

Shakespeare's Theater

William Shakespeare and his partners built the Globe Theater in 1599 in a London suburb named Southwark. Southwark was on the south bank of the Thames River, just across the river from the center of the city. This was a major entertainment area of the time.

The Globe was a three-storied building. It had a small hut on top of the roof. The owners of the theater raised a flag from a flag pole on top of the hut on the days of performances. London citizens could look across the river and see which of the theaters would have a production that day.

The Globe enclosed an open courtyard. The theater patrons named this courtyard the *pit*. People who paid the lowest ticket price stood in this area; they were referred to as the *groundlings*. Almost surrounding the pit were three seating galleries. Audience members who paid for more expensive tickets could sit in these galleries. In addition to being able to sit while watching the play, the audience members in the gallery were protected from the sun and rain by a thatched roof.

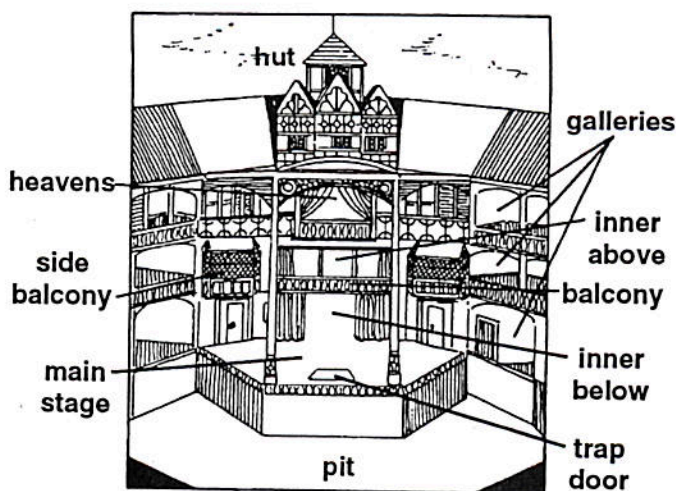
A large platform, called the *main stage*, protruded from one end of the pit. Most of the action of the play occurred here. The theater owners cut a trap-door into the main stage floor. The trap door could be opened to allow scenes in which ghosts and demons would appear or disappear; it could also become a grave, as in a famous scene from *Hamlet*.

A roof, supported by two large columns, covered the stage area. This roof protected the actors and their costumes from the rain. Paintings of the Sun, Moon, and stars covered the underside of the roof. The roof area above the stage became known as *the heavens* because of this decoration. In some plays, technicians lowered actors portraying angels or spirits from the heavens onto the main stage as if the actors were descending from heaven.

In back of the main stage was a small room. A curtain hung between this room and the main stage. The name of this room was the *inner-below*. They opened this to reveal scenes to the audience. The inner-below was the location of interior scenes in the plays.

Above and to the rear of the main stage was a balcony that was used when actors needed to overlook some action on the main stage below. In back of this balcony was another small curtained room, called the *inner-above*, that was used in much the same manner as the inner-below. The theater also had two small balconies, one on each side of the main stage.

In Shakespeare's time the audience did not expect the plays to be realistic. Scenery was not used; one or two items or pieces of furniture would suggest the location of the scene. If the audience saw a throne on the stage, they knew the location was in a palace or castle. If they saw a couple of tree branches on the stage, they knew the scene was in a forest. Since the crew did not need to move the scenery, the plays contained many short scenes and a variety of locations. Though the theaters of the time did not use scenery or special lighting, they did use colorful costumes, musical accompaniment, and special sound effects.

