

► By William Shakespeare

Background of the Poem

William Shakespeare was a great playwright and a poet, who reflected the intricacies and realities of life in a very subtle manner. In his famous play 'As You Like It', Jacques gives a speech about the seven stages in a man's life. Jacques' speech became a masterpiece and extracts of the speech are often quoted in literature. Since Jacques was a melancholy character, he presents a negative picture of life.

Summary

Through Jacques, Shakespeare puts forth the view that the world is a stage in which human beings play their part. There are seven Acts like seven stages in a man's life. A person performs multifarious roles in a single life-time. In the beginning, he is a baby crying in the arms of the nurse. Infancy is followed by school-going stage, when he is bright-eyed, trudging unwillingly to school. In the third stage, he grows into a lover, writing poems in praise of his beloved and sighing like a furnace. Then he plays the role of a soldier, who is rash, and who willingly sacrifices his life for honour. In the next role he is a Judge, well-fed, prosperous, fat and fierce-eyed. He is always in a mood of impressing others and is full of wise maxims.

The next stage depicts man to be weak, thin, wearing spectacles and slippers. His clothes are loose and legs are thin and his voice is shrill like that of a child. At the end comes the last stage when he loses his memory, teeth, eyes, taste, infact everything. It is like a second childhood as he has to depend on others for everything. Thus ends the drama of his eventful life.

सारांश

विश्व प्रसिद्ध कवि और नाटककार विलियम शेक्सपियर के एक प्रसिद्ध नाटक – ऐज़ यू लाइक इट – से यह कविता ली गई है। नाटक के एक पात्र – जैक एक भाषण देता है कि हर प्राणी के जीवन में सात अवस्थाएँ आती हैं। जैक का भाषण संसार में बहुत प्रसिद्ध हो गया और हर भाषा में उसका वर्णन हुआ। जैक एक दुखी प्राणी था इसलिए उसका दृष्टिकोण नकारात्मक है।

जैक्स कविता के द्वारा मनुष्य को एक अभिनेता के रूप में दिखाते हैं, जो रंगमंच पर आकर अपनी भूमिका निभा कर चला जाता है। प्रत्येक मनुष्य को मंच पर सात भूमिकाएँ निभानी होती हैं। एक ही जीवन में मनुष्य को भिन्न-भिन्न पात्रों का अभिनय करना पड़ता है।

सर्वप्रथम एक शिशु का, जिसका काम नर्स की गोदी में रोना है। दूसरा एक स्कूल जाने वाले बालक का। वह अनिच्छा से बस्ता घसीटता हुआ पाठशाला जाता है। तीसरा पात्र एक नवयुवक का है जो प्रेम करता है वह हर समय अपनी प्रेमिका के ही बारे में सोचता है और उसकी याद में गर्म आहें भरता रहता है। चौथी अवस्था में वह एक सैनिक का पात्र निभाता है जो सदैव अपने देश के लिए अपने प्राण देने में तत्पर रहता है, बहुत जल्दबाज़ और अविवेक से काम करने वाला प्राणी है।

अगले पात्र में वह एक न्यायाधीश है, एक खाता-पीता, धनवान, मोटा, और तीव्र पैनी दृष्टि वाला पुरुष। वह हमेशा दूसरों को नसीहत देता रहता है और अपनी बुद्धिमता का प्रदर्शन करना चाहता है।

अगली अवस्था में मनुष्य एक दुर्बल, पतला, कमज़ोर दृष्टि का, चश्मा लगाये, चपल पहनने वाला हो जाता है। उसके कपड़े उस पर झूलते हैं उसकी आवाज भी बच्चों की तरह कमज़ोर और पतली हो जाती है।

अन्तिम अवस्था में वह बिना दाँत, बिना आँखों की रोशनी वाला, बिना ज़बान में स्वाद का, बिना स्पर्ण शक्ति वाला प्राणी रह जाता है। वास्तव में यह उसका दूसरा बचपन होता है जिसमें वह पूर्णतया: दूसरों पर निर्भर रहता है इस तरह जीवन के नाटक का अंत होता है। (याद रहे इस कविता में लेखक के समय के जीवन की रूपरेखा दिखाई गई है।)

Word-Meaning

- **Players** – actors ● **Time** – lifetime ● **Parts** – roles
- **Ages** – stages ● **Whining** – grumbling ● **Sighing** – drawing deep breath ● **Ballad** – song ● **Jealous in honour** – keen to guard his reputation ● **Bubble reputation** – short-lived glory ● **Justice** – judge
- **Lined** – filled with

SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT

TEXTBOOK QUESTIONS (SOLVED)

1. On the basis of your understanding of the poem, answer the following questions by ticking the correct choice

(a) *All the world's a stage* is an extended metaphor for _____.

