

## 100 Interesting Facts about Famous Authors

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**Virginia Woolf** was the granddaughter of novelist William Makepeace Thackeray.

**Aldous Huxley** was the great-nephew of Matthew Arnold.

**Harriet Beecher Stowe**, author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, lived next door to Mark Twain.

**Evelyn Waugh's** first wife's name was Evelyn. They were known as 'He-Evelyn' and 'She-Evelyn'.

**Arthur Ransome**, author of *Swallows and Amazons*, married Leon Trotsky's secretary.

In 1951, **William Burroughs** accidentally shot his common-law wife Joan Vollmer dead at a party during a drunken game of 'William Tell'.

**Samuel Johnson** had only three pupils enrol at the school he opened in the 1730s. However, one of those three was future actor David Garrick.

**Jonathan Swift** invented the name Vanessa.

**Vladimir Nabokov** had a 'genitalia cabinet' in which he kept his collection of male blue butterfly genitalia. It's now housed at Harvard.

In 1974, **Arthur C. Clarke** predicted the internet of the year 2001.

**Edgar Allan Poe** was one of the first to propose a solution to the cosmological problem known as Olbers' paradox.

**Lewis Carroll** once stayed up all night composing this anagram of British Prime Minister William Ewart Gladstone: 'Wild agitator, means well'.

**Stieg Larsson** said that *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* was based on what Pippi Longstocking would be like as an adult.

**Thomas Hobbes**, author of *Leviathan* (1651), who famously described human life as 'nasty, brutish and short', lived to be 91 years old.

In 1849, **Dostoevsky** was sentenced to death by firing squad. At the very last minute the sentence was commuted to four years' hard labour.

Playwright **Tennessee Williams** choked to death on a bottle cap.

The author of *The Hunger Games*, **Suzanne Collins**, was one of the writers on the 1990s children's TV show *Clarissa Explains It All*.

**Alexandre Dumas** fought his first duel at age 23. During the course of the duel, his trousers fell down.

Poet **Samuel Taylor Coleridge** joined the army under the name Silas Tomkyn Cumberbatch.

Before settling on the pen name **Mark Twain**, Samuel Langhorne Clemens signed his writings with the pseudonym 'Josh'.

Before finding fame as a novelist, *The Da Vinci Code* author **Dan Brown** was a pop singer. One of his solo albums was called *Angels and Demons*.

Detective fiction author **Dashiell Hammett** started out as a private detective; his first case was to track down a stolen Ferris wheel.

**Washington Irving**, who wrote both 'Rip van Winkle' and 'The Legend of Sleepy Hollow', suffered from insomnia.

**T. E. Lawrence** lost the manuscript for his masterpiece *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom* at Reading railway station. He had to rewrite it from notes.

**Jean-Dominique Bauby** 'dictated' his book *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly*, about his life following a stroke, by blinking his left eyelid.

**Stella Gibbons** wrote much of her novel *Cold Comfort Farm* while commuting to work on the London Underground.

**Friedrich von Schiller** kept rotten apples in his desk. He claimed that he needed the scent of their decay to help him write.

**F. Scott Fitzgerald** once danced on the lawn of publishers Doubleday to attract Joseph Conrad; the caretaker noticed him and had him removed.

**Franz Kafka** would attend nudist camps but refused to drop his trousers; he was known by others as 'The Man in the Swimming Trunks'.

When **Marcel Proust** and **James Joyce** met in 1922, they spent dinner talking about their ailments before admitting they hadn't read each other's work.

When he worked for Faber, **T. S. Eliot** liked to seat visiting authors in chairs with whoopee cushions and offer them exploding cigars.

**Mrs Beeton** was only 21 when she began her *Book of Household Management*, which sold 2 million copies in its first decade. She died aged 28.

**Noel Coward** claimed he began every day by checking the obituary column in *The Times*; if he wasn't listed there, he could get down to work.

