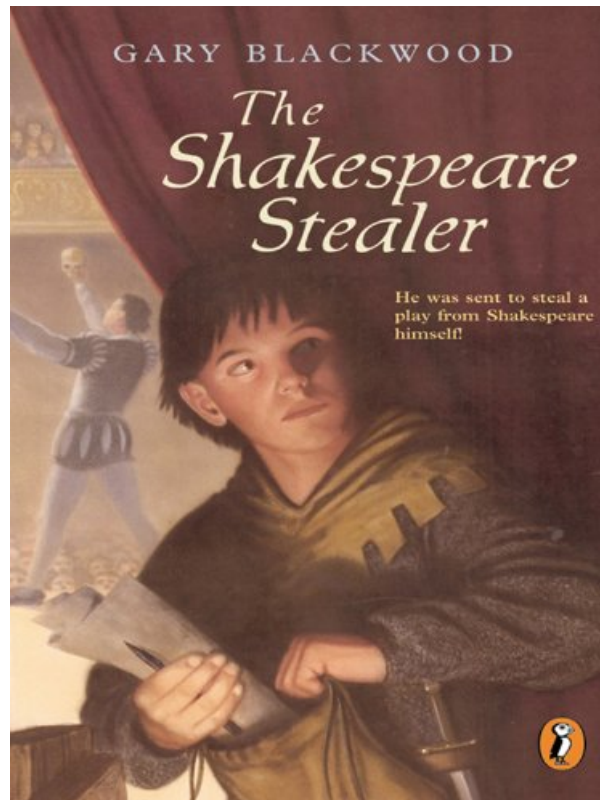
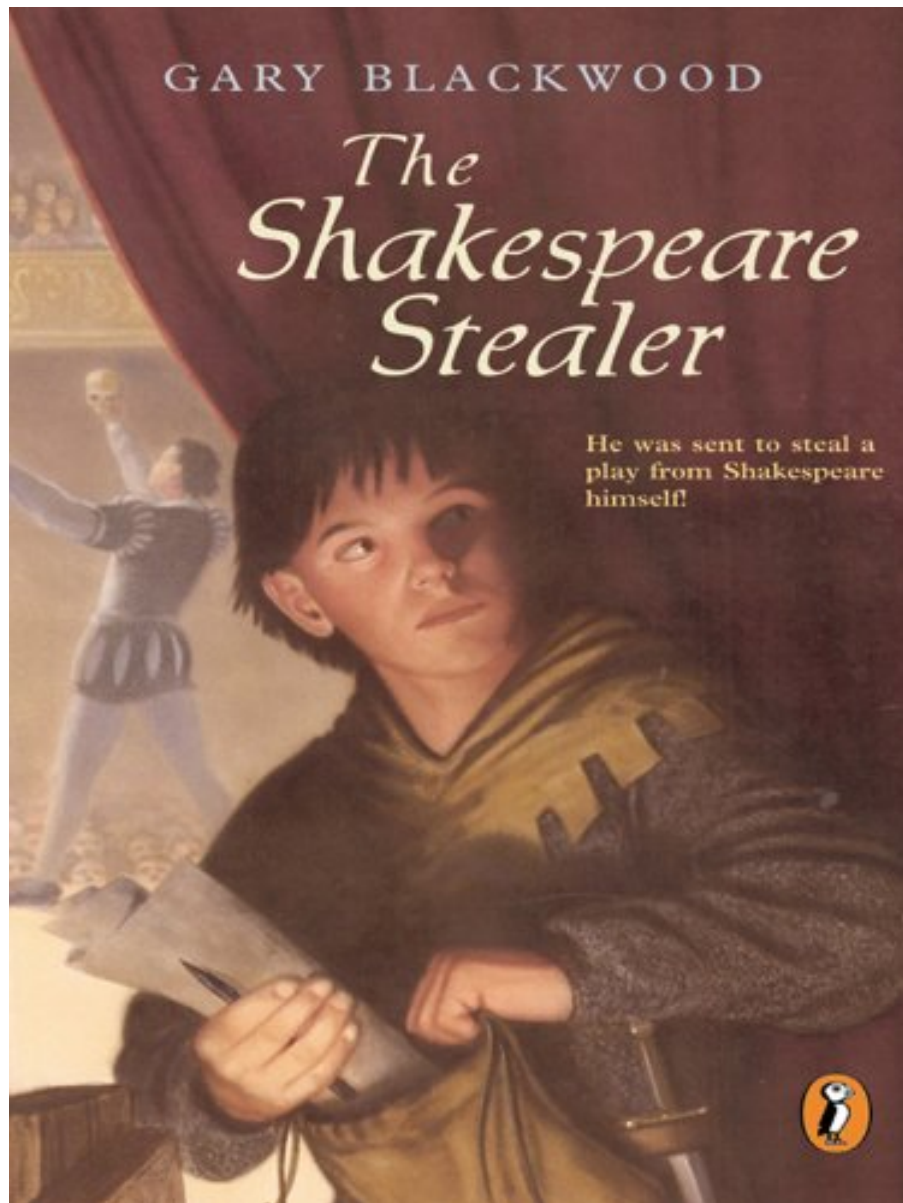


