

Opening extract from
Shakespeare

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When William arrived, he found his friend Richard Burbage already struggling into his costume; he was playing the King, and William, one of the lords.

The actors spent the morning rehearsing, with William making sure they got their lines right. They went over the sword fights, and the actors who were going to be stabbed hid bags of pigs' blood under their shirts. The boy playing Henry's queen combed his wig. Women weren't allowed to perform in public, so their parts went to boys with smooth chins and high voices.



Eventually, the audience began to file in. "Groundlings" paid a penny to stand in the yard, at the mercy of the weather, while the wealthy paid tuppence for the luxury of a seat in one of the covered galleries. A few pennies more bought you a seat in an exclusive balcony right above the action.

Soon, the place was filled with a chattering, nut-munching, expectant crowd. It was time to start.

"I hope they like it," William thought nervously.

He needn't have worried. From the first trumpet call to the final battle, the play was a triumph. The crowd oohed and aahed in all the right places, and even cried at the heroic death of one brave English soldier.

