**William Shakespeare**

-Baptized on April 26th, 1564 in Stratford-on-Avon

-third child of John Shakespeare and Mary Arden (m. 1557). His two older sisters died in infancy, but there were three brothers and at least two other sisters who lived into childhood.

-John Shakespeare was well off: dealt in farm products and wool, owned property and was alderman, high bailiff and chief alderman.

-No records of Shakespeare's education. This is significant because we don’t actually know what kind of education he received so it’s hard to tell if he is actually completely responsible for his plays. He probably went to the Parish school though.

**Adult Life**

-At 18, he married Anne Hathaway, who was 26.

-1583: Susanna was born.

-1585: Hamnet and Judith were baptized.

-The time immediately after his marriage is unknown. He may have been an apprentice butcher, a teacher, or a provincial company actor.

-Eventually ran away to London to join a company. He started as a stage hand, also known as a holder of horses, and then worked his way up.

-He was established by 1592.

**Some Family Dates**

-August 11, 1596: Hamnet, Shakespeare's son, is buried.

-October 20, 1596: John Shakespeare given a coat of arms.

-September 9, 1601: John Shakespeare buried.

-September 9, 1608: Mary Shakespeare buried.

-June 5, 1607: Susanna Shakespeare married Dr. John Hall (their daughter is named Elizabeth).

-February 10, 1616: Judith Shakespeare marries Thomas Quiney during Lent without a license and is excommunicated.

-March 25, 1616: Shakespeare revises his will. He leaves his second best bed to his wife.

-April 25, 1616: Shakespeare buried.

**Shakespeare the Writer**

-His first plays seem to have appeared in the early 1590s.

-1593: First published work is "Venus and Adonis," a poem.

-1594: "The Rape of Lucrece" appears. There is believed to be an increase in poetry at this time because of an outbreak of the plague closed all the theatres.

-1609: His book of sonnets was published.

-1594: "A Comedy of Errors" is performed.

-1595: Shakespeare and his company, the Lord Chamberlain's Men, are paid to perform for the Queen.

-1599: The Globe Theatre is founded.

-Post 1603: The Lord Chamberlain's Men became the King's Men in honour of King James I.

-Several plays were published during Shakespeare's life time, such as Titus Andronicus, Henry VI (Parts II and III), and a pirated edition of Romeo and Juliet, but 18 are known only because they appeared in a collected volume called the First Folio, which was published in 1623.

-Plays weren’t published at the time because they were written quickly for fast production, collaboration happened a lot, and they weren’t thought to be reading material.

-The theatre companies owned the rights to the play and they were only usually published if the company disbanded, they needed money or the play didn’t do so well and needed to be defended against criticism.

-Sometimes pirated editions were circulated and these happened when a single member of the company wanted money or someone copied down the play.

**Shakespeare’s Works and a Bit of Controversy**

-There are 37 plays usually attributed to Shakespeare. Six of these have been questioned as to whether he actually wrote them.

-154 sonnets are attributed to him.

-Some people believe there was no way he could have written the works.

-Collaboration was common, and it's likely that he worked with other authors at least on some of the works.

**Shakespeare’s England**

-There was a rise of the middle class during Shakespeare's age.

-London was a walled city with a population of about 200,000.

-There were no sewers or drains, so the city was smelly so were the people.

-Leeching and blood letting were common treatments for illness.

-The major church was the Anglican church created by Henry VIII and furthered by his daughter Elizabeth I.

**Elizabeth I**

-reigned 1558-1603

-youngest daughter of Henry VIII.

-preceded to the throne by her younger brother, Edward VI, and older sister, Mary I, or Bloody Mary.

-Elizabeth was known as the Virgin Queen as she never married or had any children.

-Elizabeth avoided naming an heir for a long time, which worried her subjects because if she died without an heir there would be chaos.

-Eventually, Elizabeth named James VI of Scotland as her heir.

**James I**

-reigned 1603-1625

-son of Mary, Queen of Scots, who was executed by Elizabeth I in 1587 for treason.

-James first ruled Scotland as James VI and then took the rule of England in 1603, joining the two countries for the first time.

-November 5, 1603: Roman Catholics angry over fees for not attending Protestant services levvied against them, plotted to blow up the parliament and James with them. This is called the Gunpowder Plot.

-They stored a large amount of gunpowder in the cellar, but the plot was discovered and the conspirators were arrested and executed.

-He believed that kings and queens were chosen by God.

**Some More Notes about Plays**

-The source of Shakespeare's genius, was not his plots. The plot in R&J is actually quite thin and weak, with a lot of coincidence. He is really good at character development.

-Additionally, you must remember that when he wrote, he could only write characters for the actors that he had in his troop. If his troop didn't have a certain type of actor he couldn't write the character.

-You must also keep in mind that plays written at this time were mostly not original ideas. They were often based off familiar stories. The mark of a good playwright was shown by how good they were at adapting a familiar story.

-In Shakespeare's plays there is a mix of prose and verse.

-Plays fully in verse were out of fashion at his time.

-Elevated passages, philosophically significant ideas and speeches by men of high rank are in verse.

-Comic and light parts or speeches are done in prose.

-The verse is almost always blank verse (iambic pentameter without rhyme).

-Rhyme is used to mark the close of scenes or an important action. It also marks character entrance, and change of mood, etc.

Iambic Pentameter: A line of verse with five metrical feet. Each foot consists of one short or unstressed syllable followed by a long or stressed syllable.

Ex. Two households, both alike in dignity.

**Macbeth**

-first printed in 1623 in the First Folio

-based on Holinshed’s “Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland.”

-written in honour of James I, who was the patron of Shakespeare’s theatre company.

-James was very interested in the supernatural and wrote two books about witches.

-Several of the characters are ancestors of James: Duncan, Malcolm, Banquo, and Fleance.

-*Macbeth* is the shortest tragedy Shakespeare wrote.

**Witchcraft**

-Witches were believed to have the following powers:

They could speak with the devil, and with his help could communicate with the dead. Some could see into the future.

They could make people fall ill by using spells and potions, and they could kill people at a distance.

They could fly through the air, and make themselves invisible at will.

They use animals such as cats as disguises for the evil spirits who serve them.

They can cause bad weather and storms, affecting ships at sea and spoiling the crops.

-In other words they could be blamed for everything and anything that went wrong.

-In Scotland, between 1590 and 1680, it is estimated that 4400 witches were executed.

-The most famous case was the North Berwick witches in 1590-92.

-They were accused of worshipping the Devil in church at night, flying in sieves, raising storms, and attempting to murder King James I by melting a wax image of him in a fire, among other things.

-The king took this very seriously and interrogated them himself.

-One witch, Agnes Simpson, was able to whisper the words he and his wife had spoken to each other on their wedding night, which naturally impressed him.

-They finally confessed and all were executed.

**The Curse of Macbeth**

-The curse of *Macbeth* is the misfortune that happens during the production of the play.

-The theory goes that Shakespeare included actual black magic spells in the incantations of the weird sisters.

-Anyone who appears in the play and mentions the name within the confines of the theatre risk having these evils brought down on their heads.

-It is often called “The Scottish Play” or “that play” or “that unmentionable.”

-It is supposed to be bad luck to use any sets, costumes, or props from the production over again.

-This reputation is partly from the weird sisters, and partly because tradition traces a long line of disasters back to it’s premier on August 7, 1606.

-To break the curse you must step outside, turn around three times, spit, and say the foulest word you can think of, and wait for permission to re-enter the theatre.

-Another method is mumbling the phrase: “Thrice around the circle bound, Evil sink into the ground.”