

Poetry *9*

UNIT

P.4 The Seven Ages

by William Shakespeare

1. **What according to you are the stages of a person's life? What characteristics would you associate with each stage? (e.g., childhood: innocence, joy)**
2. **Listen to this extract from Shakespeare's play As You Like It. As you listen, read the poem aloud; you can do this more than once.**

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,

- 5 His acts being seven ages. 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

Unwillingly to school. And then the lover,

- 10 Sighing like furnace, with a **woeful** ballad
Made to his mistress' eyebrow. Then a soldier.
Full of strange **oaths**, and bearded like the **pard**,
Jealous in honour, sudden and quick in quarrel,
Seeking the bubble reputation.

- 15 Even in the **cannon's** mouth. 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;



mewling: crying

puking: being sick, vomiting

satchel: a small bag, for carrying school books

woeful: very sad

pard: leopard (a symbol of fierceness in Shakespeare's time)

cannon: a big gun that fired cannon-balls made of iron

capon: a male chicken, very big and fat

oaths: solemn promises

justice: judge

saws: sayings

- And so he plays his part. The sixth age shifts
 20 Into the lean and **slipperd pantaloön**,
 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
 25 And whistles in his sound. Last scene of all,
 That ends this strange eventful history,
 Is second childishness and mere **oblivion**,
Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything.

About the Poet

William Shakespeare (1564-1616) was born in Stratford-upon-Avon. He is considered by many to be the greatest dramatist of all time. He wrote 154 sonnets, two long narrative poems and about three dozen plays. Shakespeare used poetic and dramatic means to create unified aesthetic effects. In verse, he perfected the dramatic blank verse.

3. 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.
- (b) *All 'have their exits and their entrances'*. Exits and entrances refer to _____.
- (i) birth and death
 - (ii) beginning and end of play
 - (iii) coming and going of actors
 - (iv) death and birth

slipperd : wearing slippers (indoor shoes)

pantaloön: a vicious old man a loose fitting garment for hips and legs

pouch: a soft fold of loose skin that hangs down, as a result of illness or old age

hose: tight-fitting leg coverings

shank: legs from the knee to the ankle; frame

treble: a high voice

oblivion: forgetting everything, and being forgotten by everybody

sans: (pronounced like sone) a French word meaning without

(c) The seven roles that a man plays correspond to his ____

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

4. **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

5. **Work individually, and rank the seven stages in order of attractiveness. If you think being a schoolboy is most attractive stage, you could rank it number 1. Then, work in groups of four and compare your individual rankings.**

6. **Explain the meaning of the following**

- a) ... all the men and women merely players:
They have their exits and their entrances...
- b) And then the lover,
Sighing like furnace...
- c) a soldier,
... Seeking the bubble reputation
Even in the cannon's mouth.

7. **You already know the two literary devices generally used by writers and poets for comparison, i.e. metaphor and simile. e.g.**

- a) He was a lion in the battle, (metaphor)
- b) He fought like a lion, (simile)

In (a) the writer talks of the soldier in terms of a lion. The comparison is implied. In (b) the writer compares the soldier to a lion with the use of the word **like**, (**as** may also be used for such comparisons.)

Read the poem again and note down the metaphors and similes. Complete the following chart.

Reference	Metaphor	Simile
world	all the world's a stage	
men, women		
school-boy		
lover		
soldier		
reputation		
voice		

Which comparison(s) do you find most interesting? Why?

8. ***In this poem, life is being compared to a play. Just as in a play, a man acts many parts, so also in life, a man plays many roles. Can you think of some other comparison for life? (For example, life could be compared with the seasons in nature, the days of the week, the lessons in a school day.) Select one of these comparisons (or choose one of your own), and write about the similarities that life has with it. (80-100 words)***
9. ***Your teacher will select seven readers and seven "mimers," one pair for each of Shakespeare's seven ages. At the start of the reading, all seven "mimers" stand in front of the class and the readers are at their desks. For each age, the reader stands up and reads, while the corresponding "mimer" mimes what is being read.***