

1.4 All the World's a Stage

William Shakespeare (1564-1616) was an English poet, playwright and actor, widely regarded as the greatest writer in the English language and the world's prominent dramatist. He is often called England's national poet and the "Bard of Avon".

This poem is taken from his play 'As you like it'. Here he compares the world to a stage, where the drama of human life is enacted.

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. 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, 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

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; and so he plays his part. The sixth age shifts into the lean and slippered pantaloon,

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. Last scene of all, that ends this strange eventful history,

Is second childishness and mere oblivion?

Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything.

- William Shakespeare

Meanings

Players: actors

Puking: throwing up, vomiting

Satchel: school bag

Woeful ballad: sad poem/song

Pard: poetical short form of 'leopard'

Cannon's mouth: facing great danger to life with good capon

Lined: with excess fat from careless eating habits

Saws: sayings

Youthful hose: closefitting covering for legs.

Shank: legs (knee to ankle)

Treble: (here) three times weaker than

Second childishness: a return to the helpless, ignorant state of a child

Oblivion: the state of being unaware or unconscious of surroundings and happenings

Sans: without

Grammar

I. Pick out from the poem two examples of each.

1. Simile: [1] Creeping like a snail

[2] Soldier bearded like the pard

2. Onomatopoeia: [1] And then the whining schoolboy
[2] Sighing like a furnace
3. Alliteration: [1] They have their exits and their entrances
[2] His youthful hose, well-saved, a world too wide
4. Metaphor: [1] They have their exits and their entrances
[2] men and women merely players
5. Inversion: [1] His acts being seven ages.
[2] With eyes severe and beard of formal cut
6. Transferred Epithet: [1] with a woeful ballad
[2] Into the lean and slippered pantaloons

II. The poem is entirely metaphorical. Pick out the comparisons from the poem. (Answers given directly)

1. World - stage
2. Actors - players
3. Birth and death – entrances and exits
4. School boy – a snail
5. The lover's sigh – a furnace
6. Spotted leopard – bearded bear
7. Last stage (old age) – last scene

III. Read the words in given clouds. Match them with what they signify.

A	B
1. Stage	a. Birth
2. Characters	b. Situation/Incidents
3. Script	c. Story of life
4. Dialogues	d. Death
5. Entry	e. Conversation
6. Exit	f. Roles played by human beings
	g. Life

Ans. [1-g], [2-f], [3-c], [4-e], [5-a], [6-d]

IV. Answer the following questions

1. What is the theme/central idea of this poem?
2. Which two stages of man, described by Shakespeare sound humorous? Say why.
3. The last (7th) stage of life sounds very sad and miserable. How can you make old age also cheerful and happy?

V. Your own response

1. Write down in your own words the differences between the following stages of a man's life.

2nd stage and 4th stage.....

3rd stage and 5th stage.....

1st stage and 7th (last) stage

2. Read the summary of the play 'As You Like It' by William Shakespeare using the Internet. Find out which character has narrated the above poem and on what occasion. Also, make a list of all the characters of the play.

Appreciation of a Poem (Point wise)

The title of the poem: 'All The World's A Stage'

The poet: William Shakespeare

Theme/Central idea: The theme of the poem is the cycle of life. This poem describes the various stages of life from birth to death. The poet compares the world to a stage, where the drama of human life is enacted.

Rhyme scheme: blank verse i.e. no rhyme scheme, but there is a steady rhythm of five beats in each line.

Figure of speech: Metaphor

Special Features (Type of poem, imagery, implied meaning if any, etc.) : The poem has a narrative style which makes the poem flow smoothly from one stage to the next one.

Favourite line/lines: All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players;

Why I like/don't like the poem: I like the poem because it beautifully describes the life cycle which we all are a part of.

Appreciation of a Poem (Paragraph Format)

The poem 'All the World's A Stage' by William Shakespeare is taken from Shakespeare's play 'As you like it'. The main theme of the poem is the cycle of life. In this poem Shakespeare describes the various stages of life from birth to death. He compares the world to a stage, where the drama of human life is enacted. The poem is written in blank verse i.e. no rhyme scheme, but there is a steady rhythm of five beats in each line. There are many figures of speech eg. Metaphor. In the lines 'All the world's a stage, and all men and women are merely players' there is a comparison between two different things. The

special features of this poem is its narrative style which makes the poem flow smoothly from one stage to the next one and the imagery. My favourite lines in this poem are All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players. I like the poem because it beautifully describes the life cycle which we all are a part of.