- (i) the life shown in well known plays.
- (ii) seeing the well known plays.
- (iii) life of well known actors.
- (iv) life of man that comes to an end.

Ans : (iv) life of man that comes to an end.

(b) All '*have their exits and their entrances*'. *Exits and entrances* refer to _____.

- (i) death and birth
- (ii) beginning and end of the play
- (iii) coming and going of actors
- (iv) the end of the Shakespearean era

Ans : (i) death and birth

(c) *The seven roles that a man plays* correspond to his _____.

- (i) chronological age in life
- (ii) desires
- (iii) mental age in life
- (iv) idea of a perfect life

Ans : (i) chronological age in life

2. Having read this extract, identify the stages of a person's life as Shakespeare has done. Write down these stages in your note book, and sum up the characteristics of each stage in two or three words. e.g.

Stage	Characteristic feature
infancy	crying

Ans :

Stage	Characteristic feature
● Infancy	crying
● School-going boy	fresh clean face, carrying a bag; but walks slowly like a snail because of his unwillingness to go to school

● Lover	sentimental, unhappy, poetic, tense
● Solider	quarrelsome, short tempered, foolishly looking for glory and fame in the jaws of death
● Justice	fat, corrupt, accepts gifts of chickens, quotes popular sayings and modern examples
● Old age	getting weak and lean due to failing health, loss of manly voice
● Extreme old age	second childhood, weakening of all senses and faculties of hearing, seeing, taste, etc.

3. Explain the meaning of the following.

(a) ... all the men and women merely players:

They have their exits and their entrances...

Ans : All men and women appear on the stage of the world to play various roles. They are just stage artists. Their birth marks their appearance on the stage and death denotes their departure.

(b) And then the lover,

Sighing like furnace...

Ans : In the third stage, man becomes romantic and sentimental. He falls for some girl. The distance from her makes him sad and he writes love poems. He draws deep breath like the bellow of the blacksmith.

(c) a soldier,

... Seeking the bubble reputation

Even in the cannon's mouth.

Ans : As a soldier, man pledges of loyalty to his country and is keen to guard his good name. He hungers for honour as a brave fighter. He risks his life on the battlefield. He hopes to become immortal by winning a medal.

MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

Read the following extracts and choose from the options given below :

1. *Then a soldier*

*Full of strange oaths, and bearded like the pard,
Jealous in honour, sudden quick in quarrel,*

Seeking the bubble reputation

Even in the cannon's mouth.

(a) *The pard* is a symbol of :

- (i) humility
- (ii) fierceness
- (iii) jealousy
- (iv) love

(b) The poetic device used in the second line is a :

- (i) metaphor (ii) simile
(iii) alliteration (iv) irony

(c) The soldier seeks his moment of glory :

- (i) through death on the battlefield
(ii) through his acts of chivalry
(iii) by rescuing a maiden in distress
(iv) making great promises of valour

Ans : (a) (ii) (b) (ii) (c) (i)

2. And then the justice,

*In fair round belly with good capon lined,
With eyes severe and beard of formal cut,
Full of wise saws and modern instances
And so he plays his part.*

(a) Which stage is being referred to here?

- (i) Sixth (ii) Third
(iii) Fifth (iv) Seventh

(b) "good capon lined" means :

- (i) riches (ii) filled with big, fat, male chicken
(iii) round belly (iv) some gown

(c) How does he show his wisdom?

- (i) By physical appearance
(ii) Keeping severe expression
(iii) By quoting wise sayings
(iv) By showing off

Ans : (a) (iii) (b) (ii) (c) (iii)

3. *Into the lean and slippered pantaloons
with spectacles on nose and pouch on side,
His youthful hose, well saved, a world too wide
For his shrunk shank; and his big manly voice
Turning again toward childish treble, pipes
And whistles in his sound.*

(a) Which stage of man is referred to here?

