

Character Planning Guide for Elizabethan Middle Class

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Every society has its misfits and oddballs: people who stand out because they are outside the mainstream. While we certainly respect the individuality of such people, when it comes to creating a character we must ignore them. We strive to give a sense of everyday life: people who are part of the society around them. While they can be colorful, to be meaningful and theatrical convincing their eccentricities must be one of their era, not ours.

The characteristics below are broad outlines of Elizabethans in town and countryside, as opposed to Londoners. Please note that the characterizations of "rich" and "poor" are relative to the middle class, they are not meant to denote true poverty or high birth. These are only guidelines; if there is a good theatrical reason, you may wish to diverge from them a little. If you'd like help with this or want pointers to further research, please see the theatrical director.

Age	Poor	Rich
Under 7	<p>If you're male, you help with the family garden and perform basic tasks around the house. If you live on a farm, you help glean the fields. If your father is ambitious, he might be trying to find an apprenticeship for you in one of the local guilds.</p> <p>If you're a girl, you're already learning to cook, spin, sew, work a still room, brew, and handle household accounts.</p>	<p>If you're male, you're likely to have had some instruction at a village school, learning Latin, French, history, and mathematics. Your father may have made an arrangement for you to be involved in one of the local Guilds, and you may have already begun some studies towards a career.</p> <p>If you're female, you are receiving private tutoring in the same subjects found above. You also study music, dance, and the fine arts in preparation for marriage, and may already be betrothed. You would be working on the contents of your dowry chest – household linens, baby clothes, and the like – and would be learning to manage household accounts and how to handle servants.</p>
7-12	<p>If you're male, you are either enrolled as an apprentice or actively involved in learning a trade. Over 70% of the population of England live on small farms, and you are very familiar with farming even if you hope to follow some other trade.</p> <p>If you're female, you would be learning midwifery, and are taking over many of the household duties from your mother. You might have a position as a maidservant in another, more prosperous, household.</p>	<p>If you're male, you are actively involved in learning a trade, becoming a scholar, or have been fostered to a wealthier household. In any case, you are learning everything you can. Your family may have betrothed you to a girl of another family with which they plan a dynastic link. You are probably literate.</p> <p>If you're female, you will be starting to attend society functions to show your worth and eligibility as a wife, and you would be expected to entertain family and guests with your learned musical skills. You probably have some control over household servants at this point, but no control over money. You might also be employed as a maidservant at a noble household or, if your family owns a store, assist with the work there.</p>

Age	Poor	Rich
13-18	<p>If you are male, you are married or soon will be though you may still be living with your parents or on their land. If you were apprenticed, then you are probably continuing your studies as a journeyman. You have probably never ridden a horse or traveled more than 20 miles away from your home. You are at least semiliterate.</p> <p>If you are female, you are married at this point, with at least one child (18-year olds might have as many as three). You might be living at your family's household or that of your husband's.</p>	<p>If you are male, although the upper classes often waited until later in life (unless there were dynastic pressures), you are engaged, married, or soon will be. You may have traveled within England with your father or Master in the course of business duties, and are therefore relatively cosmopolitan. You may be caught in the romantic notion of making your fortune fighting in France or Ireland. You are highly literate in English and would know some French, and perhaps a smattering of Latin.</p> <p>If you're female, and if you're married by now, you have a household of your own and are complete charge of running the household, including servants and accounts. You probably have at least one child.</p>
19-30	<p>If you are male, you are probably a farmer or shepherd, making part of your income in barter and part cash, but you could also be working in one of the semiskilled trades or in one of the lesser Guilds. You most likely live in a farm cottage or in a house over your workshop, and have started to make arrangements for your sons' futures.</p> <p>If you are female, you are skilled at home brewing, curing and smoking meats, and pickling. For a woman to be unmarried over the age of 25 was highly unlikely -- most women of this age have already had several children. Around 60% of women die in childbirth during this era, and this is a real concern for you. You are now training your daughters the same skills your mother taught you.</p>	<p>If you are male and a craftsman, you are a full member of the Guild as a working journeyman or Master, and may be involved in local politics as an alderman or constable. If you are rich enough, you may even have the right to vote. You have started to make arrangements for your sons' futures.</p> <p>If you are female, you are probably married with one or two children. Wealthier families tended to have fewer children than those of poorer families, but around 60% of women die in childbirth during this era, and this is a real concern for you. You are now training your daughters in the same skills your mother taught you.</p>

Age	Poor	Rich
30-40	Both male and female: you definitely have several children, and odds are that not all of them have survived childhood. You may be involved in making marriage arrangements for your oldest children by now. If either of your parents are alive, they are considered very old.	<p>If you are male, you have probably served as an alderman, or on the town or shire council, or in some other civic or church duty (the two are not very separate in this era). You may have been involved as a litigant in some sort of court case -- hardly anyone of means avoided being sued over boundary disputes, contested wills, and the like. You probably own a substantial amount of pewter and silver plate, though probably not much gold.</p> <p>Women: more of the same. If you are a widow, you may have control of the money and business that your husband left to you -- or it might be in the control of your (or his) relatives, and you would instead be receiving a stipend to live on. You cannot be forced to remarry (although it did happen).</p>
40-50	More of the same... your parents are dead, and you are starting to feel the rigors of age yourself.	If you are sufficiently wealthy to do so, you are probably buying land, either to rent or to give as dowries and gifts for your children's marriages.
Over 50	You are a patriarch or matriarch of a large extended family, possibly with dozens of grandchildren. You will probably work at your trade for as long as you can, though it was not entirely unknown for someone who was comfortably wealthy to spend time in study, particularly of religion.	

Things you are not, regardless of wealth:

- Openly Catholic, Jewish, or Muslim
- Proudly Irish, unless you are a Protestant settler who fled Ireland when the wars started
- Over 30 and never married, unless you are in the clergy.

Some notes on the servant class:

If you are in the servant class, you live to the same standard as your employer; servants are not the modern interpretation of "servants," with the undertone of "slave." It was a valued position, much sought-after to gain higher standing and a better life than in the fields. Many servants were viewed upon as a part of the family they served, and were loved, trusted, and counted upon in the household and family business.