William Shakespeare was born in April 1564 in a house in Stratford-upon-Avon.

His father, John Shakespeare, was a glove maker and Mary, his mother, was the daughter of a local farmer.

In the year William was born, the plague was in Stratford-upon-Avon and many people died as a result. There was a special doctor called a plague doctor. He would wear a long black cloak which covered him from head to toe, and a special mask shaped a bit like a bird's beak.

When William was about seven years old, he started school in Stratford-upon-Avon. He was lucky to go to school because not everybody did. It cost money to go to school, so if your family were poor you would have stayed at home and learnt the family trade instead. Girls did not usually go to school in those days. Happily, today both girls and boys have equal education opportunities in schools.

Children learned to read from a horn book. It was made of wood from an oak tree and a piece of parchment - which is a bit like paper but made from sheep or goat skin. It had the alphabet, some phonics and a Christian prayer printed on it, for the children to read from. It is called a horn book because the parchment is covered by a thin layer of horn from a cow which was used to protect it.

For a full range of resources see: shakespeare.org.uk/primaryresources
William Shakespeare's life story

When William was a bit older he moved up to ‘Big school’. There William would have learnt to write with a quill pen. It would have been made from a feather from a goose or a swan.

At the age of 18 William married a woman called Anne Hathaway and they had three children, Susanna and twins Judith and Hamnet. Although Shakespeare spent a lot of time in London acting and writing plays. He also came home to see his family in Stratford-upon-Avon. He wrote some of his plays in his big house in Stratford-upon-Avon, known as New Place.

During their reigns, both Queen Elizabeth I and King James I really liked William’s plays and so he became incredibly famous! He also became so rich and successful that, along with other actor friends, he became part owner of a theatre in London called The Globe.

William died in 1616 when he was 52 years old. He was buried at Holy Trinity Church in Stratford-upon-Avon. The church burial entry shows his name and by it, it says ‘gent’! This meant he had reached the status of a gentleman - something that was very important at the time.

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William Shakespeare's life story

William was buried inside Holy Trinity Church in Stratford-upon-Avon. He famously put a curse on his grave so that nobody would move his body once he had been buried. The curse reads, ‘Blessed be the man that spares these bones and cursed be he that moves my bones!’

Seven years after William's death, his friends gathered his plays together and published them in a book known as The First Folio.

William Shakespeare’s grave in Holy Trinity Church, Stratford-upon-Avon

Activity
Using information included above, as well as that on Shakespeare's Timeline (see separate resource sheet), create your own presentation on William Shakespeare’s life and times to share with family, friends or classmates.

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