

Shakespeare's Language: What's the Meaning?

All the World's a Stage
from Act II, Scene VII of
As You Like It
by William Shakespeare



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.

Find the Meaning

Briefly explain the meaning of each of the following phrases.

"...creeping like snail/Unwillingly to school"

"His youthful hose, well saved, a world too wide/For his shrunk shank"

"Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything"

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Find the Meaning

Actual answers will vary. Examples of correct answers:

Briefly explain the meaning of each of the following phrases.

“...creeping like snail/Unwillingly to school”

The school boy doesn't want to go to school, so he walks very slowly, like a snail.

“His youthful hose, well saved, a world too wide/For his shrunk shank”

In his older years, the man's body has gotten smaller. His clothes are loose and baggy.

“Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything”

The elderly man has aged to the point that he has lost his teeth, his eyesight and his sense of taste. He will soon lose his life which is the most important thing he has.