

Question 5

Are charges of illiteracy against members of Shakespeare's family relevant to his own identification as a writer?

Elizabeth Woledge

Literacy the ability to read and write is nothing more than a function of education – it tells us nothing about a person's intelligence, imagination or creativity. It tells us only that no one taught that person to make or recognise a symbolic mark to represent a word. Shakespeare's father and mother may not have been able to sign their names but they were perfectly intelligent individuals John handling local affairs and Mary being the executor of her father's will. It is probable that both his parents could read although they were not skilled in pen craft, reading and writing were taught as separate skills in Tenaissance England not linked as they are today. Dw'iterate or not, Shakespeare's parents were perfectly capable of producing and raising a son who became one of the most gifted writers ever – writing is more than pen craft alone, and literacy is no determinate of intelligence or creativity, many of us can write though few of us have yet written anything approaching Shakespeare's brilliance. Incidentally there are surviving signatures of Shakespeare's daughter and granddaughter by that time pen craft was far more universsally taught"unkm