**Agatha Christie** disliked her creation Hercule Poirot, calling him 'a detestable, bombastic, tiresome, egocentric little creep'.

**Enid Blyton's** 1946 *Gay Story Book* included tales called 'Let's Play Worms' and 'Dame Poke-Around'.

A young **Samuel Johnson** was turned down for a teaching job because it was feared his 'way of distorting his face' would scare the pupils.

**Molière** died after collapsing on stage while acting in one of his own plays – ironically, he was playing the role of the hypochondriac.

**William Makepeace Thackeray** was so moved by the novel *Jane Eyre* that he broke down in tears in front of his butler.

The first recorded reference to anyone in England having a cup of tea is in **Samuel Pepys'** diary on 25 September 1660.

**Charles Dickens** gave himself a number of nicknames, including 'The Sparkler of Albion', 'The Inimitable', 'Revolver', and 'Resurrectionist'.

On his marriage document in 1582, **William Shakespeare's** name was spelled 'William Shagspeare'.

**J. D. Salinger** once dated Oona, the daughter of playwright Eugene O'Neill, but she left him for Charlie Chaplin whom she later married.

**Virginia Woolf** was a keen cricketer and was known by her family as 'the demon bowler'.

**Mickey Spillane** ordered 50,000 copies of his 1952 novel *Kiss Me, Deadly* to be destroyed when the comma was left out of the title.

**Gaius Thomas Hardy's** only acting role was a walk-on part in a pantomime at Covent Garden.

American lexicographer **Noah Webster** was T. S. Eliot's great-uncle.

The first US edition of **Ian Fleming's** novel *Casino Royale* was published with the title 'You Asked for It'.

The phrase 'dark horse' comes from **Benjamin Disraeli's** 1831 novel *The Young Duke*, in which such a horse is the surprise winner at the races.

*Biggles* author '**Captain**' **W. E. Johns** never attained the rank of Captain – he was only a Flying Officer.

**Neil Gaiman's** first book was a biography of *Duran Duran*, published in 1984.

**Roald Dahl's** school report read: 'I have never met anybody who so persistently writes words meaning the exact opposite of what is intended.'

**Ian Fleming** was Christopher Lee's step-cousin.

**C. S. Lewis** coined the word 'verbicide' to denote the killing of a word or the distortion of its original meaning.

Writer of westerns **Louis L'Amour** received 200 rejections before he was published. His novels have now sold 320 million copies worldwide.

In 1862, novelist **Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton**, who coined the phrase 'the pen is mightier than the sword', was offered the throne of Greece.

Modernist writer **Katherine Mansfield** wore mourning dress to her first wedding and left her husband on their wedding night.

In his novel *Bleak House*, **Charles Dickens** coined the word 'growlery' for a place to retire to when you're feeling 'out of humour'.

The only fan letter **Richard Dawkins** has ever written was to Douglas Adams; to his delight, he got one back.

One of **Geoffrey Chaucer's** earliest poems was an acrostic which he wrote for people to use when praying.

When **Sarah Kane's** death was announced in 1999, there was a minute's silence on German radio.

**Roald Dahl** planned to write a third *Charlie Bucket* book, *Charlie in the White House*; he died before he could complete it.

Owing to failing eyesight, **James Joyce** wrote much of his novel *Finnegans Wake* in crayon on pieces of cardboard.

**Pablo Neruda's** 'Ode to My Socks' contains the lines 'what is good is doubly good when it is a matter of two socks made of wool in winter.'

**J. R. R. Tolkien** was known to dress up as an axe-wielding Anglo-Saxon warrior and chase his astonished neighbour down the street.

**Michael Bond** bought Paddington Bear in 1956; he felt sad for the bear as it was the only toy left on the shop's shelves on Christmas Eve.

**James Joyce's** last words were reportedly 'Does nobody understand?'

**Truman Capote** wouldn't begin or end a piece of work on a Friday, and would change hotel rooms if its phone number involved the number 13.