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# THE SHAKESPEARE STEALER BY GARY BLACKWOOD PDF

Widge is an orphan with a rare talent for shorthand. His fearsome master has just one demand: steal Shakespeare's play "Hamlet"--or else. Widge has no choice but to follow orders, so he works his way into the heart of the Globe Theatre, where Shakespeare's players perform. As full of twists and turns as a London alleyway, this entertaining novel is rich in period details, colorful characters, villainy, and drama. "A fast-moving historical novel that introduces an important era with casual familiarity." --School Library Journal, starred review

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Most helpful customer reviews

43 of 46 people found the following review helpful.

The Shakespeare Stealer

By A Customer

The Shakespeare Stealer is a book about a poor orphan boy, called Widge, living in Shakespearean England who can write a rare coded language in which symbols for each word can be written as the words are said. His forceful master, taking advantage of his ability, orders him to go to the Globe Theater to steal Shakespeare's Hamlet by writing down the lines of the play as the actors are acting them out. Though Widge, the poor, nameless orphan boy feels stealing the play is wrong, he enters the Globe Theater to copy down the play Hamlet. He is found by the players at the theater and they take him in and treat them as one of their own, while also being trained as an actor. While living with one of the men from the Lord Chamberlain's Men (the playing troupe) Widge, a country boy, adjusts to city life. However, Widge has not forgotten the threat his master made to him if he did not bring him a copy of Hamlet, and Widge knows that he has sent someone to London to find him and bring him back to the country. While living in London, Widge's accent is not the only thing that changes. For the first time in his life Widge can make decisions on his own. He learns about the meaning of words such as honesty, trust, loyalty, and friendship. He begins to realize that by working and living with the Lord Chamberlain's men, he is betraying them. The real reason he came to the theater was not to become a player, but to steal from Shakespeare himself, and consequently hurting the people who he is now closest to. Widge tries to decide whether he should betray his friends and copy the play or betray his master and stay in the Lord Chamberlain's Men for acting, not for the purpose of stealing a play, even though it means if his master finds him, Widge will receive severe punishment. Widge also learns that the playing troupe has become like family to him, something he has never experienced, but loves very much. Now he wonders: If his master finds him, will the only family he's ever known disappear from him forever?

I felt as though I could relate with the main character, Widge, for one main reason. All through his life, Widge tries to search for, or feel, a sense of belonging. I have moved between two continents and a dozen more houses during my life. I know how important it is to have a sense of belonging somewhere, because having a sense of belonging somewhere makes people unique and who they are. Widge learns that as long as everybody has people who love and care for them it doesn't matter where they live, they will always feel at

home and as though they belong. That is why I think that Widge's "family" at the Globe Theater is so important and dear to him. I think *The Shakespeare Stealer* has a good message about family, and how no matter what it is like, it is important to everybody's sense of belonging, is a good message.

I loved this book. It not only has action, such as duels and manhunts, it had a great perspective of Elizabethan life in the late fifteen hundreds from a teenager's point of view. My favorite part of the book is when Widge gets his first chance at acting on stage with the players. He was so nervous, he was sure he would forget everything, but once he was on stage he made a great performance. I think it proves that if anyone tries hard they can conquer just about anything. My least favorite part of the book was when an actor from *The Lord Chamberlain's Men* was forced to leave because she had disguised herself as a boy, because it was illegal for women to act. If I could change any part of the book, it would be that Julian, were allowed to stay on and act with the players, even though she was a girl. I think the fact that Julia was not allowed to stay on with the players, even if they wanted her to, shows the general sexism against women in England at the time, even though it was getting better because the sole ruler of England was a queen (Queen Elizabeth).