- (i) Fifth (ii) Third
(iii) Seventh (iv) Sixth

(b) 'Shrunk shank' means

- (i) socks (ii) thin legs
(iii) wrinkled face (iv) twisted neck

(c) Why does his voice again become childish?

- (i) Suffers from sore throat
(ii) Remains unwell

(iii) Is like a child's voice again

(iv) His old age weakens his voice

Ans : (a) (iv) (b) (ii) (c) (iv)

4. Last scene of all

*That ends this strange eventful history,
Is second childishness and mere oblivion,
Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything.*

(a) Why is this last stage called, 'second childishness'?

- (i) Behaves like a child
(ii) Is without teeth, taste like a child
(iii) Pretends to be a child
(iv) Has no hair

(b) 'mere oblivion' means :

- (i) illness (ii) weakness
(iii) forgetfulness (iv) no financial security

(c) Why is man's life called 'strange eventful history'?

- (i) due to uncertainty
(ii) due to lot of variety
(iii) due to strange happenings
(iv) like a story

Ans : (a) (ii) (b) (iii) (c) (iii)

5. *In fair round belly with capon lined*

*With eye severe and beard of formal cut
Full of wise saws and modern stances
And so he plays his part.*

(a) Which stage of man is the poet referring to in the above lines?

- (i) Infancy (ii) Youth
(iii) Middle age (iv) Old age

(b) The round belly is suggestive of :

- (i) A wise person (ii) A fat person
(iii) A generous person
(iv) A person of importance

(c) By 'wise saws' the poet means :

- (i) Words of wisdom
(ii) Shrewd behaviour
(iii) Pretence (iv) Words of love

Ans : (a) (iii) (b) (iv) (c) (i)

NON-MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

Read the following extracts and answer the questions that follow :

1. *All the world's a stage
and all the men and women merely players:
They have exits and entrances;
And one man in his time plays many parts,*

[CBSE 2010 (Term II)]

(a) What does the poet mean by the terms 'exits and entrances'?

Ans. In this line 'exits and entrances' symbolise death and life respectively.

(b) What parallelism has the poet drawn between the stage and the world?

Ans. Stage is a platform in a theatre where actors perform their act. Similarly, life is also a theatre where men and women play their part and die.

(c) Which figure of speech has been used in the second line?

Ans. Figure of speech used in second line is 'Simile'.

2. *Jealous in honour, sudden and quick in quarrel,
Seeking the bubble reputation
Even in the cannon's mouth :*

[CBSE 2010 (Term II)]

(a) Who is the person being described in the above lines?

Ans. The person described in the above lines is a soldier.

(b) What traits characterise this stage?

Ans. A man in this stage is fierce and can be easily provoked. He is prone to jealousy and a desire to safeguard his reputation.

(c) Explain : 'the bubble reputation'.

Ans. Eagerness to seek reputation.

3. *At first the infant*

Mewling and puking in the nurse's arms

Then the whining schoolboy, with his satchel

And shining morning face, creeping like snail.

(a) How is the life of a person like an infant ?

Ans. As an infant a man is totally dependent. Crying and vomiting milk in the nurse's arms.

(b) How does a schoolboy appear ?

Ans. A schoolboy appears to be sulking and unwillingly carrying his school bag to the school.

(c) The schoolboy is depicted as 'shining' and 'whining'? Why ?

Ans. Since he is a small boy, his face is shining and whining depicts his unwillingness to go to the school.

SHORT ANSWER QUESTIONS

1. What is the theme of the poem 'The Seven Ages'?

Ans. According to Shakespeare human life is transitory. There is nothing permanent in it. This poem is based on a speech given by a character Jacques who is a cynic in the well known play 'As You Like It'. For Jacques there is nothing noble or praiseworthy in a man's life. He makes fun of all the seven ages of man and calls birth as 'entry' and death as 'exit'.

2. Why does the poet say that the school boy creeps like a snail to school?

Ans. The school boy is not very willing to go to school. He is disinterested and just walks slowly like a snail carrying his school bag. He is always whining and complaining.