In Florida's Key West, there's an annual **Ernest Hemingway** Lookalike Contest.

When he was six, **Roald Dahl** made his mother take him to meet Beatrix Potter. Potter, who disliked children, told them both to 'buzz off.'

**J. K. Rowling** came up with the names for the houses at Hogwarts in Harry Potter while she was on a plane. She jotted the names down on a sick-bag.

For 164 years, **Anne Brontë's** gravestone gave her age at the time of her death as 28; she was actually 29.

**Dr Seuss** included the word 'contraceptive' in a draft of his children's book *Hop on Pop* to make sure his publisher was paying attention.

**William Faulkner** was born Falkner; according to one story, the 'u' was the result of a typesetting error Faulkner didn't bother to correct.

When staying in hotels, **Hans Christian Andersen** always carried a coil of rope with him in case he needed to escape from a fire.

One publisher rejected **Mary Higgins Clark's** novel *Journey Back to Love* with the words: 'We found the heroine as boring as her husband did.'

Only ten people attended **D. H. Lawrence's** funeral. One of the mourners was Aldous Huxley.

**Daniel Defoe's** numerous pen names included Jeffrey Sing-Song, Obadiah Blue Hat, Betty Blueskin, Penelope Firebrand, and the Man in the Moon.

**Nathaniel Hawthorne's** great-great-grandfather, John Hathorne, was one of the judges at the Salem witch trials.

**Alexandre Dumas'** name at birth was Dumas Davy de la Pailleterie.

In 1912, **Ambrose Bierce** proposed an early emoticon, the snigger point, written as \\_\_\_/! and designed to mimic 'a smiling mouth.'

**Quentin Crisp's** real name was Denis Pratt.

**Samuel Johnson** deliberately misspelled the name of the publisher of his poem London so that readers would think it was a pirated copy.

**Robert Louis Stevenson** legally gave his birthday away to a little girl.

**Jack Kerouac** typed up his novel *On the Road* on one continuous roll of paper that was 120 feet long.

**Henry Wadsworth Longfellow** coined the phrases 'ships that pass in the night' and 'footprints on the sands of time'.

**Rudyard Kipling** referred to his friend, the writer and designer William Morris, as 'Deputy Uncle Topsy'.

**T. S. Eliot** was a huge fan of Groucho Marx; he wrote the comedian a fan letter and kept a picture of him on his wall.

**Maurice Sendak** based the monsters in *Where the Wild Things Are* on his Polish relatives who lived with him after escaping the Holocaust.

One of **Bill Bryson's** first books, from 1985, was about 'unusual, unspoiled, and infrequently visited spots in 16 European countries'.

Poet **William Ernest Henley** was the inspiration for *Long John Silver* and the father of the girl who inspired the character *Wendy Darling*.

In 1871, **Mark Twain** invented one of the first bra straps.

**Emily Brontë** once had to put out her brother, Branwell, when he set fire to his bedclothes.

**J. M. Barrie** set up a celebrity cricket team featuring G. K. Chesterton, Arthur Conan Doyle, Jerome K. Jerome, A. A. Milne, and H. G. Wells.

There is an asteroid named after **Kurt Vonnegut**.

**Marlon Brando** was a huge fan of **Toni Morrison**; he would often call her up and read passages of her own novels which he particularly enjoyed.

There is a life-size android version of the SF writer **Philip K. Dick**, built in 2005 by David Hanson. It has been christened 'Robo-Dick'.

**Sylvia Plath** committed suicide in an apartment in which W. B. Yeats had once lived.

The US sitcom *I Dream of Jeannie* was created by **Sidney Sheldon**, who went on to become the seventh bestselling fiction writer of all time.

**William Wordsworth** went to the same school as Fletcher Christian, the man who led the mutiny on the *Bounty* in 1789.

The first known person to use the word 'outsider' was **Jane Austen**, in a letter of 1800.