

# Frequently asked questions about Shakespeare and his work



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## Do we know Shakespeare's date of birth?

We can not be sure of his exact date of birth. We know it was in 1564 but our only record at this time was of his baptism at the Holy Trinity Church on April the 26th. It is assumed that his date of birth would have been about three days before and by tradition is celebrated on April the 23rd.

## At what age did Shakespeare write his first play?

It is believed that Shakespeare wrote his first play [Henry VI, Part 1](#), between 1589 and 1590. Shakespeare would have been 25 at the time.

This play is believed to have been performed at The Rose Theatre in London.

## Do we have a record of all of Shakespeare's work?

The play Cardenio, though written and performed in Shakespeare's time was not for some reason recorded in the First Folio of 1623, the same as Pericles.

Unlike Pericles which appeared in the Second Folio we have no record of the play Cardenio.

## How many plays did Shakespeare write?

Thirty seven plays as the sole or main writer (thirty-eight including the lost play Cardenio) and 154 sonnets.

The Two Noble Kinsmen, composed in 1613 is credited in a 1634 Stationer's Registry entry as being the work of both William Shakespeare and John Fletcher.

This play as he was the not the sole or main writer is not usually included in collections of Shakespeare's plays.

Love's Labour's Won is sometimes attributed to Shakespeare as a lost play.

It may be a sequel to Love's Labour's Lost or just be a rewording of another play's title.

## What is Shakespeare's greatest play?

[Hamlet](#) is generally considered to be Shakespeare's greatest play by critics, actors, and also the general public.

Hamlet grieves for his father and avenges his death.

[Macbeth](#) may be considered his second greatest play about a great man that lets his ambition and that of his wife's turn him into a murderer. It is very tightly written.

## What is Shakespeare's longest play?

Shakespeare's longest play is [Hamlet](#). It has 4011 lines of spoken text ("standard" quoted is 4024 lines). For lengths of plays see [Play lengths](#) Hamlet is also one of his most popular plays.

## What is Shakespeare's shortest play?

Shakespeare's shortest play is [The Comedy of Errors](#) It has 1790 lines of spoken text ("standard" quoted is 1786 lines).

## How many characters in all of Shakespeare's plays have lines of speech?

We are glad you asked! If include all 37 of Shakespeare's plays and include all characters

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that have one or more lines of speech there are 1,333 characters. Some of these are not separate characters but where "all" or "both" characters are speaking at the same time, so excluding these, there are 1,292 separate characters (there are 31 "all" characters and 10 "both" characters).

Some characters appear in more than one play, there are 39 such repeats in total.

For details see [Characters appearing in more than one play](#). If exclude these repeat occurrences, there are 1,253 individual characters.

Note some characters always speak at the same time as a group eg [Citizens in Coriolanus](#), so each "group" is usually counted as one character. There are 23 such group characters.

See [Full list of all Shakespeare's characters \(with link for each character\)](#).

### **How many female characters in all of Shakespeare's plays have lines of speech?**

If include all 37 of shakespeare's plays and include all characters that have one or more lines of speech there are 162 characters.

Two female characters appear in more than one play, Queen Margaret and Hostess, and there are 6 repeats in total.

For details see [Characters appearing in more than one play](#). If exclude these repeat occurrences, there are 156 separate female characters.

Some character's gender is ambiguous, or is not male or female (6 such characters, they are usually spirits or supernatural).

If exclude these characters there are 150 female characters.

See [Full list of female Shakespeare's characters \(with link for each character\)](#)

### **How many words did Shakespeare write?**

According to Marvin Spevack's concordances to Shakespeare's works, Shakespeare's complete works consist of 884,647 words and 118,406 lines.

For lengths of plays see [Play lengths](#)

### **Who is Shakespeare's most villainous or most evil character?**

[Iago](#) from [Othello](#) is probably the most villainous and the most well known villain.

He is jealous of Cassio, so he convinces Othello that his wife Desdemona is sleeping with Cassio.

Othello then kills Desdemona. Iago's wife tells Othello that she was innocent, and that Iago had lied to him. She is stabbed and killed by Iago.

He has no regrets at all and is only interested in himself to the end. He states at the end:

Demand me nothing: what you know, you know:

From this time forth I never will speak word. ([5.2.349-250](#)).

Probably the most evil is [Aaron](#) from [Titus Andronicus](#).

