

The Elizabethan era saw the first purpose-built theatre being built in England. These soon grew in popularity, with thousands of people across all social classes enjoying the spectacle. It was a time when playwrights like William Shakespeare rose in prominence.

WHAT WAS THEATRE LIKE BEFORE ELIZABETH?


- There were no theatres in the country.
- Plays were performed by travelling groups.
- Unpopular with the government.
- Acting was seen as begging.



In 1572, in attempt to get rid of travelling actors, **Parliament passed a law that said that all actors had to be licensed.** It encouraged the actor companies to organise themselves.

WHY WAS THERE OPPOSITION TO THE THEATRE?

Many groups in society, especially Puritans, did not approve of the theatre. Below are the reasons why:




They thought it encouraged fighting.




They thought it was a waste of money.




They thought it led to drunkenness.



They thought it led to theft.



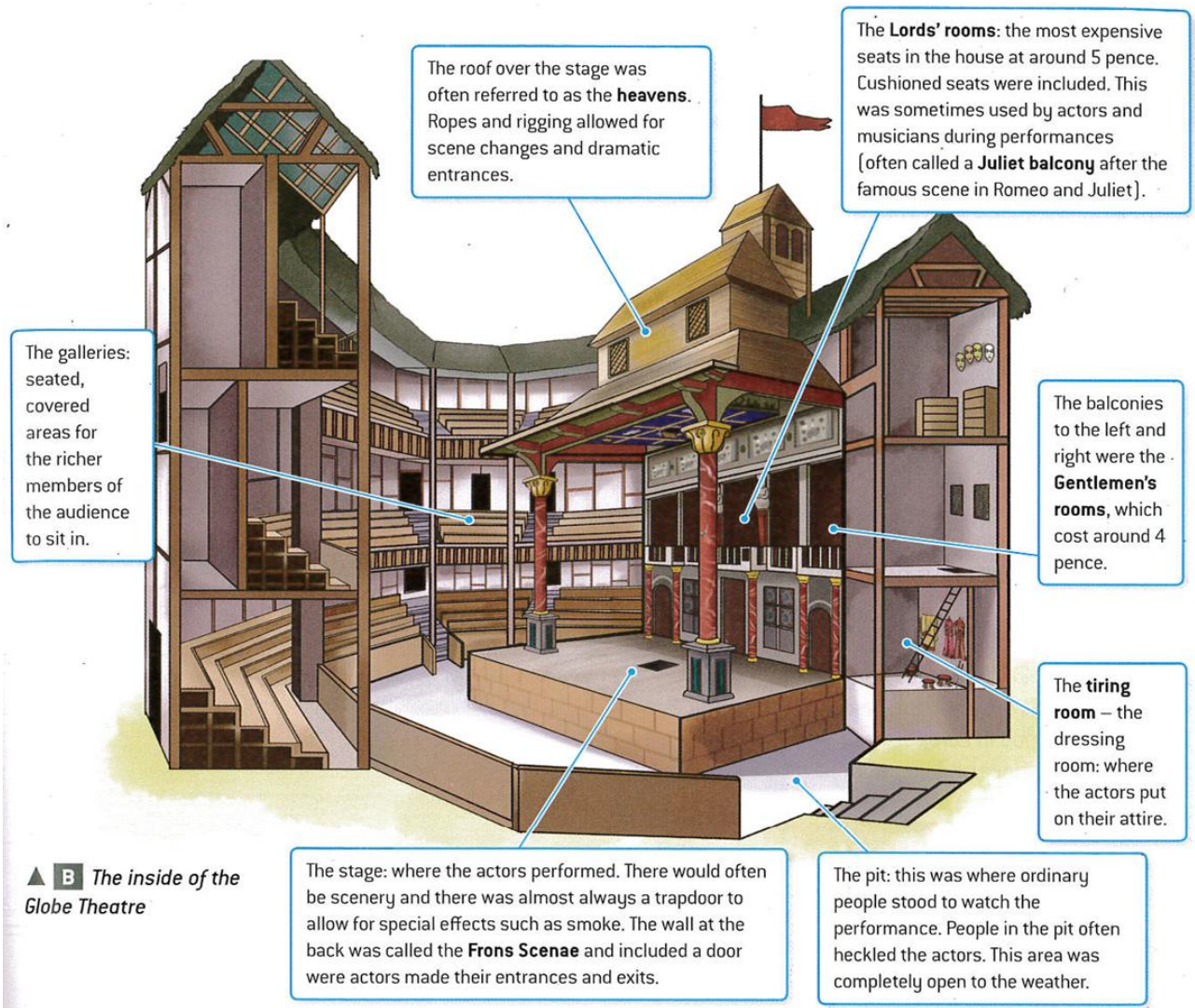
They thought it was a distraction from church.



They thought it could lead to rebellion.

WHAT WAS THE STRUCTURE OF THE THEATRE?

The **Globe Theatre** was constructed from the timbers of **Burbage's Theatre**. The Globe was partly funded by the Burbage brothers and four leading actors, including **William Shakespeare**. It quickly became one of the most famous theatres in London.



The 2026 Historic Environment question is likely to ask **either why theatres developed** or **what the main change of the development of the theatre was**. This knowledge organiser provides key, specific evidence you should use in your response.

ENTERTAINMENT & SPECTACLE



Plays written by William Shakespeare **moved away from religious 'mystery' plays to genres such as comedies, histories and tragedies.**



Shakespeare and Marlowe wrote **dramatic stories.**



All social classes mixed. Tickets could be bought for 1p for the Pit and 5p for the Galleries and Lord's Rooms.



Plays like the **Merchant of Venice** reminded audiences of fussy London Merchants, **making stories more relatable.**

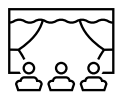
Special Effects



A donkey's head was used as a life-like prop in 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' to make stories more believable.



Cannon balls were rolled on the floors to simulate the sound of thunder.



Scene changes were made possible by the purpose-built heavens.



The **trap door** allowed for **dramatic entrances and exits.**

GOVERNMENT CONTROL & CENSORSHIP



In **1572**, Parliament passed a **law that said that all actors had to be licensed.** It encouraged the actor companies to organise themselves.



1581, the **Master of the Revels censored plays** to ensure only approved themes were performed.



OPPORTUNITY FOR PROPAGANDA



Plays like **Richard III** presented **Tudors as fair and just**, legitimizing their reign.



Plays like '**Measure for Measure**' reminded citizens of their **civic duties.**



The **Isle of Dogs** play was **banned** for criticizing the Queen.



The Globe's design reinforced social hierarchy with the **poor in the pit** and the **nobility in the Lord's Rooms.**



Entertainment provided a **distraction from failed harvests.**

SUPPORT OF PATRONS



Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester was the patron of **Leicester's Men.**

- Provided protection to actors
- Benefitted Dudley as a man of culture.



Being a **patron** showed how **wealthy and cultured** the nobility were.



Traders and nobles invested in the theatre as **profit could be made.**



Nobles gained popularity at Court and patronage from the Queen for their involvement in the theatre.



Successful actor companies **encouraged other patrons to support companies.**

BBC Teach on YouTube
The Globe Theatre Video



YouTube
A Historian discussing the Globe

