

Shakespeare and Money
Student Worksheet

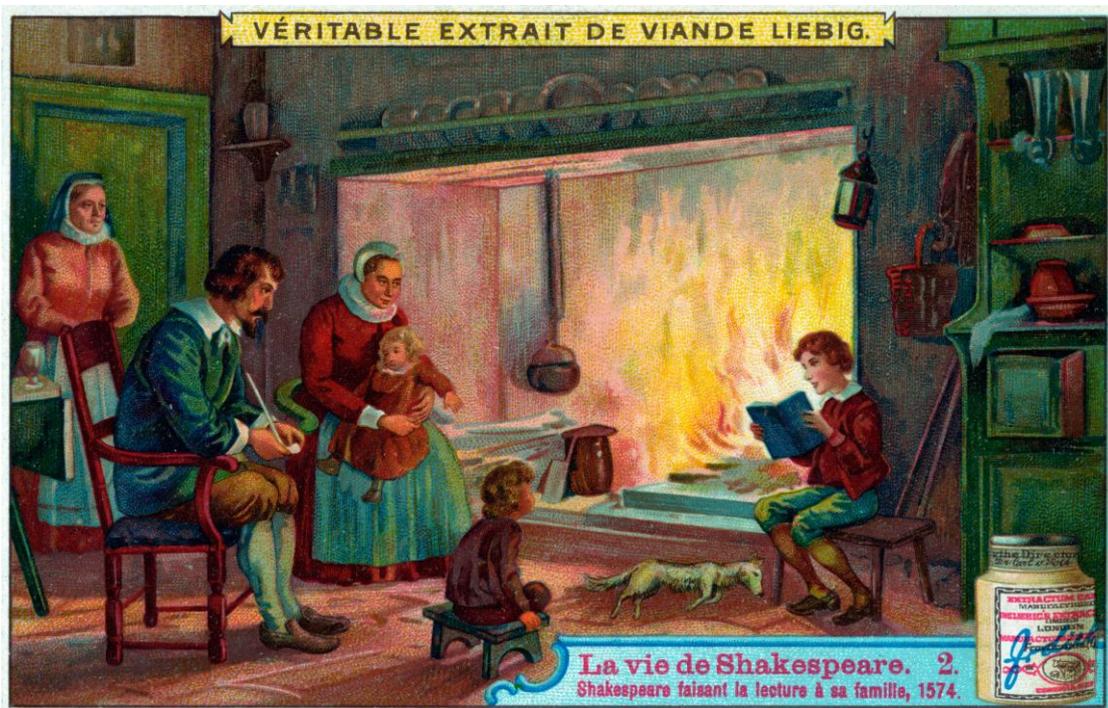
Warmer – Rich or poor?

Sort these words into two categories: less or more money.

broke	loaded	penniless	skint	wealthy	well off
less money			more money		

Task 1 – Shakespeare’s life: predictions

Work in groups of three. Look at the picture of young William Shakespeare with his family and discuss the three questions.



Shakespeare as a boy (sitting by the fire) with his family

1. Do you think Shakespeare’s family were wealthy or poor? Why?
2. What job do you think Shakespeare’s father did?
3. How do you think Shakespeare spent his time when he was a boy?

Task 2 – Reading: checking predictions

Read the text once to check your predictions from **Task 1**

Shakespeare and money

1 William Shakespeare experienced both privilege and poverty. He had the opportunity to
2 enjoy wealth and benefits but was also acquainted with greed and dishonesty.

3 Shakespeare's parents were Mary Arden and John Shakespeare. Mary's family were well-to-
4 do farmers and owned a large farm. They probably had a comfortable way of life. William's
5 mother and father were not from Stratford, but by the time they had moved there, John was a
6 successful glover. A glover (or glove-maker) was a very respectable trade at the time.

7 Shakespeare's family rose in social status and became popular members of the community.
8 For example, William's father, John, was elected as a town councillor and later, in 1568, as
9 mayor. In 1571, John's success enabled William to be sent to an expensive school. This was
10 a great privilege for William, as education was not available for all.

11 John Shakespeare became surprisingly wealthy. In addition to his glove-making business, he
12 traded in wool and became involved in money lending. Both of these activities were illegal. At
13 the time, wool was the most valuable commodity and, therefore, regulated heavily. As well as
14 making loans worth a lot of money, he also charged interest. However, informers told the
15 town councillors what William's father was doing. John was then prosecuted for his crimes.
16 This meant that in 1576, when William was only 12 years old, his father's business collapsed.

17 This misfortune caused John to withdraw from public affairs and to sell off everything. William 18 had to
be removed from school. Consequently, William went to work for his father at home in 19 an attempt to help keep
his family business going.

20 Although Shakespeare is most well known as a playwright, he spent many years as an actor
21 before he gained fame and fortune for his writing. William then became prosperous and was
22 able to purchase property of his own. He also achieved success in London and had shared
23 ownership of a theatre company. Most of his income was from the company rather than his
24 plays.

Task 3 – Reading: finding the main events

1. *Read the text again and put the main events of the life of Shakespeare and his family in order. Write a number next to each event.*

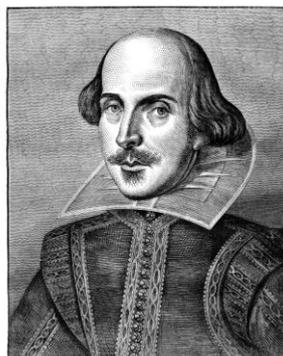
- a. John Shakespeare earned a lot of money from unlawful practices.
- 1 b. John Shakespeare had a good job when the family relocated to Stratford.
- c. John was given positions of responsibility in the community.
- d. People found out about John Shakespeare's crimes.
- e. Shakespeare worked as an actor.
- f. The family business failed.
- g. William became very well off.
- h. William stopped going to school because his family couldn't afford it any more.
- i. William was sent to school.

2. *Answer these questions from the text.*

a. How did William's father become wealthy?

b. What happened in 1576? Why?

c. How did William gain financial success?



Shakespeare as an adult

Task 4 – Vocabulary from context**Guessing meaning from context**

When you are unsure about the meaning of a word or phrase, look at the surrounding words and sentences to help you understand it.

Look at the words (1–8) and match each one with the meaning (a–h). Find the words in the text to help you determine the context. Use the line numbers.

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1. acquainted with (line 2) | a) something unlucky that happens to someone |
| 2. well-to-do (lines 3 and 4) | b) a member of a local government |
| 3. a glover (line 6)
leader | c) a person elected to represent a town or city as |
| 4. a councillor (line 8) | d) knowing about or familiar with |
| 5. the mayor (line 9) | e) a person who makes or sells gloves |
| 6. commodity (line 13) | f) something that is sold for money |
| 7. an informer (line 14) | g) wealthy |
| 8. misfortune (line 17)
especially to | h) someone who gives information in secret,
someone in authority |

Are there any other words in the text that are new? Can you work out their meaning from the context?

Task 5 – Discussion

Work in small groups to discuss the following questions.

- How do you think these events made Shakespeare feel?
- What lessons about life do you think he learned?
- How important is money to you and your family?
- Do you agree with this quotation from Shakespeare's tragedy *Hamlet*? 'Neither a borrower or a lender be' Why?/Why not?



A scene from *Hamlet* by William Shakespeare