



## A Closer Look at

# "All the world's a stage..."

**This speech is spoken by Jaques in Act 2, Scene 7 of *As You Like It*.**

### Who's Jaques?

Jaques is a 'traveler' and a 'melancholy fellow' who lives in the Forest of Arden with the banished Duke and his followers. Jaques often offers insightful comments to other characters. Interestingly, while Jaques' name has a French spelling, it's not usually pronounced in the French way. Most often, you'll hear people say JAY-queese. Another popular pronunciation is JAKES, or JAKE-ess.

### What's happening when this speech is spoken?

The Duke and his followers are eating in the forest, discussing criticism and hypocrisy, when a desperate Orlando interrupts them, threatening violence and demanding food. They calmly invite Orlando to join them. He apologizes and explains his situation. Grateful for their hospitality, Orlando asks them to wait until he returns with his faithful old servant, Adam, who has collapsed from exhaustion and hunger. While they wait, the Duke observes,

"Thou see'st we are not all alone unhappy.  
This wide and universal theatre  
Presents more woeful pageants than the scene  
Wherein we play in."

Jaques responds with this speech...

*JAQUES:*

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.  
And then the whining school-boy, 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 slipper'd 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.

## The speech: thought by thought

Shakespeare's language can be overwhelming, so it helps to break it down, thought by thought. Look at the speech again below, taking your time to make sense of each thought. This is a subjective process, so this example is just one way to break the speech down into thoughts. Would you do it differently?

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They have their exits and their entrances;

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His acts being seven ages.

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Mewling and puking in the nurse's arms.

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## Phrases to think about

- **bubble reputation** - why do you think it's described this way? What's a bubble like?
- **beard of formal cut** - there are lots of ways to style a beard, and this was very important in Shakespeare's day. In your opinion, what do different beard styles convey?
- **second childishness** - why is old age described this way? Do elderly people resemble children? If so, how?

## Words and phrases that might be new or have an unexpected meaning

- **merely** – here it means 'completely' or 'totally'
- **players** – in Shakespeare's day, actors were called players
- **mewling** – whining or crying weakly
- **puking** – vomiting
- **satchel** – a bag for schoolbooks
- **woeful** – expressing deep sadness
- **ballad** – a light, simple song, often sentimental or romantic in nature
- **mistress'** – here it means belonging to a beloved woman
- **strange** – here it could mean extreme
- **oaths** – here it means strong statements, kind of like swearing
- **pard** – a leopard or other type of panther (they sort of have beards)
- **justice** – another name for a judge
- **capon** – a rooster that's been neutered to produce better-tasting chicken, expensive to produce
- **saws** – old sayings
- **modern instances** – common, everyday examples that illustrate a point
- **slipper'd** – wearing slippers
- **pantaloon** – a caricature of a lean, foolish, old man who wears big, baggy trousers
- **pouch** – a small purse or wallet
- **hose** – close-fitting garment that covers the legs, often worn by men in Shakespeare's day
- **shank** – the leg between the knee and the ankle
- **treble** – tones of high frequency or pitch in music
- **mere** – complete, absolute
- **oblivion** – nothingness that comes from having been forgotten completely
- **sans** – without

## Explore the language

- Are the words short and simple, or long and complex?
- If you're a hearing person, what do the words sound like? Are there any sounds that repeat?
- Are the thoughts short and direct, or long and complex? Do they ever change?
- What might this tell you about what's happening for the character?

## Explore the ideas

**Think about the different ages of people in your life.** As you go through the speech, think of a specific person as you talk about each age. How did that change the experience of reading or speaking the speech for you?

**Now think about yourself at each of these ages.** Some will have been in your past and some may be in your future, so you'll have to either remember or imagine yourself at each age as you talk about it. How did that change the experience of reading or speaking the speech for you?

## Challenge the words

William Shakespeare wrote his plays and poems more than 400 years ago, and his experience of the world was different from ours today. A word's meaning changes over time, as does its resonance. We encourage you to explore and interpret Shakespeare's language in your own ways, to discover how it resonates for you.

What do you do when specific words or phrases in Shakespeare's text feel hurtful or problematic? What about language that doesn't include you, or everyone you would like to include?

For example, in the speech above, consider the line "All the men and women merely players". Is everyone included in this phrase? What about children? What about people who don't identify as either men or women? Do you read it that way? What possible alternatives can you imagine? Is there any other language in this speech that you'd like to adjust? What's the impact of your adjustment?

## Make it your own

### Performance

**Learn some or all of the speech by heart and perform it.** Discover what it all means, and what it means to you, so you can truly make it your own. If you like, think about staging, costuming, props, lighting, etc. Share your work with an audience of family and/or friends.

**Ask someone to film your performance** so you have a record of it. They can either film your live performance, or you can create a special opportunity for filming. Collaborate to find the best location, lighting, camera angles, sound, titles, etc. for what you'd like to create.

### Art

**Create** a drawing, painting, sculpture, still life, photograph, or film that expresses what the speech means to you. Decide how you would like to share your creation.

### Music

**Express what the speech means to you through music.** Choose a song or piece of music, build a playlist, or even compose an original piece that conveys your feelings about the speech. Decide how you'd like to share what you've created.

### Creative Writing

**Compose your own poem, speech, or story** inspired by the speech. If you were to imagine the different ages mentioned in the speech in our contemporary context, what examples come to mind? How would you put them together?

**Is there anything in the speech you'd like to challenge?** Write a response to Jaques that expresses your thoughts on the subject. What form of writing would you like your response to take? How would you present it?