

The Seven Ages of Man

Poet:

William Shakespeare

Source: From the play As You Like It (Act II, Scene VII)

Summary

“The Seven Ages of Man” by William Shakespeare is a dramatic monologue that compares life to a play and human beings to actors. Shakespeare explains that every person goes through seven distinct stages in their lifetime, just like an actor plays different roles on a stage.

These stages begin with infancy and end in old age and death. Each stage represents a different phase in life — from a helpless baby to a school-going child, then a passionate lover, a brave soldier, a wise judge, an old man, and finally a return to a child-like state before death. Through this poem, Shakespeare shows the cycle of life, filled with both growth and decline.

Detailed Explanation of the Poem (Seven Stages)

Infant

- The first stage of life.
- A crying, helpless baby in the nurse's arms.
- Mewls (cries) and vomits without understanding anything.

Schoolboy

- A whining child who goes to school unwillingly.
- Carries a school bag and has a fresh morning face.
- Walks slowly like a snail, showing reluctance.

Lover

- A teenager or young adult who falls in love.
- Emotional and dreamy, sighing like a furnace.
- Writes sad poems for his beloved, focusing even on her eyebrows!

Soldier

- A young adult full of energy and pride.
- Brave but aggressive, easily angered.
- Speaks with strong words (strange oaths) and grows a beard like a leopard.
- Seeks fame and honor, even risks his life in battles.

Justice (Judge)

- A mature and wise man.
- Well-fed, serious-looking, with a trimmed beard.
- Shares proverbs and modern examples, representing wisdom and experience.

Old Age (Pantaloon)

- Becomes weak and thin, wears glasses, carries a pouch.
- Clothes from youth now seem too big.
- Voice turns thin and high-pitched, like a child's again.

Extreme Old Age (Second Childishness)

- Final stage: becomes dependent and forgetful.
 - Loses teeth, eyesight, taste, and strength.
 - Just like a baby again – helpless and unaware – leading to death.
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Theme of the Poem

- Life is a cycle – from birth to death.
 - Human life is temporary, just like a performance on stage.
 - Everyone has a role to play, but in the end, we all return to dust.
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Literary Devices

Device	Example	Purpose
Metaphor	"All the world's a stage"	Compares the world to a stage
Imagery	"Sighing like furnace", "shrunk shank"	Creates strong mental pictures
Simile	"Creeping like snail", "Sighing like furnace"	Shows slow movement, intense emotions
Alliteration	"Mewling and puking", "shrunk shank"	Adds musical quality and emphasis
Repetition	"Sans teeth, sans eyes..."	Shows the total loss of abilities in old age

Conclusion

Shakespeare's "The Seven Ages of Man" gives a thoughtful and realistic view of human life. It reminds us that time keeps moving, and we must value each stage of life. The poem is famous for its universal truth — we all are actors with temporary roles in the great drama of life.

Question & answers

Here are the answers to your questions, written in a clear, student-friendly way (Class 8 to 10 level) and optimized for educational use on notebuddy.in:

1. How is infancy, the first stage of life, described? What are the actions associated with it?

Infancy is described as the stage when a person is a newborn baby. The baby is helpless, always crying (mewling) and vomiting (puking) in the nurse's arms. At this stage, the baby depends completely on others and does not understand anything about the world.

2. With which age mentioned in the extract do you identify now? Why?

I identify with the schoolboy stage, because like the boy in the poem, I go to school every day. Sometimes, I also feel lazy or unwilling to go, just like the child who creeps like a snail. I carry my school bag, try to be on time, and face the daily routine of school life — so I connect most with this age.

3. What are the qualities attributed to the soldier? What does he seek?

The soldier is described as a brave, bold, and emotional person. He makes strange promises (oaths), has a

beard like a leopard, and is quick to fight to protect his honor. He is often angry or short-tempered, and always wants to earn fame and a strong reputation, even if it means risking his life in battle. The poet says he seeks a “bubble reputation”, meaning a short-lived fame that can easily disappear.

4. How does the writer describe the sixth age of life? How does this age contrast with the earlier stages?

In the sixth stage, the person becomes old and weak. He wears slippers, spectacles, and carries a pouch. His legs become thin and weak, so even his old clothes become too loose. His once strong voice now turns high-pitched and shaky, like a child’s voice again.

This stage is very different from the earlier ones. While earlier stages show growth, strength, and ambition, the sixth stage shows decline, weakness, and fading power. It marks the beginning of the end of life.

Activity A

Completed Table: The Seven Ages of Man

Age/Stage	Description	Key Imagery	Characteristics
Infant	A helpless baby crying and vomiting in the nurse's arms.	Mewling and puking in the nurse's arms	Innocent, vulnerable, and needy
Schoolboy	A young boy who goes to school unwillingly with a satchel.	Creeping like a snail, with satchel and shining morning face	Reluctant, obedient, and fresh-faced
Lover	A teenager or young man deeply in love, full of emotions.	Sighing like furnace, with a woeful ballad	Emotional, passionate, romantic

Soldier	A young adult, proud and brave, ready to fight for honour.	Bearded like the pard, full of strange oaths, seeking fame	Ambitious, aggressive, honour-driven
Justice	A wise and experienced man, well-fed and full of advice.	Fair round belly, eyes severe, beard of formal cut	Judgemental, knowledgeable, mature
Old Man (Pantaloon)	Weak and thin, wears spectacles and loose clothes.	Spectacles on nose, shrunk shank, childish voice	Fragile, forgetful, shrinking physically
Second Childhood	The final stage of life, fully dependent	Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans everything	Dependent, helpless, unaware of surroundings

like a baby
again.

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Activity B

‘The Seven Ages of Man’ written by William Shakespeare is taken from the play As You Like It. In this extract, the world is compared to a stage. The extract outlines seven stages of a man’s life.

In the first stage, the infant cries and needs care. Then comes the schoolboy who unwillingly goes to school. After childhood comes the lover, who is full of emotions and writes sad songs for his beloved. Next is the brave soldier, who seeks honour and fame even at the risk of his life. The fifth stage is the justice, a wise and experienced man who enjoys respect. In the sixth stage, he becomes weak and thin, with a trembling voice. Finally, in the seventh stage, he returns to a second childhood, becoming completely dependent on others, having lost his senses.

Activity 1 – Let's Recall and Recreate

A. Pick out other instances of simile in the extract.

Simile is a figure of speech that compares two different things using 'like' or 'as'.

Examples of simile from the poem:

1. "Sighing like furnace" – Compares the passionate sighs of the lover to the heat and intensity of a furnace.
 2. "Creeping like snail" – Already given in the activity.
 3. (There are only two clear similes in the poem; the rest are metaphors or direct descriptions.)
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B. What are the two things compared in these lines?

"All the world's a stage,

And all the men and women merely players;"

Two things compared:

- The world is compared to a stage.
- Men and women are compared to actors/players on that stage.

This metaphor shows that life is like a play and people perform different roles at different times.

Pick out other instances of metaphor in the extract:

Metaphor is a poetic device that states implicit comparisons without using 'like' or 'as'.

Examples of metaphor from the poem:

1. "All the world's a stage" – The world is directly called a stage.
2. "And all the men and women merely players" – Life is portrayed as a drama, and we are all actors.
3. "One man in his time plays many parts" – Compares stages of human life to roles played in a drama.
4. "Last scene of all" – Life is compared to a theatrical performance with a final act.