Information

Michael Rosen's Pocket Shakespeare: A Beginner's Guide to the Best Bits of The Bard By Michael Rosen, illustrated by Chris Riddell

Meet the author – Michael Rosen



Tell us a little bit about yourself?

I was born in 1946 and have lived in and around London all my life. I've been writing since I was about 15. I studied English language and literature at university and I present a radio programme on BBC Radio 4 called 'Word of Mouth' which is all about how we talk and the words we use. I visit school and book festivals doing my one-man show. I also have a YouTube Channel that has had over 150 million views.

When did you first learn about Shakespeare and what did you think?

My parents were both teachers and both loved Shakespeare. Right from when I was very young, there was a mix of things: old 'gramophone' records of the plays that my parents used to play, radio productions of the plays, seeing films of Shakespeare plays like Lawrence Olivier's *Hamlet*, *Richard III* and *Henry V*. I was also taken to see plays at the Old Vic and I saw famous actors like Judi Dench and Sir John Gielgud there. A friend of my father's put on Shakespeare plays at his school, (Kilburn Grammar School), and I can remember some great productions of *Henry IV part i* and *Henry IV part ii*.

Why did you want to write a book about Shakespeare?

There are many ways of getting into Shakespeare and there are some great books that help us do that. When I was young, I used to like reading the books that told the stories of the plays so that when I went to see the plays, I could be sure I knew what was going on. There are really good cartoon versions and I really like ones that have extracts of the dialogue in the plays so that we can perform those. There aren't many for young people, I thought, that gather together the great speeches, songs, and any sonnets. So that's what we did, and Chris Riddell has done some fantastic pictures to go with them.

What is your favourite Shakespeare quote and why?

'So we'll live/And pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh/At gilded butterflies...'

This comes at a moment when angry old King Lear finally realises that he's done his daughter Cordelia wrong. He wants her to forgive him, so he conjures up an image of how they might be in the future. I'm always amazed at how Shakespeare could have come up with such an incredible image as the idea that they might 'laugh at gilded butterflies' (gilded means covered in gold) and put it into the mouth of someone at a moment of high emotion!

Do you prefer to write stories or poems?

When I'm writing a story, I usually feel that I'm at the very biggest 'stretch' of what I can do. When I write poems, I usually feel comfortable.

What would you like to write about next?

My father's uncle and aunt escaped from being watched over and fled hundreds of miles across France. It was during the Second World War and if they had been captured they would have been killed. I want to imagine and research what that was like.

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