

Shakespeare's Life

from The British Library

Help Sheet

1. **Key Ideas and Details:** What does paragraph 1 say about Shakespeare's life?

1 Shakespeare was born in Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire, in 1564. Very little is known about his life, but by 1592 he was in London working as an actor and a dramatist. Between about 1590 and 1613, Shakespeare wrote at least 37 plays and collaborated on several more. Many of these plays were very successful both at court and in the public playhouses. In 1613, Shakespeare retired from the theatre and returned to Stratford-upon-Avon. He died and was buried there in 1616.

The text says there is _____ known about Shakespeare's life. He was born at _____ in _____ and buried there in _____. He worked as a _____ and _____.

2. **Craft and Structure:** What does the word *manuscript* mean in paragraph 4? Which phrase in the sentence helps you understand the meaning of the word?

4 None of Shakespeare's **manuscripts** survives, so the printed texts of his plays are our only source for what he originally wrote. The quarto editions are the texts closest to Shakespeare's time. Some are thought to preserve either his working drafts (his foul papers) or his fair copies. Others are thought to record versions remembered by actors who performed the plays, providing information about staging practices in Shakespeare's day.

The text says only the printed copies of his manuscripts are still around. The printed copies are the only source left of what he originally wrote, so what is a manuscript? What words helped you come to that definition?

A manuscript is _____.

The words that helped me were _____.

3. **Key Ideas and Details:** How do the details in the fourth paragraph show that the quartos are important?

4None of Shakespeare’s manuscripts survives, so the printed texts of his plays are our only source for what he originally wrote. **The quarto editions are the texts closest to Shakespeare’s time. Some are thought to preserve either his working drafts (his foul papers) or his fair copies. Others are thought to record versions remembered by actors who performed the plays, providing information about staging practices in Shakespeare’s day.**

The quartos are important because they are his _____ drafts, so they are the closest to what he originally _____. They are also the text _____ to his time and provide information about _____ in Shakespeare’s day.

4. **Craft and Structure:** Which details from the section *Shakespeare in Print* contribute to the development of the ideas in the text, and how?

6Printed plays formed a very small part of the book trade. Relatively few plays got into print. They did not sell in large numbers, and were not particularly profitable. The companies of players were not necessarily reluctant to have their plays printed, but the uncertainty of profits may well have deterred publishers. The dramatists themselves were unlikely to make money from the printing of their plays. There was no law of [copyright](#) to protect their interests. Once a manuscript play had been sold to a publisher, and he had paid for its approval and licensing for printing, he had sole rights over the work.

7Several of Shakespeare’s plays, including *Richard II* and *Richard III*, were popular enough to be printed in several editions. From 1598, with *Love’s Labour’s Lost*, his name began to be added to their title-pages as a selling point. Scholars have long held that Shakespeare had no interest in the printing of his plays, but this is now being challenged.

Plays were a _____ part of the book trade and several of Shakespeare’s plays were _____ several times. This lets us know that Shakespeare’s plays were _____ because people were willing to buy them.