

# Why Shakespeare?

The question “**Why Shakespeare**” is a very open-ended one. That doesn’t necessarily mean that it doesn’t have an answer; I think that just means that there can’t be only one answer for this question. Why Shakespeare? Why do we study him? Why is he so significant? I can think of several interesting takes on “Why Shakespeare”— the difficult part is answering all these questions.

First of all, William Shakespeare was an English poet and playwright who lived in England in the 1500-1600s. His poems and plays are some of the most popular in English literature, and some of the most universal too— much of his work has been translated into every known language on the planet. Of course, as far as first impressions go, this says a lot about William Shakespeare and his impact on the world. But how did his work get so widely renowned? Why him and not some other poet?

I believe that Shakespeare’s work goes beyond talent. Shakespeare knew how to *write*. He knew how to use words in a way that could convey profound messages eloquently, and he knew how to illustrate stories of grandeur and transcendency that separated him from the everyday playwright. So though he didn’t particularly use fancy language or have amazingly skilled teachers to teach him how to write poetry, I believe he had a knack for words, and knew how to use them.

He was also smart. He knew what people wanted, and how to give it to them— without finding his work repetitive or similar to other poets or playwrights trying to do the same. People wanted stories with kings and

queens and love and death, and he knew how to write for these people. He could write *for a crowd*, compared to simply writing for the sake of writing.

And he did a damn good job of it (the writing, that is). At the heart of everything, a simple answer to “Why Shakespeare” would be— well, he wrote really... cool stuff! His plays are remembered because they are performed and performed again by countless actors and connect with by millions of people throughout the decades. He invented over a thousand new words, countless phrases, and wrote numerous plays and poetry.

I also think of it like this— imagine Shakespeare as a musician. He’s released hundreds of songs, but unlike many bands that have two or three massive hits and several other mildly popular tunes, the majority of Shakespeare’s body of work is beyond popular. He’s practically made of one-hit wonders! With anything, yes, it’s partially luck, but also— as his work has been re-performed and reread, it has immortalized itself within its cleverness, versatility, iconic characters and storylines.

So. Why Shakespeare?

Complicated questions have complicated answers. Because he was skilled, but also because he was lucky. Because he knew how to write, but not because he had an extensive amount of education about how to be a poet or a playwright. Because he managed to produce such a significant repertoire of work that checked off so many of the boxes required to make history. Shakespeare, because why not?