



Shakespeare's London and Theatre

Opening Discussion: Activate Prior Knowledge

Explain to students that they are going to travel back in time to 1611, to a performance at the Globe. London was by far the biggest town in England and an attractive place to young men like William Shakespeare, who arrived there to make his fortune some time between 1592 and 1594.

Create a thought shower from students' prior knowledge and impressions of London, and what theatres might have been like, at this time.

Group Activities

1) Shakespeare's London

Students work in small groups discovering information on a particular topic about London life in Shakespeare's time. The topics you could assign are: entertainment; crime and punishment; transport; shops and trades; clothing; buildings; poverty; hygiene; risks and dangers.

The text on page 3 ('**Shakespeare and his Theatre**') could be used as a starting point for their research.

Students could also be encouraged to visit the Globe's website and explore our fact pages, to discover the world that Shakespeare lived in:

<https://www.shakespearesglobe.com/discover/shakespeares-world/>

Once they have completed their research, they present back their findings to the class. After this, you can ask them to complete the close activity (or set this as homework) on page 4.

2) Theatre glossary

Explain that theatres were outside the walls of the City of London on the south bank of the River Thames and this meant that they were outside the jurisdiction of the Puritan city fathers. Here people would find bear pits, brothels and theatres. The Globe Theatre was built in 1599.

Students are going to compile their own glossary and/or semantic maps about theatres in Shakespeare's time. A **glossary** is provided for students to complete on page 5, with the following terms:

attic, discovery space, frons scenae, gentlemen's boxes, groundlings, heavens, hell, iambic pentameter, jig,, in the round, lords' rooms, musicians' gallery, thrust stage, tiring house, traps, vomitorium, yard. There is also a **semantic map** for them to hone in on key words.

Divide up the words among the group and ask them to predict what they think the word means in the context of Shakespeare's theatre before looking it up; a full **Teacher Glossary** can be found on the website.



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Take feedback from students, including hearing about words that have a specific meaning in this context, but which have a different or more general meaning outside of this context. You could also display or print off a map of the Globe Theatre and encourage them to label the different parts of the theatre.



Shakespeare's London and Theatre: Shakespeare and his Theatre

Jim Bradbury, *Shakespeare and his Theatre* (Longman, 1975):

London was still a walled city with its medieval gates: Bishopsgate, Aldgate, Cripplegate and so on. There were so many newcomers that London was growing outside its walls, to the west around Westminster, over the river on the south bank, and along the main roads that came into the city. But there were still fields in many places that are now built over, such as Moorfields and Chelsea. You could still go duck-shooting... to Islington ponds. Hackney was a village that sent turnips to the city.

The River Thames was as important to London then as it is now. Ships came and went from all over the world, to ports on the continent, to the Mediterranean, sometimes to the New World of America, or perhaps just up and down the Thames, or round the English coast. Water transport often seemed more reliable than the badly made roads.

London Bridge was still the only bridge over the river into London. People often crossed by ferry. The watermen got very annoyed when the authorities closed the theatres on the south bank, because they lost all the customers they usually took across to see the plays. London Bridge was the old bridge you have probably seen in pictures with houses and shops actually on the bridge itself, with a covered way and just a narrow road. It had twenty arches between the large piers or 'starlings'. They caused the water to flow through so fast that it made dangerous currents. On the Gatehouse tower of the bridge the heads of traitors were stuck on poles as a warning. In 1592 a foreign visitor counted thirty-four heads on show.



Shakespeare's London and Theatre: Close Activity

The close activity featured below will help you build a picture of what a visit to the theatre in Shakespeare's time would have been like.

By 1600 London theatres could take up to _____ people for the most popular plays. With several theatres offering plays most afternoons, this meant between _____ and 20,000 people a week going to London theatres.

With such large audiences, plays only had short runs and then had to be replaced. Between 1560 and 1640 about 3,000 new plays were written. To attract the crowds, these plays often re-told famous stories from the past, and they used violence, music and humour to keep people's attention. This was vital because, if audiences didn't like a play, they made their feelings known. In 1629, a visiting French company were hissed and _____ from the stage. This was because the company used _____ to play the female roles, something which outraged the audience.

In open air theatres the cheapest price was only 1 penny which bought you a place amongst the _____ standing in the 'yard' around the stage. (There were 240 pennies in £1.) For another penny, you could have a bench seat in the lower galleries which surrounded the yard. Or for a penny or so more, you could sit more comfortably on a cushion. The most expensive seats would have been in the _____. Admission to the indoor theatres started at 6 pence.

The groundlings were very close to the action on stage. They could buy food and drink during the performance – _____ (apples), oranges, nuts, gingerbread and ale. But there were no _____ and the floor they stood on was probably just sand, ash or covered in _____.

In Shakespeare's day, as people came into the theatre they had to put their money in a _____. So the place where audiences pay became known as the box office.

groundlings toilets Lord's Rooms 10,000 women
pippin-pelted box pippins 3,000 nutshells



Shakespeare's London and Theatre: Glossary

Attic	
Discovery Space	
Frons Scenae	
Gentleman's Boxes	
Groundlings	
Heavens	
Hell	
Iambic Pentameter	
In the Round	
Jig	
Lords' Rooms	
Musicians' Gallery	
Thrust Stage	
Tiring House	
Traps	
Vomitorium	
Yard	



Shakespeare's London and Theatre: Semantic Map

Definition in your own words	Use it in a sentence
Word:	
Synonyms or examples	Antonyms or non-examples

You can add an image to support your understanding below: