

# Robert-Louis Stevenson

Every country has its writer. Shakespeare is associated with England, and Mark Twain with the United States. Robert Louis Stevenson is always associated with Scotland, although he spent most of his life travelling and living in other countries.

He was born in Edinburgh on November 13, 1850, but when he was 41, he gave his birthday to an American girl called Annie Ide. Annie's real birthday was on Christmas Day, but she wanted a special day just for her. Stevenson said he didn't need a birthday any more and made a legal contract so that he could give Annie his birthday.

Stevenson was an only child. Because he spent a lot of time on his own and was often ill, he had a vivid imagination. He started writing when he was a teenager, but he decided to study engineering and law at Edinburgh University. He didn't like studying and quickly became disruptive and arrogant.

Stevenson's father was an engineer. Their relationship was difficult and they often argued, but his father gave him money to travel around Europe when he was young. Stevenson travelled to make his health better, and his first books were descriptions of these travels.

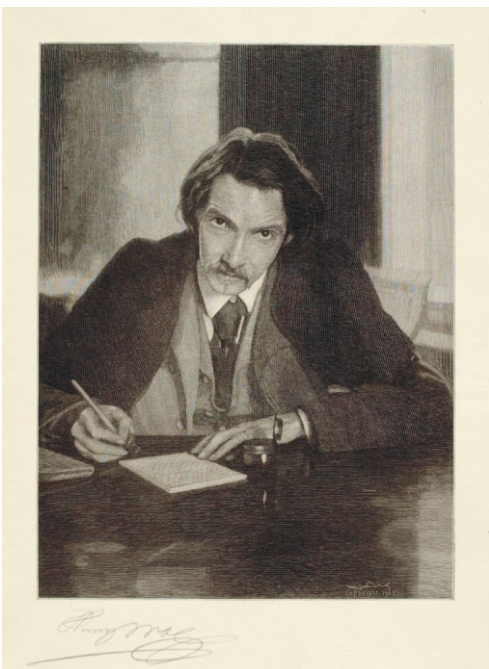
In 1876 in Belgium, when Stevenson was 26 years old, he met Fanny Osbourne. She was a 36-year-old American. She was married and had two children. She didn't like Stevenson at first, but he followed her to America and a few years later they got married.

On a cold September morning in 1881, he started writing the book that made him famous – *Treasure Island*. Some people say it is the most exciting children's story ever written. Stevenson's visual imagination makes his stories perfect to illustrate, and many artists have illustrated the adventures of Jim Hawkins and Long John Silver, which he originally wrote for Fanny's son Lloyd.

After "the most exciting children's story ever" he wrote "the best thriller ever". It was called *Kidnapped* and it contains one of the best chase sequences of all time, when the hero escapes from his kidnappers and travels across Scotland to recover his inheritance from his evil uncle.

The idea for *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde* came to Stevenson in a dream. He wrote a first version of the story in three days, but Fanny didn't like it. So Stevenson destroyed it and started again. The story is about a doctor who conducts experiments that give him a double personality. It's about the good and bad in all of us. Stevenson based the character on Deacon William Brodie, a respectable man by day who became a burglar by night.

The year after *Dr. Jekyll* and *Kidnapped* were published, Stevenson's father died. The Stevensons used the inheritance money to explore islands in the Pacific Ocean, and they went to live in Samoa in 1890, where Stevenson continued to write about the country he loved, Scotland. He suffered from tuberculosis, but it was a cerebral haemorrhage that killed Stevenson on December 3, 1894. He was 44 years old.



## Check you understand

Are these sentences about the writer Robert Louis Stevenson true or false? Correct the false sentences.

- T F 1. He is always associated with England.
- T F 2. His birthday was on Christmas Day.
- T F 3. He gave his birthday to an American girl.
- T F 4. He started writing when he finished his university studies.
- T F 5. He didn't have a good relationship with his father.
- T F 6. His first books were about his travel experiences.
- T F 7. He married an American woman 10 years younger than him.
- T F 8. He wrote the book *Treasure Island* for his wife's son.
- T F 9. The book *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde* made him famous.
- T F 10. The character of Dr. Jekyll is based on a real person.

## ANSWERS

1. False. He is always associated with Scotland.

2. False. His birthday was on November 13.

3. True

4. False. He started writing when he was a teenager, before he went to university.

5. True

6. True

7. False. His wife was 10 years older than him.

8. True

9. False. The book *Treasure Island* made him famous.

10. True