatre in costume because, if they did, they would be fined.

Oh dear. Luckily, many of them had ingenious trapdoors built into the ceiling and floor. Arghhhhhhhhhhh!

And up on the roof of the Globe, they even had a cannon, which they fired during battle scenes, to add a real sense of drama.

[SFX - SOUND OF EXPLOSION]

Especially during a performance of Henry VIII in 1613, when the cannon misfired and burnt the whole theatre down.

[SFX - SOUND OF SIREN]

Guys, I think I'm gonna get down now. Guys, guys!

But a year later, they rebuilt the theatre, giving that tragedy a happy ending. In fact, back then pretty much all tragedies had a happy ending. Thanks mate, you're really strong.

[FEMALE ACTOR WEEPS IN BACKGROUND]

To make sure the audiences left in a good mood, even the dramatic plays with a sad ending like Romeo and Juliet, would be followed up by a ridiculously upbeat song and dance number. Totally inappropriate.

Five, six, seven, eight.

[UPBEAT MUSIC PLAYS]