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William Shakespeare

Before Reading

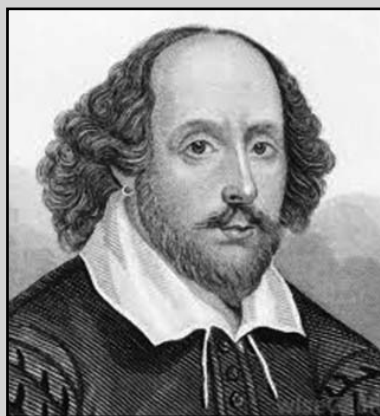
Answer these questions.

- How does life begin?
- Do you think that the whole world is a stage?
- Are we the actors in the world? What roles can a person play in his/her life?

William Shakespeare (1564-1616) was an English poet, dramatist and actor of the Renaissance era. He is widely regarded as the greatest writer in English language and the world's greatest dramatist. His most famous works include *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, *Romeo and Juliet* and *Macbeth*.

This poem is taken from William Shakespeare's play *As You Like It*. With these words “*all the world's a stage*” begins the monologue by the character Melancholy Jaques in Act II Scene VI of the play.

In this poem, Shakespeare has compared life with a stage. The seven stages of a person's life are infant, school going boy, lover/husband, soldier/fighter, justice/ability to understand the right and wrong, Pantalone (greediness and high in status) and old-age., which can come into your mind when you go through this poem with the theme that a person is the ultimate loser in the game of life.

**Reading**

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.



Glossary

furnace (n.): a device for heating

hose (n.): tights, thin trousers that men wore in Shakespeare's time

mewling (v.): crying weakly with a soft, high-pitched sound

oaths (n.): promises

oblivion (n.): a state of nothingness

pard (n.): a leopard

puking (v.): vomiting

sans (prep.): without, lacking

satchel (n.): a shoulder bag for school

treble (adj.): high-pitched

whining (v.): uttering a high-pitched cry

woeful (adj.): sorrowful; distressed with grief

Understanding the text

Answer the following questions.

- a. Why does the poet compare the world with a stage?
- b. What is the first stage in a human's life? In what sense can it be a troubling stage?
- c. Describe the second stage of life based on the poem.
- d. Why is the last stage called second childhood?
- e. In what sense are we the players in the world stage?

Reference to the context

- a. Explain the following lines:
All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players
- b. Explain the following lines briefly with reference to the context.
They have their exits and their entrances;
And one man in his time plays many parts,
- c. Read the given lines and answer the questions that follow.
Then the whining schoolboy, with his satchel
And shining morning face, creeping like snail
Unwillingly to school.
 - i. Which stage of life is being referred to here by the poet?
 - ii. Which figure of speech has been employed in the second line?
 - iii. Who is compared to the snail?
 - iv. Does the boy go to the school willingly?
- d. Simile and metaphor are the two major poetic devices used in this poem. Explain citing examples of each.
- e. Which style does the poet use to express his emotions about how he thinks that the world is a stage and all the people living in it are mere players?
- f. What is the theme of this poem?

Reference beyond the text

- a. Describe the various stages of a human's life picturised in the poem "All the World's a Stage."
- b. Is Shakespeare's comparison of human's life with a drama stage apt? How?