3. Describe the fourth and fifth stages of man.

OR

What characteristics does the poet associate with fourth and fifth stages of man. [CBSE 2010 (Term I)]

Ans. The fourth stage is of a soldier. He is fierce like

a leopard full of vigour and can easily be provoked. He is jealous and always defensive to save his honour. In the fifth stage he is fat and huge. There is somberness in his eyes and his beard gives him a formal look. He is always full of advice for others and performs the role of a justice.

4. *All the world's a stage*

And all the men and women merely players;

They have their exits and their entrances;

And one man in his time plays many parts,

His acts being seven ages.

(a) Why does the poet call the world a 'stage'?

(b) What does the poet mean by 'exits' and 'entrances'?

(c) How can one man play many parts?

Ans. (a) Stage is a platform in a theatre where actors perform their parts. Similarly, life is also a performance in which men and women play different parts. These roles are preordained and are in God's power.

(b) The exits are deaths and entrances are births

- (c) The various parts are the various stages in his life : Childhood, adolescence, youth, middle age and finally death.

5. *At first the infant*

*Mewling and puking in the nurse's arms
Then the whining schoolboy, with his satchel
And shining morning face, creeping like snail.*

- (a) How is the life of a person like an infant?
(b) How does a schoolboy appear?
(c) The schoolboy is depicted as 'shining' and 'whining' Why?

Ans. The first stage of man is of childhood an infant who cries and vomits in his nurses arms. He is helpless and depends on others for his every need. The next stage is of a school boy who carries his school bag, goes to school unwillingly and slowly like snail. At this time his face is always scrubbed and shining. But he is not a very willing student, he keeps whining and complaining.

6. Explain 'All the world's a stage' with reference to the poem. (CBSE 2010)

Ans. In this poem life is compared to a play. First as man plays different roles in a play so also does he in a real life. As on a stage there is a particular entry and a particular exit of actors; in the same way in life man comes when he is born and departs when he dies. Just as a part is assigned to an actor, in the same God decides man's role in life, what he has to do at various stages. Nothing is in man's hand.

7. What is the theme of the poem 'The Seven Ages'.

Or

What do you think has the poet referred to as 'an eventful history' in the poem, *The Seven Ages and why*? [CBSE 2010 (Term I)]

Ans. Shakespeare said that human life is transitory. There is nothing permanent in it. This poem is based on a

speech given by a character Jacques, who is a cynic, in the well known play 'As You Like It. For Jacques there is nothing noble or praiseworthy in a man's life. He makes fun of all the seven ages of man and calls birth as 'entry' and death as 'exit'.

8. Write two characteristics of infant state mentioned in the poem 'The Seven Ages'. (CBSE 2010)

Or

How does Shakespeare describe man in the first stage of life? [CBSE 2010 (Term II)]

Ans. The two characteristics of an infant stage are crying and vomiting out his milk. Whenever he needs anything he cries, whether he is hungry, sick, or wet. The only language he knows is of crying which attracts the attention of those who care for him. The only reaction he gives regarding his behaviour is by vomiting out his milk. These two traits characterise an infant.

9. Why has been the last stage of a man's life referred to as second childishness'?

[CBSE 2010 (Term II)]

Ans. An infant has to depend on others for everything. Similarly, an old man is weak and ignorant of everything around him. He has no teeth, no sense of taste and is absolutely helpless.

10. What are the problems faced by a person in 'Soldier' stage? [CBSE 2010 (Term II)]

Or

How does man as a soldier behave? (*The Seven Ages*) [CBSE 2010 (Term II)]

Ans. The fourth stage of a man is of a soldier. He is heroic, seeking reputation, willing to face total annihilation. He is fierce like a leopard, full of vigour and is easily provoked. He is jealous and defensive. He risks his life to become immortal.

LONG ANSWER QUESTIONS

1. Describe the seven stages in a man's life. What are the attributes of each stage according to Shakespeare?

Or

According to Shakespeare, there are seven stages in a man's life and these stages are universal. Justify this statement in the light of poem 'The Seven Ages'.