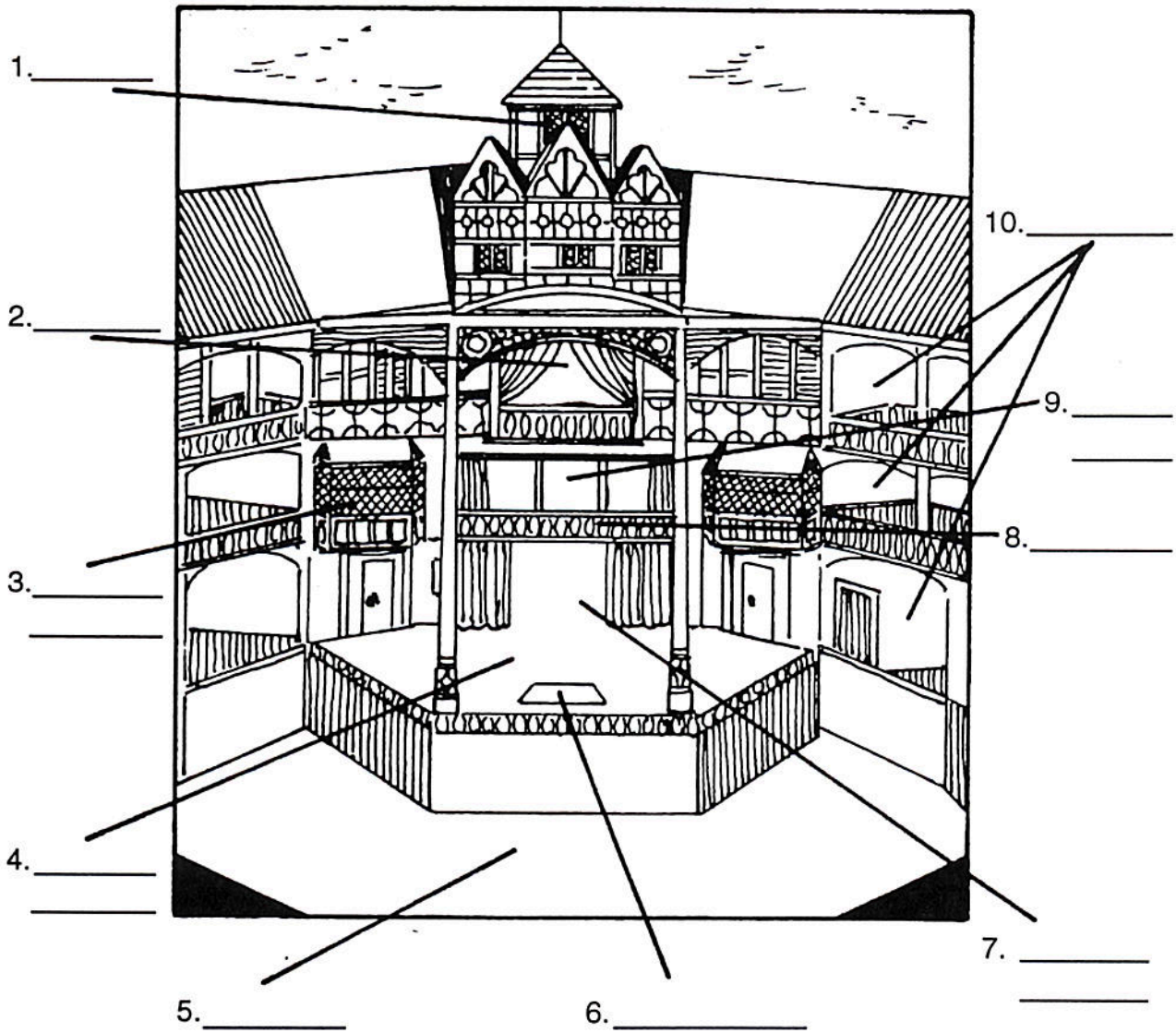


The Globe Theater

Name _____ Date _____

Identifying the Parts of the Globe

Write the name of each part of the Globe theater on the correct blanks below.



