

# The Seven Ages Of Man William Shakespeare

## Seven Ages of Man

All the world's a stage,  
And all the men and women merely players,  
They have their exits and 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 lin'd,  
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 slipper'd pantaloon,  
With spectacles on nose, and pouch on side,  
His youthful hose well sav'd, a world too wide,  
For his shrunk shank, and his big manly voice,  
Turning again towards 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

The seven ages of man William Shakespeare is a poignant reflection on the stages of human life, famously articulated in the play "As You Like It." This concept, encapsulated in the monologue delivered by the character Jaques, serves not only as a literary device but also as a philosophical exploration of existence. Shakespeare's portrayal of these seven distinct ages provides a framework for understanding the journey from infancy to old age, encapsulating the essence of human experience. In this article, we will delve into each of these stages, their significance, and the broader implications they hold for our understanding of life.

# Understanding the Seven Ages of Man

Shakespeare's seven ages of man represent a cycle of life that every individual experiences. Each age is marked by unique characteristics, challenges, and contributions to the larger tapestry of human existence. The metaphor of life stages offers profound insights into personal growth, societal roles, and the inevitable passage of time.

## 1. The Infant

The first stage of man is the infant, a period characterized by vulnerability and dependency. In this stage, the individual is entirely reliant on caregivers for survival. The infant's experience is marked by:

- Dependency: Infants require constant care and attention from parents or guardians.
- Innocence: This stage is filled with innocence, as the infant is unaware of the complexities of life.
- Exploration: Infants begin to explore their surroundings, developing their senses and understanding of the world.

The infant stage represents the beginning of life, a time of pure potential and untainted experience.

## 2. The Schoolboy

As children grow, they transition into the schoolboy phase. This stage is characterized by the introduction of formal education, socialization, and the development of identity. Key features include:

- Learning: Schoolboys are introduced to literacy and the broader world through education.
- Imagination: This stage is marked by creativity and imagination, as children engage in play and storytelling.
- Rebellion: Schoolboys may exhibit reluctance or resistance towards authority, reflecting their budding

independence.

This phase lays the groundwork for intellectual development and social interaction, shaping the individual's future.

### **3. The Lover**

The third age is that of the lover, where the individual experiences the emotional intensity of love and passion. This stage encompasses:

- Romantic Pursuits: Lovers experience the thrill of attraction and the complexities of romantic relationships.
- Desire and Longing: This age is often marked by yearning and emotional turmoil, as lovers navigate the highs and lows of affection.
- Artistic Expression: Many lovers turn to poetry, music, and art to express their feelings, contributing to cultural richness.

The lover stage is significant for its exploration of connection and emotional depth, which profoundly influences personal identity.

### **4. The Soldier**

Following the lover is the soldier, a phase characterized by ambition, courage, and a desire for honor.

This stage includes:

- Ambition: Soldiers strive for recognition and success, often seeking glory through achievements.
- Bravery: This age is marked by a readiness to confront challenges and defend one's values.
- Impetuosity: Soldiers may exhibit rashness and a tendency to act impulsively, driven by passion and ideals.

The soldier stage reflects the drive for purpose and the pursuit of one's aspirations, often leading to significant personal and societal contributions.

## 5. The Justice

The fifth age is that of the justice, where individuals gain wisdom and authority. This stage is characterized by:

- Maturity: Justices are often more rational and thoughtful, using their experiences to guide others.
- Responsibility: This age involves taking on leadership roles, making decisions that impact the community.
- Reflection: Justices often reflect on their past, gaining insights that contribute to their wisdom.

The justice stage represents a culmination of experiences, where individuals are equipped to mentor and lead, ensuring the welfare of those around them.

## 6. The Old Man

In the sixth age, individuals transition into old age, marked by physical decline and introspection. This stage encompasses:

- Decline: The body begins to weaken, leading to a greater awareness of mortality.
- Wisdom and Experience: Older individuals often possess a wealth of knowledge and life lessons, which they can share.
- Reflection and Legacy: The old man reflects on his life, considering the legacy he will leave behind.

This phase is vital for understanding the full spectrum of life, as it emphasizes the importance of wisdom and the value of shared experiences.

## 7. The Second Childhood

The final stage, often referred to as the second childhood, returns to a state of dependency and innocence. This stage is characterized by:

- Vulnerability: Similar to the infant stage, the individual may become reliant on others for care.
- Simplicity: There is often a return to a simpler way of life, with a focus on basic needs and comforts.
- Reflection on Life's Journey: Individuals may reflect on their life's experiences, finding peace in the cycle of life.

The second childhood serves as a poignant reminder of the cyclical nature of existence, highlighting the continuity of human experience from infancy to old age.

## The Significance of the Seven Ages of Man

Shakespeare's seven ages of man not only provide a framework for understanding the human life cycle but also invite deeper philosophical reflections on the meaning of existence. Each stage serves as a metaphor for personal growth, societal roles, and the inevitability of change.

## Philosophical Implications

The exploration of these ages raises several philosophical questions, such as:

- What is the purpose of life? Each age offers different experiences that contribute to an individual's understanding of life and self.
- How do we perceive time? The passage through these ages illustrates the transient nature of life, prompting reflections on how we value our time and experiences.
- What legacy do we leave behind? The importance of the justice and old man stages emphasizes the

impact of one's life on future generations.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the seven ages of man as depicted by William Shakespeare in "As You Like It" provide a profound commentary on the human experience. Each stage captures the essence of life, from the innocence of infancy to the introspection of old age. This framework not only enriches our understanding of individual growth but also encourages a collective reflection on the shared journey of humanity. Shakespeare's timeless insights continue to resonate, reminding us of the beauty and complexity of life's stages. Embracing these ages can lead to a deeper appreciation of our own lives and the lives of those around us, fostering a greater sense of connection and understanding in the world.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### **What are the seven ages of man according to Shakespeare?**

The seven ages of man, as described by Shakespeare in 'As You Like It', are: Infancy, Childhood, The Lover, The Soldier, The Justice, Old Age, and Second Childhood.

### **In which play does Shakespeare describe the seven ages of man?**

'The seven ages of man' is a monologue found in the play 'As You Like It', specifically in Act 2, Scene 7.

### **What is the significance of the seven ages of man in Shakespeare's work?**

The seven ages of man symbolize the stages of human life, reflecting the progression from innocence to experience, and ultimately to the decline of old age, illustrating the cyclical nature of life.

How does Shakespeare characterize the 'Lover' stage in the seven ages of man?

In the 'Lover' stage, Shakespeare depicts young men as passionate and romantic, filled with sighs and poetry, often lamenting unrequited love.

**What literary devices does Shakespeare use in the monologue about the seven ages of man?**

Shakespeare employs metaphors, vivid imagery, and a rhythmic structure to convey the emotional depth of each age, enriching the audience's understanding of life's journey.

**What is the tone of the monologue describing the seven ages of man?**

The tone of the monologue is reflective and somewhat melancholic, as it contemplates the transient nature of life and the inevitability of aging and death.

## How has the concept of the seven ages of man influenced modern literature and culture?

The concept has influenced modern literature and culture by providing a framework for understanding human development and life stages, often referenced in various artistic and philosophical discussions about the human experience.

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