

▼ Early Elizabethan theatres were lively places. The audience wandered around during performances, eating and drinking, and made their opinions of the plays clear through clapping, booing and even throwing things at the actors. The playwrights were not often university graduates, and the plays could be coarse and rowdy, which perhaps accounts for their popularity. In addition, theatres were expected to put on a new play every couple of days, so there was little time for rehearsal. Most of these 600 or so plays from this period no longer remain. One which does, Udall's *Ralph Roister Doister*, combined the style of classical playwrights like Seneca with the more English themes of chivalry. It is often regarded as the first English comedy and influenced other writers, including Shakespeare. Elizabethan audiences clearly loved plots with action, excitement and humour. There was no scenery, so people could focus on the play, but the actors did wear colourful costumes. Acting was not considered suitable for a woman, so the female parts were played by young boys. Performances took place in the afternoon before it got dark. In the two photos above you can see the reconstructed Globe theatre, which continues to be popular with audiences. The modern Globe often uses Elizabethan costumes in its performances.