I would definitely recommend *The Shakespeare Stealer* to others because it has action, emotion, drama, and it is a great historical-fiction. It also shows a lot of aspects of Elizabethan England, but it is definitely not a bore. I think someone who likes excitement and historical fiction would greatly enjoy this book, and I highly recommend it.

34 of 36 people found the following review helpful.

Containing a boy who frets his hour upon the stage

By E. R. Bird

Children's works of historical fiction often suffer from a common malady. If the writer is not completely comfortable with the time period they're writing about, they'll hang everything on a famous person and leave it at that. When I saw that this book was entitled, "*The Shakespeare Stealer*", I was sure that it would be a book in which a young boy befriended the great William Shakespeare and had an impact on history, yadda yadda yadda. But Gary Blackwood's not your everyday run-of-the-mill writer. There's a truly interesting story at the heart of this tale and a truly talented hand behind the writing. Blackwood doesn't just place his book in the past. He authenticates it by drawing you back into a fully realized historical moment in time. The result is a whole lot of fun and a book that I'll be shoving into the hands of any kid forced to read something realistic for a book report.

Widge received his odd name when the mistress of an orphanage took one look at him as a babe and said, "Och, the poor little pigwidgeon" (thereby surprising anybody who thought that J.K. Rowling had made up the name). Since birth the boy has been either an orphan or a lowly apprentice. He was put under the thumb of one Dr. Bright when he was seven, and through this master he learned a form of shorthand that no one else in the world knew. Such a talent is bound to attract interest, however, and at the age of fourteen Widge is bought by a man who needs the boy's talents professionally. Sent to London, Widge is told to watch a performance of *Hamlet* and take down every word. A series of small mishaps land him not in the audience, however, but as a member of the acting troupe. Now the boy who never had a family must learn about courage, trust, and friendship from a group of people who prance about in silly clothes all day. The only question is, will his old master give him up so easily?

The book plunges you headfirst into the late 1500s/early 1600s without further ado. Reading Blackwood, you become acutely aware of just how dirty, dank, and smelly England was during that time. Because Widge is such a greenhorn to the sophistications of London, Blackwood has a perfect excuse for explaining everything. Our hero doesn't understand the presence of drainage ditches alongside busy streets, or how to fence, or what a duel constitutes, so kids can learn alongside him. What was most impressive in my eyes, though, was Blackwood's command of language. Poorly written novels set during Elizabethan England like to throw around a lot of "thees", "thys" and "thous" for good measure. Widge, for his part, is from Yorkshire,

so his words and accent are different from even those Londoners he comes to join. The book remains readable for 9-year-olds but also feels authentically Shakespearean. No mean task.

At its heart, the book is really about the beauty of performing on a stage. If you know any kid that's lured time and again to the glory of the limelight, they'll have little problem identifying with Widge. This is a book that celebrates the stage, while couching its tale in murder, fast-paced action, likable characters, and a certain amount of dramatic tension. And for those of you who'd be disappointed if Mr. Shakespeare didn't appear in a book bearing his name, rest assured that he does put in a couple appearances when the fancy strikes. Altogether, this is one of those rare titles that'll appeal to both boys and girls equally. Fine reading.

24 of 28 people found the following review helpful.

Terrific

By Glenn Miller

This is a book I picked up to read to my sons prior to a trip to London, in the hopes of giving them a sense of, not only the history of London, but of one of the world's greatest playwrights. I could not have picked a better series. The book is extremely well-written, very much in the feel of a Robert Louis Stevenson adventure, both in tone and language. It is clear that Blackwood did a fair amount of research into the life and times of Shakespeare. Although the bard is by no means a central character in this first book of the series, he is a tangential figure. And while there is a great deal of adventure and suspense within this novel, with each of the short chapters ending with a mild cliff-hanger, the beauty of the book comes in the main character's -- Widge's -- search for belonging and community. By book's end, he finds it within the theatre, Shakespeare's Globe. The book succeeds on many levels, not the least of which is giving the reader a good sense of what a player's life was like at the beginning of the 17th century. While I, as an adult reader, thoroughly enjoyed how tightly written this novel was, it should be pointed out that my enjoyment spread to re-reading a couple of Shakespeare's plays, as well as some recently-issued biographies of the Bard. Well done, Blackwood.

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