Name _____ Date _____

Questions for Consideration

1. In what year did Shakespeare and his partners build the Globe?

2. What was the name of the London suburb in which they built the Globe?

3. What river was near the Globe?

4. How did London citizens know which theaters would be giving performances?

5. What did they call the audience members who stood in the pit?

6. What type of roof did the Globe have?

7. What did the owners of the Globe cut into the main stage floor?

8. What was the name given to the roof over the stage area?

9. What was the name of the small room in back of the main balcony?

10. What was the name of the small room in back of the main stage?

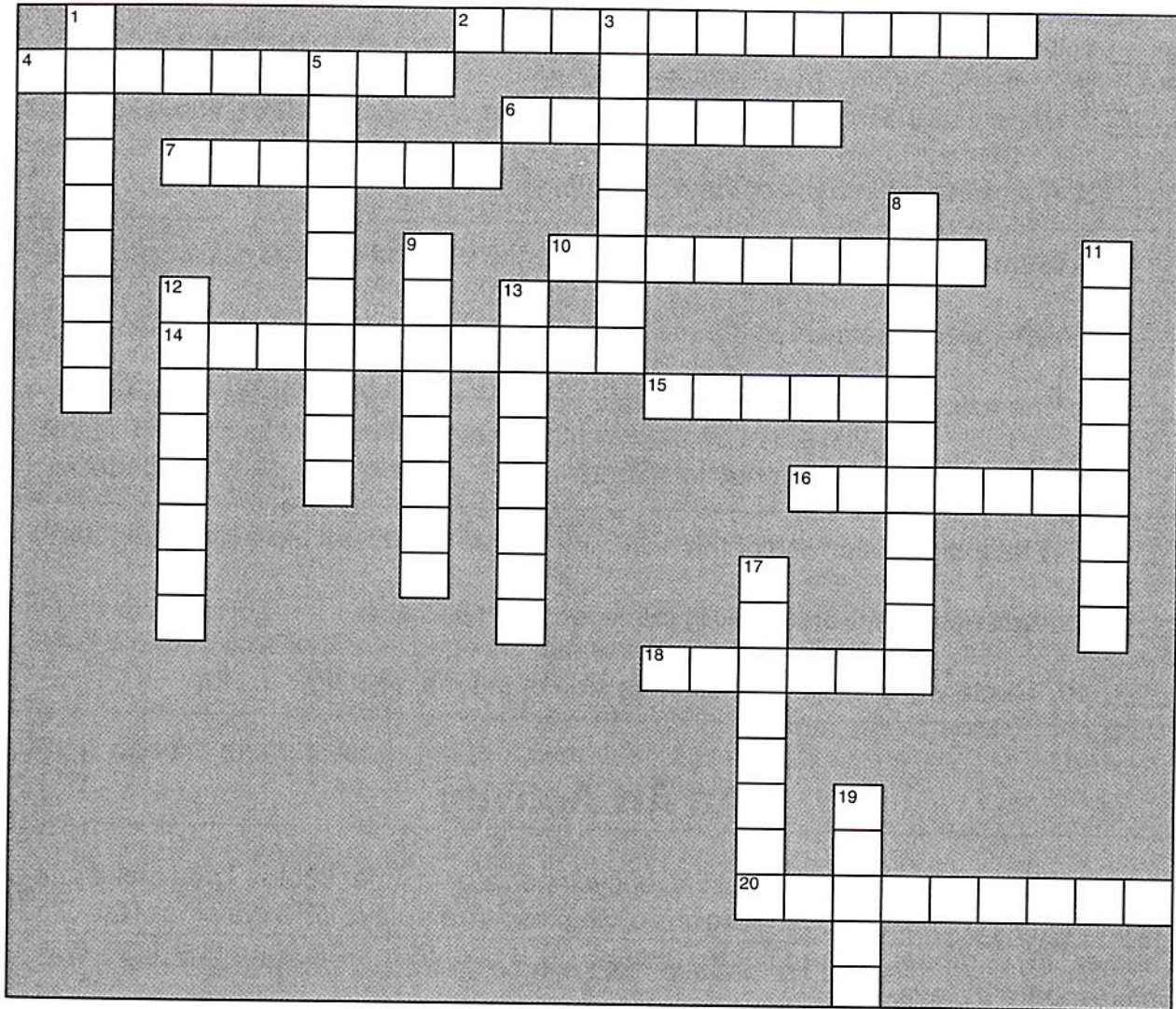
11. What was located above and on both sides of the main stage?

12. What was used to indicate that a scene was taking place in a forest?

Name _____ Date _____

Crossword Puzzle

Use the clues below to complete the puzzle. Answers may be found in the narrative about Shakespeare's theater.



ACROSS

2. A theater's flag was raised on days when these occurred.
4. Where people who bought more expensive tickets could sit
6. Name given to the roof over the main stage
7. Shakespeare's plays did not use this.
10. Name of the suburb in which the Globe was located
14. Small room in back of the balcony (two words)
15. The Globe was in a suburb of this great city.
16. Actors looked down on the main stage from this.
18. The Globe stood on a bank of this great river.
20. Theater goes in Shakespeare's time did not expect plays to be _____.

DOWN

1. Where most of the action in a play occurred (two words)
3. This was on top of the hut.
5. Small room in back of the main stage (two words)
8. Name given to audience members who stood in the pit area
9. The type of roof the Globe had
11. The Globe enclosed this area.
12. No special _____ was used in Shakespeare's theater.
13. These were very colorful.
17. This was cut into the floor of the main stage. (two words)
19. A trap door sometimes served as this.