

Lesson- 15

The Seven Ages of Man

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 instance,
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

About the Poem:

William Shakespeare (1564-1616) was an English poet, playwright, actor and dramatist. He is often called the "Bard of Avon". His works include 38 plays, 154 sonnets and 2 long narrative poems. His plays have been translated into major modern languages and are performed the world over. Shakespeare produced most of his famous works between 1589 and 1613. His plays were primarily comedies, histories, tragedies and tragi-comedies. Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, Macbeth, As

You Like It and The Merchant Of Venice are considered to be some of his finest plays.

This poem is a monologue taken from a famous Shakespearean comedy As You Like It. It is spoken by melancholy Jacques. According to the poet man's life can be divided into seven stages - infant, school boy, lover, soldier, justice, pantalone and old age. It is one of Shakespeare's often quoted monologues written in iambic pentameter. Many writers from Pythagoras to present day have compared the world to a stage.

GLOSSARY:

1. mewling and puking (v) - crying weakly
2. whining (v) - complaining and grumbling
3. satchel (n) - bag
4. snail (n) - very slow moving organism
5. furnace (n) - device used for high temperature heating
6. pard (n) - a leopard or panther
7. cannon (n) - piece of artillery that uses explosives
8. saws (n) - proverbs or wise sayings
9. pantaloon (n) - pantalone foolish old person
10. hose (n) - a man's garment covering the legs and reaching up to the waist,
11. pouch (n) - a small bag for carrying loose items
12. shank (n) - the leg of a human being
13. treble (n) - tones of high frequency or range
14. sans - without
15. capon (n) - a male chicken

ACTIVITY 1 : COMPREHENSION

A. Say whether the following statements are True or False. Write 'T' for true and 'F' for false.

1. One man in his life time plays only one part/role.
2. An old man is full of strange oaths.
3. An infant seeks the bubble reputation.
4. Justice is one of the stages of human age.
5. The last stage of man's life is called second childishness.
6. An infant has a fair round belly.

B. Answer the following questions in about 10-20 words each.

1. Who is compared with a leopard?
2. What is the role of a nurse?
3. Who sighs like a furnace?
4. At what stage does a man wear spectacles at his nose?

C. Answer the following questions in about 20-30 words each

1. What is the importance of the repetition of the word 'sans'?
2. Do you find any melancholy reference in the poem?
3. Pick out similes from the poem.

D. Answer the following questions in about 60-80 words each:

1. Describe the salient features of all the seven stages of a man's life.
2. Pick out the use of metaphors from the text.
3. How does the poem represent a mature view of life?
4. Explain how all the world is a stage in the context of the poem.
5. Discuss Shakespeare as a minute observer of human nature.

ACTIVITY 2: VOCABULARY

A. Lookup Monologue, Dramatic Monologue and Soliloquy in a dictionary of literary terms. Differentiate between monologue & soliloquy.

B. Blank Verse:

Blank verse is the poetry written with the help of regular metrical but unrhymed lines, almost in iambic pentameter. It is probably the most common form in English poetry. Like other famous writers William Shakespeare wrote his plays and sonnets in blank verse and "The Seven Ages of Man" is a fine example.

Iambic Pentameter: The term describes the rhythm the words form in a line of verse. It is measured in small groups of syllables called "feet". In English the word iambic" refers to the type of foot which has an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable. Pentameter means that a line has five such "feet". Iambic rhythms come relatively naturally in English.

A standard line of iambic pentameter has five iambic "feet" in a row: (From William Shakespeare's Sonnet 2) When I do count the clock that tells the time.

x / x / x / x / x /

(Notation/scansion of a standard line in iambic pentameter).

Monologue: When, on the stage, there is one speaker only and the rest are the listeners but they do exist. Dramatic monologue was popularized by Robert Browning.

Soliloquy: It is different from monologue. It is a method, stage technique, often used in drama when a character speaks to himself or herself. He shares his thoughts or feelings with the audience. The other characters keep silent and are disregarded by the speaker. Shakespeare has used some of the most powerful soliloquies in his plays namely Othello, Macbeth, Hamlet, Julius Caesar and many others.

Cataloguing: It means listing of things on a certain topic or issue. Notice how melancholy Jacques catalogues the seven stages of human life.

Tragi-Comedy: William Shakespeare has not written pure comedies or tragedies. Comic scenes appear in tragedies while tragic seems appear in comedies for example role of Fool in King Lear or Melancholy Jacques in As You Like It. This enhances the effect of comic scenes as well as tragic scenes by way of contrast against each other. Moreover Shakespeare imitated the world or human nature where one person's gain is the loss of another; and joys and sorrows are not separated but intermingled.

ACTIVITY 3: SPEECH ACTIVITY

The king along with his followers including Jacques has been banished from the kingdom and living in a forest where these philosophical ideas about human misery are expressed.

Observe various stages of a man's life in your neighbourhood. Try to correlate them with the description given in the poem and prepare a speech based on your observation for your class.

ACTIVITY 4: COMPOSITION

1. Write an article for your school magazine on 'The person who impressed me most'.
2. Write your arguments in favour of 'Man is the centre of the Universe'.