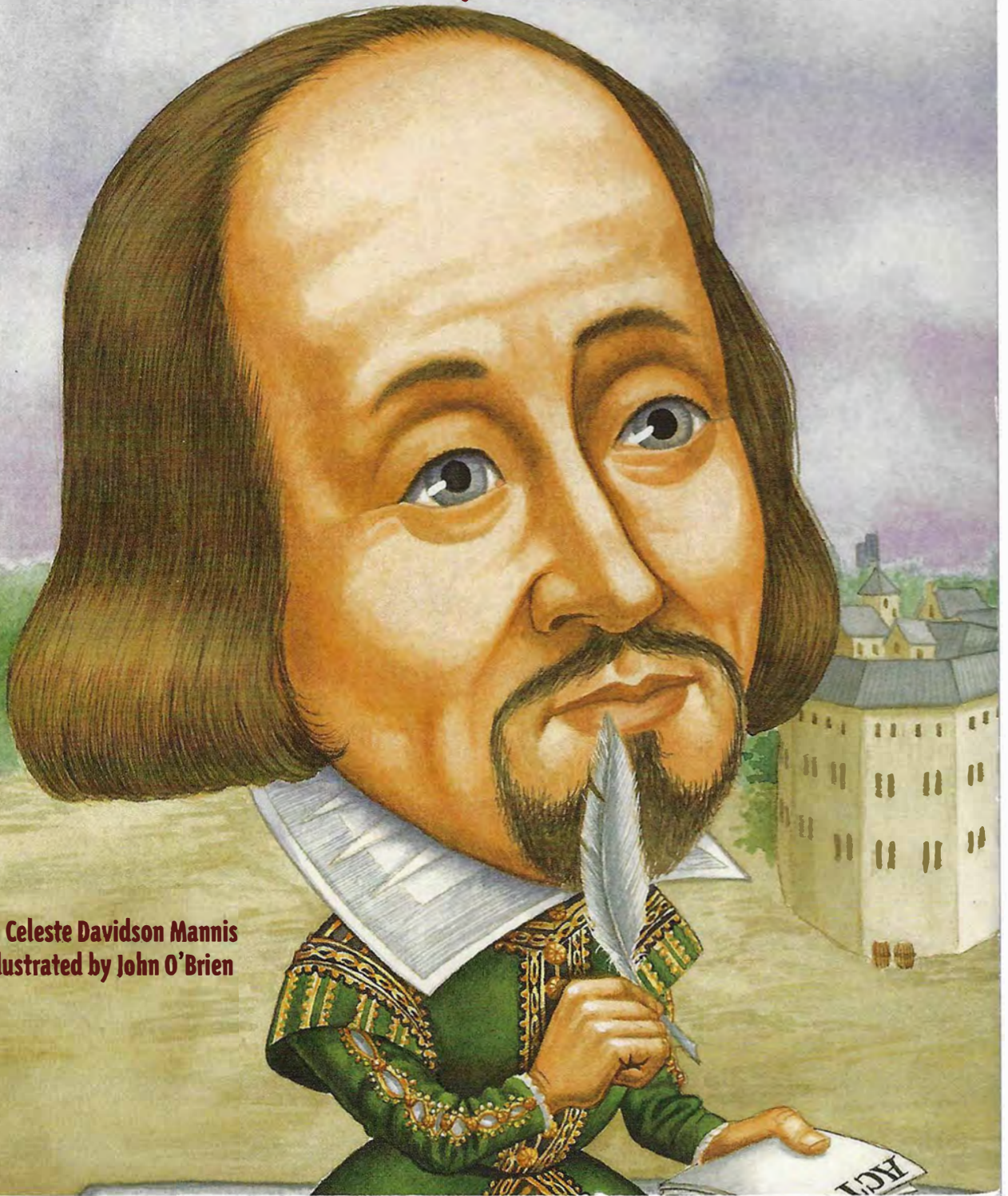


Who Was William Shakespeare?

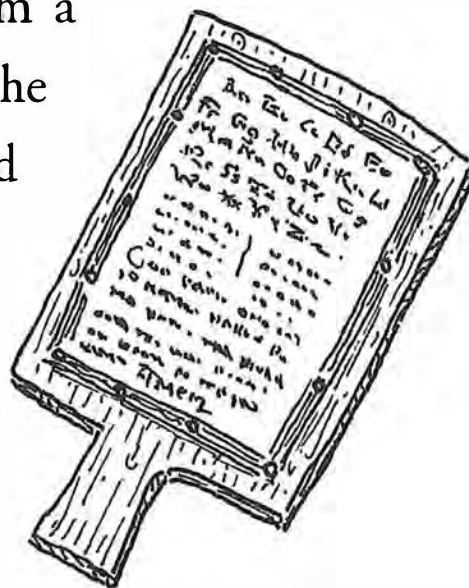


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Will learned to read from a hornbook: a board with the letters of the alphabet and the Lord's Prayer printed on it. He also learned many other prayers.



A year or two later, Will began to read Aesop's *Fables* and Bible stories. He also read comic plays written a thousand years earlier. They were by a playwright named Plautus who lived in ancient Rome.

Learning Latin was very important. Will began studying it when he was seven. Church services were held in Latin. Laws were written in Latin. As Will grew older, he and the other boys were not allowed to speak English at school. Only Latin. They were spanked if they spoke English. Will learned Latin grammar; he knew famous speeches in Latin by heart. He could write in Latin.

Will also performed in plays and had debates with the other boys. He became good at it. He probably liked to be in front of a crowd.

In Shakespeare's plays there are many lines about school. Most of them make school seem like a chore. In one play, *As You Like It*, he describes the "whining school-boy" who is "creeping like snail Unwillingly to school." Does that mean Will didn't like school? Nobody knows. We never can be sure when William Shakespeare's characters are speaking for William Shakespeare, the man.

We do know that Will learned a lot that he used later in his plays. The Bible story of Cain and Abel is mentioned twenty-five times in his work.



He borrowed funny stories from famous plays he liked, and sad stories, too. In *Romeo and Juliet*, two young people fall in love, but their families are enemies. So Romeo and Juliet get married in secret. But by the end of the play, both are dead. The plot of this play comes from Virgil.

Virgil was a Roman poet who lived sixteen hundred years before William Shakespeare was born. Was it considered cheating to borrow stories? Not at the time. This is what writers often did. What made Shakespeare's plays so great were the characters he created and the beautiful language he used.

Will never went beyond grammar school. That's the reason some people don't believe he wrote the plays. How could he? they ask. A man with so little schooling? Some believe that Christopher Marlowe, a famous playwright of the same time, was really Shakespeare. Still others even suggest that Queen Elizabeth I or a nobleman—the Earl

of Oxford—may have written the plays. But grammar school then was very different from elementary school now. By the time Will finished grammar school, he had studied many subjects taught in college today, such as philosophy, history, and great literature.

When Will was thirteen, his family fell on hard times. The wool trade was England's largest industry. In the 1570s it collapsed. When the wool trade suffered, everyone suffered.

Besides being a glover, Will's father was a moneylender. But when times got bad, many people who borrowed money could not pay it back. John was also a brogger. A brogger sold wool