[CBSE 2010 (Term II)]

Ans. The seven stages in a man's life are : 1. Infancy, 2. School Boy, 3. Lover, 4. Soldier, 5. Judge, 6. Old Age, 7. Very old age. As an infant he only pukes and cries. As a school boy he moves about sulking, unwillingly carrying his school bag to the school. As a lover he keeps sighing like a furnace. As a soldier he is heroic, seeking reputation,

willing to face total annihilation, he is rash and foolish. He risks his life to become immortal. As a judge he is wise, he gains weight, sports a beard and wears well-cut clothes and is always offering good advice to others. Sixth stage is of old age. He grows weak and thin. His teeth become loose and his legs become thin. In the seventh stage he is too old, without teeth, eyesight and taste. This is his second childhood and also the time to make his exit from the world.

2. What message does Shakespeare's 'The Seven Ages' convey? [CBSE 2010 (Term II)]

Ans. Shakespeare wishes to point out that human life is transitory, we are in this world for a short span of time. We are born with predetermined destiny and we must

accept our fate with grace and humility. Every human being has to pass through the necessary stages of childhood, adolescence, youth, middle age and finally death. Death and birth are like the 'entrances' and 'exits' of actors and are in God's hands. So we should not complain or grumble but perform our roles with dignity. Since life is short we should not resort to arrogance or vanity. We are mere puppets in the hands of the puppet-master i.e. God, so gratitude and compliance is expected from us.

3. "Sighing like furnace, with a woeful ballad made to his mistress' eyebrow." Why does a lover behave thus?

Ans. In his youth he becomes a lover. Falls in love and plays the role of a romantic lover. He writes love songs and when sad and separated from his beloved, he draws deep and hot breaths like the bellows of a blacksmith. He writes sad tragic ballads, sentimental verses tragic and poetic descriptions of his love life. He is always unhappy and sad.

4. With eyes severe and beard of formal cut, full of wise saws and modern instances." Which stage is this? State the reason for this kind of behaviour.

[CBSE 2010 (Term II)]

His eyes have a severe expression and his beard displays a formal cut. He is always giving wise advise to others, always connecting them with present day instances. This is the stage when man plays the role of a Magistrate. He accepts the bribe of chicken and meat. He is living a

life of ease and has put on a good weight. He has been an irresponsible youth a sentimental fool/lover, a daring soldier, so the time is ripe for him to play this role of a wise adviser.

5. Why is the world compared to a stage by Shakespeare?

Ans. Stage is a platform in a theatre, where actors perform their roles and all the action is enacted. The roles of the actors are written by the playwright and performed according to the directions of the director. Similarly, life is a performance and this world is akin to a stage, where men are born to perform certain roles, predetermined by God. Human beings cannot choose their roles, they are placed in situations and circumstances according to divine choice. Their births and deaths are also in God's power. Shakespeare was one of the greatest dramatists of his time and each of the plays he wrote appeared to be small segments from life itself. So comparison of the world to a stage, life to a drama, is an age-old concept.

6. Describe the fourth and fifth stages of man's life.

Ans. In the fourth stage of his life, man performs the role of a soldier. He is fierce like a leopard, full of vigour and can be easily provoked. He is prone to jealousy and a desire to safeguard his reputation. In the fifth stage of his life he grows fat and huge, his eyes acquire a serious expression and his beard is very formal. He is always advising others and performs the role of a justice, who is desirous of impressing others.

FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT

(A) READING / WRITING

Write a short narrative piece or poem on any one of the stages described by Shakespeare. Add your own qualities.

- Discuss with your neighbour
- Read it aloud in the class

(B) DRAMATISATION / ROLE PLAY

- Organise an intra-class activity
- Select children for various roles
- Arrange costumes and other accessories
- Practice
- Present before the class on a fixed date and time

(C) CLASS DISCUSSION / DEBATE

It is believed that we are mere actors performing our roles, which are predestined. In the context, does the onus of acting in a particular way lie on us.

- Agree / disagree
- Come to a conclusion
- Share the outcome with others.

(D) PROJECT

- Divide the children in seven groups.
- Each group should be assigned one stage of man's life.
- Instruct the groups to prepare the powerpoint presentations.
- Combine all the presentations and show to the whole class.