



## **All the World's a Stage: A Novel in Five Acts**

by Gretchen Woelfle

illustrated by Thomas Cox

Holiday House

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“Woelfle opens a revealing window into 1590s London and its dynamic theater scene. There are intriguing snapshots of one William Shakespeare, who finds his inspiration from street songs and conversations he overhears. Men and boys play the roles of women, sew costumes, rehearse speeches and sword fights and build sets. The scene stealer here is the intrigue behind the stealthy deconstruction of the Theatre and its rebuilding as the Globe due to a legal squabble with the landlord.” – *Kirkus Reviews*

“Readers will be enthralled as, piece by piece, the playhouse is dismantled and rebuilt (as the famous Globe Theatre); simultaneously, Kit falls in love with the art of carpentry (“’Tis work that will satisfy my heart and my head”). Woelfle sprinkles the narrative with just enough “twas”s and “he knew not”s to add flavor without seeming contrived, and Kit’s journey from lost boy to young man with a future is as satisfying as the detailed portrait of place and time.” – *The Horn Book*

“The most compelling drama is Kit’s universal search for his calling his shifting friendships, particularly with a girl so clever that even Shakespeare quotes her.” – *Booklist*

“The language is infused with Shakespearean phrases sure to please fans of the Bard... With its engaging characters and manageable length, this is a good pick for historical-fiction novices, and an obvious choice for kids with an interest in Shakespeare and his time.” – *School Library Journal*

*Inspired by fact, this coming-of-age story offers a vivid picture of the rebuilding of and life behind the curtain at Shakespeare’s Globe Theatre.*

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

- *All the World’s a Stage* is written in five acts with scenes for each. Discuss why you think the author chose to structure the novel this way. What significance do the chapter titles have?

- Shakespeare’s plays include comedies, tragedies, and histories. Which do you think best describes *All the World’s a Stage*?
- What circumstances led Kit to live on his own on the streets of London? Besides being “cutpurses,” what were other options for orphans in Elizabethan England?
- Why does Kit at first prefer living on the streets to working at the theater, and why does he later decide to return?
- Shakespeare often used the theme of appearance vs. reality in his plays. In what ways is that theme used in *All the World’s a Stage*?
- In Shakespeare’s time, women’s roles were played by boys. Why do you think there were no actresses?
- When Kit tells Molly, “At least you have got good luck now” (p. 41), she replies, “’Tis not luck.” What does she mean, and how does Kit learn the truth of her words?
- Kit asks Will Shakespeare why he buys broadsides in the marketplace. Shakespeare responds, “Everything is food for my plays” (p. 45) and adds, “You are writing a play too, lad, the play of your life” (p. 46). Discuss how this theme, echoing the book’s title, is demonstrated throughout the novel.
- Kit and Molly discuss fate. Kit quotes Shakespeare, who called Romeo and Juliet “star-crossed lovers. ’Twas their fate to die” (p. 122). But in his later play *Julius Caesar*, Shakespeare paraphrases Molly’s belief, “The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, but in ourselves. . . .” (I, ii, 140–141). These contradictory statements echo much of Kit’s conflict throughout the novel. What role, if any, did fate play in Kit’s life?
- Shakespeare spends his days building a frame of words. Master Street builds buildings. What influenced Kit’s final decision regarding his life’s path?

### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Gretchen Woelfle (pronounced Wolf-lee) travels around the world looking for stories. She’s lived in the Himalayas, on a tiny island in the Pacific Ocean, and now lives in Los Angeles, California. Visit her online at [www.gretchenwoelfle.com](http://www.gretchenwoelfle.com).