Aaron persuades Tamora's sons Chiron and Demetrius to rape and mutilate Titus's daughter Lavinia.

They cut out her tongue and cut off her hands so that she can't identify them.

Titus's other two sons were imprisoned, and Aaron tells Tamora to tell Titus that if he would cut off his own hand she would set his sons free. But after Titus sends his own hand it is immediately returned along with the heads of his two sons.

See [All plays, villain list of characters](#)

### **What is the longest speech in Shakespeare's plays?**

The longest speech is spoken by Mercutio in Romeo and Juliet ([1.4.57-99](#)) which is 43 lines.

See also [Romeo and Juliet Monologues](#)

### **What is the shortest speech in Shakespeare's plays?**

The shortest speech is spoken by King John in King John which is just one word:

Death. ([3.3.72](#))

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### What is the longest scene in Shakespeare's plays?

The longest scene is [Love's Labour's Lost Act V, Scene 2](#) which is 932 lines.

The second longest scene is [Macbeth Act IV, Scene 3](#) which is 281 lines.

The third longest scene, which is sometimes wrongly stated as the longest scene is [Hamlet Act I, Scene 2](#) which is 274 lines.

### What is the shortest scene in Shakespeare's plays?

There are three scenes that are the shortest, they have 4 lines of spoken text.

They are: [Antony and Cleopatra Act III, Scene 9](#)

[Antony and Cleopatra Act IV, Scene 11](#)

[The Merry Wives of Windsor Act V, Scene 4](#).

There are two scenes that are the second shortest, they have 6 lines of spoken text.

They are: [Julius Caesar Act V, Scene 2](#)

[Antony and Cleopatra Act III, Scene 8](#).

Probably the most well known short scene is [Macbeth Act I, Scene 1](#) where the witches decide when they will next meet, it is 13 lines.

### What play has the fewest number of characters?

Othello has the fewest number of characters. It has 13 characters excluding messengers and attendants, etc according to the [dramatis personae](#). However if include all characters that have one line of speech or more it has 26 characters.

See [Othello's Full list of characters](#)

### What play can be played by the fewest number of actors?

As actors can "double up" to play one or more parts, this question can be thought of asking: "What play has the scene where the maximum number of characters on stage within the play is the fewest?"

[The Comedy of Errors](#) probably has the fewest and so can be played by the fewest number of actors. It has a maximum of 9 characters on stage at one time excluding attendants etc in [Act V scene 1](#)

The Comedy of Errors has 17 characters excluding officers and attendants etc according to the [dramatis personae](#). If include all characters that have one line of speech or more it has 20 characters.

See [The Comedy of Errors' Full list of characters](#)

### What is the longest word used in Shakespeare's plays?

The longest word is honorificabilitudinitatibus, which means "the state of being able to achieve honours".

It appears in [Love's Labour's Lost \(5.1.41\)](#):

O, they have lived long on the alms-basket of words.

I marvel thy master hath not eaten thee for a word;

for thou art not so long by the head as

honorificabilitudinitatibus: thou art easier

swallowed than a flap-dragon. ([5.1.38-42](#))

### What plays are written entirely in verse?

[King John](#) and [Richard II](#)

### What are the best or most notable Shakespeare films?

Probably the best and most notable Shakespeare film are:

Macbeth, (1948), starring Orson Welles, Jeanette Nolan, Dan O'Herlihy. Directed by Orson Welles.

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Henry V, (1989), starring Kenneth Branagh, Derek Jacobi, Ian Holm. Directed by Kenneth Branagh.

Hamlet, (1996), starring Kenneth Branagh, Richard Attenborough, Judi Dench, Billy Crystal and Kate Winslet.

Directed by Kenneth Branagh.

Welles' Macbeth although low budget is powerful and memorable.

Branagh's Hamlet as well as being a visual treat has great performances.

See [Notable films](#)

### What do we know about Shakespeare's coat of arms?

On October 20, 1596 permission from the Garter King of Arms was granted to John Shakespeare, Shakespeare's father.

It was "Gold, on a bend (diagonal bar) sable (black), a spear of the first (i.e. gold), steeled argent (with a silver tip); and for his crest... a falcon his wings displayed argent (silver), standing on a wreath of his colours supporting a spear gold, steeled as aforesaid, (i.e. silver) set upon a helmet with mantles and tassles".

