

The Seven Ages

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.

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_____.

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

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

Ans : (i) death and birth

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

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

Stage	Characteristic feature
● Infancy	crying
● School-going fresh clean face, carrying a boy	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.

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:*

(ii) Fierceness

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

(ii) Simile

(c) *The soldier seeks his moment of glory:*

(i) Through death on the battlefield

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?*

(iii) Fifth

(b) *“Good capon lined” means:*

(ii) Filled with big, fat, male chicken

(c) *How does he show his wisdom?*

(iii) By quoting wise sayings

3. *Into the lean and skippered 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?*

(iv) Sixth

(b) *'Shrunk shank' means*

(ii) Thin legs

(c) *Why does his voice again become childish?*

(iv) His old age weakens his voice

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'?*

(ii) Is without teeth, taste like a child

(b) *'Mere oblivion' means:*

(iii) Forgetfulness

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

(iii) Due to strange happenings

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?*

(iii) Middle age

(b) *The round belly is suggestive of :*

(iv) A person of importance

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

(i) Words of wisdom

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.

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 sombreness 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 nurse's 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.

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'?

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'.

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'?

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?

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

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