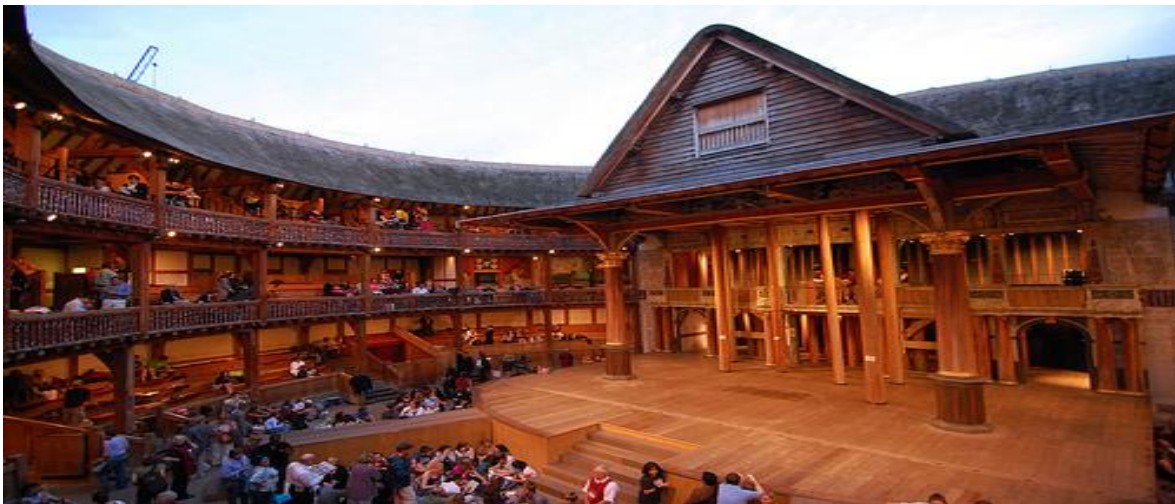


## A VISIT TO THE THEATRE IN SHAKESPEARE'S TIME



It is important to remember that Shakespeare's plays were written to be performed on the stage. The atmosphere, setting and props within the theatre would have had a big impact on the audiences' reaction and understanding to a play. *Macbeth* was performed at the *Globe* in April 1611.



The *Globe* theatre on the banks of the River Thames was a hugely popular theatre in the 1600s, visited by more than 20,000 Londoners a week! As it had an open roof and so subject to the weather, the theatre was only open from April to September. A flag would fly on the roof to tell people that there would be a performance. Plays started at 2pm sharp because there was no electricity, and a loud shot would be fired from the tower to hurry people along.

The theatre was called the *Globe*, due to its round shape. The stage can be seen by everyone, although some seats are better than others. Two pillars on the stage support a roof for the actors. This is called the 'Heavens' and is painted with stars, a sun and a moon. A trap door in the heavens enabled performers to descend using some form of rope and harness. At the back of the stage is the musicians' gallery. Musicians with trumpets, drums and other instruments play tunes and make sound effects.

Anyone could go to the theatre and tickets started at a penny. Merchants, sea-captains and clerks would have normally sat in the galleries. They would have paid between 2-6 pence for their seats. Rich and famous people would have sat in the 'Gentlemen's Rooms' or in boxes to either side of the stage. These were more expensive seats and would have cost a shilling. Finally, the lower class citizens or servants would stand in the yard or 'pit' in front of the stage. These people were known as the 'groundlings' and only paid a penny. It would have been very uncomfortable and unpleasant to watch a play from the yard. The *Globe* was a very smelly place - groundlings would throw rotten food on the stage, and even urinate in the yard! The atmosphere inside would have been chaotic - more like a football match!



Women were not allowed to act on stage, so men would play their parts. As well as performing on stage, actors would also have to work behind the stage with props and special effects.

The *Globe* burnt down in 1613 by a cannon fired during a performance. The current *Globe* is an exact replica of the original: it has a thatched roof and walls made from goat's hair.