Your notes

KS3 English: revision notes

Shakespeare

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Shakespeare's life and theatre

- William Shakespeare (1564 to 1616) was born in Stratford-upon-Avon. He wrote about 37 plays and 154 sonnets.
- Many of his plays were performed at the Globe Theatre in London. Poorer audience members (groundlings) stood in the yard, and boys played the female parts.
- He wrote in Elizabethan and Jacobean England, when people believed in fate and in a natural order led by the king.

Types of play

- Comedies end happily, often with marriages and mistaken identities: A Midsummer Night's Dream, Twelfth Night, Much Ado About Nothing.
- Tragedies end with the death of the main character, a **tragic hero** whose **fatal flaw** (such as ambition or jealousy) leads to their downfall: Romeo and Juliet, Macbeth, Hamlet.
- Histories are about English kings: Henry V, Richard III.

Shakespeare's language

- Noble characters usually speak in **blank verse**: unrhymed lines of **iambic pentameter** (about ten syllables with a da-DUM rhythm). Servants and comic characters often speak in **prose**.
- A rhyming couplet often ends a scene.
- Old words: thou and thee (you), thy (your), art (are), doth (does), hath (has), wherefore (why), ere (before), anon (soon). In "Wherefore art thou Romeo?", Juliet asks why Romeo has to be a Montague, not where he is.

Dramatic techniques

- A **soliloquy** is a speech by a character alone on stage, sharing their thoughts with the audience.
- An **aside** is a short comment to the audience that other characters can't hear.
- **Dramatic irony** is when the audience knows something a character doesn't.
- Common themes: love, power, ambition, jealousy, fate, and appearance versus reality.

Key terms

Tragedy	A play that ends with the downfall and death of the main character.
Comedy	A play with a happy ending, often with marriages.
Tragic hero	A main character whose fatal flaw leads to their downfall.
Fatal flaw	A weakness, such as ambition, that causes a character's downfall.
Soliloquy	A speech by a character alone on stage, revealing their thoughts.
Aside	A short comment to the audience that other characters can't hear.
Dramatic irony	When the audience knows something a character doesn't.
Blank verse	Unrhymed lines of iambic pentameter.
Iambic pentameter	A line of about ten syllables with a da-DUM rhythm.
Prose	Ordinary writing without a regular rhythm.

Quick questions

Cover the answers and test yourself: remembering is what makes it stick.

1. Where was Shakespeare born?
2. What is a soliloquy?
3. What is an aside?
4. What does "wherefore" mean in "Wherefore art thou Romeo?"
5. What does "thou" mean?
6. How do Shakespeare's tragedies usually end?
7. How do Shakespeare's comedies usually end?
8. What is dramatic irony?

Answers

1. Stratford-upon-Avon
2. A speech in which a character alone on stage says their thoughts aloud
3. A short comment to the audience that other characters can't hear

Your notes

4. Why
5. You
6. With the death of the main character
7. With marriages and happiness
8. When the audience knows something a character doesn't

What to do next

Practise 13 questions on this topic

Try 4 exam questions, with mark schemes

Read the lesson, one step at a time

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