



Scene from a British theatre production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

Acting and Theatres in Shakespeare's Time

15 Four hundred years ago, during Shakespeare's life, theatres and acting were very different. First, there were no actresses. Boys acted as the young women in Shakespeare's plays, and old men acted as the old women. This is why in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Bottom and the other actors are all men, but one of them will be a lady in their play. The first people who acted as Hermia, Helena and Titania were boys.

Sometimes actors performed plays at the homes of people who were very rich or important, like the Queen. At the end of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Duke Theseus watches a play at his home.

Theatres were also very different. The theatres were large. Almost three thousand people could see a play at the same time. If these people didn't like the play, they usually made a lot of noise. The theatres also usually had no roofs. When it rained, the people who watched the plays got wet. And





this was in England, where it often rains! Many people had to stand up for the whole play. People who paid more for a ticket could sit down. All of the plays started in the afternoon. There were no special lights. Most of the story in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* happens at night, but the actors of Shakespeare's times probably performed in the afternoon sun.

Shakespeare's favourite theatre was The Globe, which burned down in 1613. In 1996, some people in London built a copy of this theatre. They built this copy at the same place where the old Globe stood, and it is just like the old theatre. Go and see a play there when you are in London!



The Globe Theatre today.

1 COMPREHENSION CHECK

Are the following sentences true (T) or false (F)? Correct the false ones.

- | | T | F |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1 There were many actresses in Shakespeare's time. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2 A rich or important person could see a play in his or her house. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3 People paid a lot for tickets because the theatres were very small. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4 If the play was bad, the theatres could become very noisy. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5 People sometimes got wet because of holes in the theatre roofs. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6 Everyone always had to stand up for the whole play. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7 You could only see a play at night. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 8 You can see a copy of one of the old theatres in London. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

PROJECT ON THE WEB

The Globe Theatre

Connect to the Internet and go to www.blackcat-cideb.com. Insert the title or part of the title of the book into our search engine. Open the page for *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Green Apple). Click on the correct internet project link.

- 1 Take a 'virtual tour' of The Globe theatre in London. You can see the stage and the places where people watch the plays.
- 2 What plays will be at the Globe this week? Would you like to see any of them? Which one?