The application cost 30 guineas.

The grant was approved on the basis of the "faithfull & approved service to H7 [Henry VII]" performed by John Sakespeare's great-grandfather, and because John himself had "maryed the daughter & one of the heys of Robert Arden of Wellingcote." The motto was "Non sanz droict" which means "Not without right".

In 1602 regarding the coat of arms, Peter Brooke accused Sir William Dethick (Garter King-of-Arms) and his associate Camden (Clarenceux King-of-Arms) of "elevating base persons, and assigning devices already in use".

This also included a draft drawing of the coat of arms, and their reply included a second drswing. The complaint was dismissed.

There is no record that the arms was actually used in Shakespeare's lifetime.

### Who were Shakespeare's close friends?

Some of Shakespeare's close friends were members of his acting company.

He left some money in his will to Richard Burbage, an actor, and John Heminge (sometimes spelt Heminges) and Henry Condell, his colleagues.

John Heminge and Henry Condell collected 36 of their late friend's plays and published them together in a volume now known as "The First Folio".

Shakespeare's twins Judith and Hamnet were named after two very close friends, a baker named Hamnet Sadler and his wife, Judith.

Please see [People connections](#)

Also see [Extract preface to the First folio, Heminge and Condell's dedication](#)

### What do we know of Shakespeare's descendants or family tree?

Please see [Family tree](#)

### How much did it cost to see a play?

For those standing the fee was one penny. (There were 240 pennies in one pound.) They stood in the "pit" right by the stage and were called "groundlings".

At the top were the galleries where merchants used to sit. Their seats cost between two to six pennies. There were also "Gentlemen's Rooms" or boxes for the rich and these cost a shilling. (There were twelve pennies in a shilling.)

The entrance fee was paid in a box by the door, which is where the term "box office" comes from.

### How long was a play's performance?

In Romeo and Juliet it refers to two hours:

Is now the two hours' traffic of our stage ([0.0.12](#))

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In Shakespeare's time lines were probably said quicker than today, and there were very quick scene changes as there were no sets.

It may be that some of the plays were cut for performance compared to the written text.

Most Shakespeare plays today take quite a lot longer than two hours to perform, and are said at about 1,000 lines per hour.

Hamlet has 4011 lines, and takes between about four and four and a half hours to be performed.

The Comedy of Errors, which is Shakespeare's shortest play has 1790 lines, and takes about 1 hour 50 minutes.

See [Play lengths](#)

### **Where can I find a monologue for an audition etc?**

See [All plays Monologues menu \(with text for each monologue\)](#).

### **Where can I watch plays or movies of Shakespeare's plays?**

You can watch completely for free here. See [Video plays menu](#)

### **Who said that Shakespeare was "not of an age, but for all time"?**

This praise was said by Shakespeare's friend and writer Ben Jonson in his [poem](#) as part of the preface to Shakespeare's First Folio.

### **Where did you get the texts for shakespearecandle?**

Please see [About the texts](#)

## Technical questions

### **What is a way to remember the names of Shakespeare's plays?**

A way to remember the list of Shakespeare's 37 plays is the following mnemonic:

Just Learn Only William's Plays, Method That's Hard RACK

For details see [Mnemonic for plays](#)

### **Could an infinite number of monkeys in an infinite amount of time type the complete works of Shakespeare?**

If infinite number of monkeys and infinite time, the answer is yes.

This is the infinite monkeys theorem. It assumes the monkeys are continually typing keys randomly. But even if every proton in the universe were a monkey and each monkey was typing a key a second from the Big Bang to the end of the universe, over 100 trillion years, would need a far greater amount of time.

(It is also questionable whether monkeys would evolve, or whether protons would still exist as end of universe approaches.)

It would probably take a monkey's entire life just to randomly type banana, with about a 5% chance of doing so.

### **Can you include a video of mine on your website?**

If you are the owner of the copyright of the video we will look at it to see if we want to include it. The video does not have to be professional quality and can be of any length. The sound and picture quality must be at least good and any acting must be very good. Upload the video to youtube and [Contact us](#) with the youtube link for us to look at the video. If the video is included copyright will remain with you, but shakespearecandle.com will be allowed to use the video in all perpetuity.

### **What are future enhancements to the website?**

Please see [Releases](#)

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**I have other questions or suggestions or a request, what should I do?**

Please [Contact us](#)