William Shakespeare was born on April 23, 1564 in the town of Stratford-upon-Avon, England to Mary Arden and John Shakespeare. His dad made some money in the glove business, eventually opened a general store and over the years bought some property. Historical evidence strongly suggests John Shakespeare could not read or write.

Will was the third of eight children and received a free boyhood education because of his father's position as alderman. Indications in his later writing suggest that as a kid Shakespeare enjoyed football, field sports and arguing with the referees. The Shakespeares were comfortable, but not aristocrats by any means. By the time William was fifteen the family's fortunes were in decline. Business was bad. This just meant that, when Will came of age, he had to work for a living.

Obviously, there were not a lot of entertainment options at the time. Books were not in wide circulation and anyone with half a brain could only take so much of that crappy recorder music and those inane puppet shows - so Shakespeare had the brilliant idea of becoming an actor.

Theatrical troupes of Elizabethan England were kind of like the garage bands of their time. Actors would often write their own plays improvise lines and dress up in drag. It wasn't unusual for them to rave for hours, or to bore their friends into oblivion. Incontrovertible historical evidence strongly suggests actors of Shakespeare's times would regularly trash inns, drink heavily, chase locals and generally wreak havoc.

When Will was eighteen he fell in love with Anne Hathaway. After the requisite amount of headbanging they were married.
Aside from the birth of his children, little is known about Shakespeare between 1582 and 1592, except that he built a career as an actor and eventually became an established and popular member of the London theatre circuit.

Shakespeare's play writing success began with historical works. Between 1590 and 1593 he wrote *Henry VI*, Parts 1, 2, and 3, *Richard III* and *A Comedy of Errors*. *Romeo and Juliet* was written around 1594-1595.

As an actor, he was a member of a theatrical company known as the LORD CHAMBERLAIN'S MEN. During the reign of Queen Elizabeth and later King James, they had great success in two famous theatres, THE GLOBE and THE BLACKFRIARS.

King James was cool and actually became a sponsor of Shakespeare's reformed outfit THE KINGS MEN -- lending the group money and hanging out with the lads backstage and on tour.

Theatre of the time was enjoyed by commoners as well as the privileged. Often the audiences were completely illiterate. Public theatres like THE HOPE, THE FORTUNE, THE RED BULL and THE SWAN were "open air" so the players had to compete with livestock sales, screaming street hawkers, and the ubiquitous drunks.

To reach this crowd Shakespeare could not rely on a large stack of amplifiers. He needed the most electrifying words and images ever created in the English language. Concepts that would galvanize common people and make them stop, lose themselves, rise above the muck for an hour or two.

It was crass. It was business. It was art. And it was genius.

Shakespeare had the rhymes. Everyone knew it. In fact, he used cadences we're still hearing today to reinforce some of this most important concepts and lines.

The Bard's group was bad. They kicked butt so bad his competitors used to send out speed writers, shorthand artists and bribe other actors in his plays to try to make their own bootlegged copies of his plays. The unauthorized "boots" were known as "The Bad Quartos." (Weird but true.)

Shakespeare was ticked off by this of course, so he hired his own publishers and came out with "The Good Quartos" which are pretty much the way he intended his work to sound.

Over the years, theatre companies and scholars pieced together so called "original texts" of the plays from various notes and good and bad Quartos. There are many differences from text to text. Shakespeare probably would have kicked all their butts.
While none of his plays are set in Florida, it's interesting to note that the Pilgrims who settled in America spoke Elizabethan English and that Shakespeare's language and culture were transplanted to the "new continent" in his lifetime.

As his fame and success grew, Shakespeare was able to buy the second-largest house in Stratford, called New Place, a cottage and garden nearby, and 107 acres of soccer field.

In about 1611, Shakespeare retired permanently to Stratford, having earned the status of "gentleman." After writing many successful tragedies and comedies, he finished as he started, with a historical play, "Henry VIII."

In early 1616, he wrote his will, leaving his property to his daughter Susanna, who had married a prominent doctor, 300 English pounds to his other daughter, Judith, who was married scandalously at age 32 to a wine maker, and his second-best bed to Anne, because it was her favorite.

He died young -- on his 52nd birthday. William Shakespeare was buried at Trinity Church in Stratford as an honored citizen. On his tombstone is carved a rather wry inscription:

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Good Friend, for Jesu's sake forbear
To dig the dust enclosed here.
Blest be the man that spares these stones,
And cursed be he who moves my bones.
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*For the kind of detail and scholarship worthy of Shakespeare we suggest enrollment in Oxford University for a few decades.*

Adapted from http://www.romeoandjuliet.com/author/bio.html