

The Globe Theatre

In 1599, the famous Globe Theatre was built. Referred to by Shakespeare as a “wooden O,” the Globe had as many as 20 sides to give it a circular appearance. The theatre also had three levels, a variety of stages, and could hold up to 3,000 spectators. Shakespeare not only wrote plays for this theatre, he also acted upon its stage and helped pay for its construction.

Flag—Signified which type of play was being performed—black for tragedy, white for comedy, and red for history.

Upper Stage—This “chamber” was used for most bedroom and balcony scenes. The balcony above was used for musicians and sound effects.

Tiring House—Dressing and storage rooms. Actors rested here between scenes and changed into lavish costumes, which made up for the lack of props and scenery. The doors to the tiring house also served as actors’ main entrances and exits.

Main Stage—Where main action of the play took place, especially outdoor scenes of battlefields, forests, or cityscapes.

Inner Stage—This stage was used mostly for indoor scenes. It had a curtain that could be opened or closed for scene changes.

The “Heavens”—Consisted of a canopy supported by pillars and a hut on top. The canopy shaded and protected actors from too much sun or rain. It also represented the sky and heavens and was painted with golden stars. The hut above was used for storage and additional sound effects such as alarm bells, cannon fire, and thunder.

Galleries—Three seating sections. Audiences paid more to sit on these tiered wooden benches under a thatched roof, which kept out rain.

Open Yard—Audiences paid one penny to stand here and watch the performance, rain or shine. Often these patrons, called “groundlings,” would participate in the action of the play by throwing snacks and shouting at the performers.

Trapdoor—Actors playing ghosts or witches could rise or descend through this door built into the main stage. The cellage underneath was referred to as “hell.”

