Shakespeare's Seven Ages of Man

Stage 5

English: Year 9 and Year 10

Students respond to a representation of the Seven Ages of Man depicted in a series of stained glass windows in the Shakespeare Room at the State Library of New South Wales considering cultural, social and gender perspectives and composing metaphors to reflect on learning.

Stimulus #1: A set of stained glass windows in the Shakespeare Room of the Mitchell Wing, State Library of New South Wales made by Arthur Benfield and representing the Seven Stages of Man from Jaques' monologue in Act II sc vii of Shakespeare's As You Like It.

Text Type

- Imaginative: Students appropriate the soliloquy Seven Ages of Man to produce a Seven Ages of Woman soliloquy and design a set of stained glass windows.
- Imaginative: Students compose metaphors to reflect on learning and learning styles.

Learning intention

Students are learning to:

- Creatively transform a Shakespearean soliloquy
- Experiment with appropriations and representations
- Investigate and experiment with extended metaphors and symbolism

Success criteria

Students will be successful when they can:

- Compose an appropriation of the 7 Ages of Man using extended metaphor and symbolism
- Create a visual representation
- Develop a unique extended metaphor

Background notes for teachers

The Mitchell Wing of the State Library of New South Wales is home to the Shakespeare Room. It is a beautifully...
decorated room built to commemorate the three hundredth anniversary of the death of William Shakespeare in 1616. The Shakespeare Room is filled with objects and books connected to the life and works of William Shakespeare.

One of the most beautiful art works in the room is a series of stained glass windows depicting images from a speech from Shakespeare's play *As You Like It*. The windows were created by Sydney stained glass artist Arthur G. Benfield. They were installed in 1942 during the construction of the building.

The windows depict the Seven Ages of Man, as described in the character Jaques' soliloquy in *As You Like It*. In this comedy, Jaques is a melancholy lord who is living in the Forest of Arden after having been banished. He rarely takes part in the action around him, preferring to observe rather than to join in. In this speech Jaques first compares lives of men and women in the world to actors playing roles on a stage in the theatre. The speech then examines the changes that take place over the course of a man's life.

Jaques divides the life of a man into seven stages:

1. Baby or infant
2. School boy or child
3. Lover
4. Soldier
5. Justice or judge
6. Old man
7. Extreme old age, again like a child

Each of these stages is represented in a panel of the stained glass windows.

The idea of the Seven Ages of Man is very old and dates to the twelfth century (1100s). Shakespeare would have learnt about this idea as a young boy at school. Henry VIII owned a tapestry that featured the Seven Ages of Man.

**The Seven Ages of Man**

*Speech from William Shakespeare's As You Like It, Act II scene vii*

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.

Glossary

**ballad**: a story told through a song

**capon**: a castrated rooster, a luxury food

**hose**: stockings

**lean**: thin

**mewling**: crying or whining

**modern instances**: new judgements or decisions

**oblivion**: nothingness

**pantaloons**: refers to the sixth stage of life, the character of Pantalone is a weak old man from Italian comedy. Pantaloon was sixteenth century slang for an old man and is similar to “geezer”.

**pard**: a big cat such as a leopard or panther

**pipe**: a musical instrument like a recorder with a high pitched tone

**puking**: vomiting

**sans**: the French word for “without”

**satchel**: a school bag

**severe**: harsh or stern

**treble**: the high voice of a small boy

**wise saws**: wise sayings or proverbs

**woeful**: sad

**Summary of the Seven Ages of Man speech**

This monologue compares the world with a stage in a theatre. Men and women are the actors or players on this stage.

 Actors playing roles have entrances and exits during a performance. Life also has its entrances and exits- people are born and die and pass in and out of our lives. Just as an actor plays a variety of roles in life, so too do men and women play different roles or pass through different stages or seven ages of their lives.

The speech then focuses on the experience of men. However it is also possible to consider how the lives of women might be divided into seven ages or stages.

The **first role or stage** is that of an **infant** or baby. The baby cries and whines before vomiting in the arms of his nurse.

In the **second stage** of life man plays the role of a small boy or **child**. He holds a school bag, has a shiny face and walks as slowly as he can because he does not like school and is reluctant to leave home.
The role of the **lover** is the **third stage** of life. He is young and foolish and falls passionately in love, singing a sad song about love in which he describes the beauty of a girl’s eyebrows.

In the **fourth stage** of life the man plays the role of the **soldier**. He has a beard, swears oaths and is ambitious to seek out honour. He is so keen to improve his reputation he is willing to risk dangers such as cannons in war.

In the **fifth stage** of life man plays the role of a **justice** or judge. He has grown fat from eating expensive meats. He uses his experience of life and the knowledge he has gained to offer what he thinks are wise sayings and advice and good decisions.

In the **sixth stage** of life the man becomes a **pantaloon** or weak old man. He is so thin his stockings become loose. The speech compares this stage of life to a return to being like a baby or child. Old men and small children both have high voices and are dependent on adults.

The **seventh and final stage** is **extreme old age or a second childhood**. Like babies very old men are dependent on others and have no teeth. The old man loses his memory, hearing and control of his senses before dying.

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**Student Activities**

- [Activity 1](#)
- [Activity 2](#)

**Activity 1**

**Appropriating the Seven Ages of Man** [4]

Students write a new version of the Seven Ages of Man speech that considers the Seven Ages of Women, before redesigning the Shakespeare Room's stained glass windows to reflect this change.

Number of set tasks: 2
Activity 2
Thinking about metaphor [5]

Students experiment with metaphors.

Number of set tasks: 2
Outcomes

A student:

- responds to and composes increasingly sophisticated and sustained texts for understanding, interpretation, critical analysis, imaginative expression and pleasure EN5-1A
- effectively transfers knowledge, skills and understanding of language concepts into new and different contexts EN5-4B

Content

Students:

EN5-1A

Understand and apply knowledge of language forms and features

- analyse and explain the use of symbols, icons and myth in still and moving images and how these augment meaning (ACELA1560)

Respond to and compose texts

- explore and explain the combinations of language and visual choices that authors make to present information, opinions and perspectives in different texts (ACELY1745)

EN5-4B

Respond to and compose texts

- creatively transform a range of different types of texts, including their own, into new imaginative texts, experimenting with patterns, representations, intertextuality and appropriations

Understand and apply knowledge of language forms and features

- investigate and experiment with the use and effect of extended metaphor, metonymy, allegory, icons, myths and symbolism in texts, for example poetry, short films, graphic novels, and plays on similar themes (ACELT1637)

Text requirements

In each year of Stage 5 students must study examples of:
Across the Stage, the selection of texts must give students experience of:

- Shakespearean drama
- a wide range of cultural, social and gender perspectives, popular and youth cultures
- an appropriate range of digital texts including film, media and multimedia

LAC
Learning across the curriculum

General Capabilities:

- creative and critical thinking
- literacy
- information and communication capability
- personal and social capability

Other learning across the curriculum areas:

- civics and citizenship
- difference and diversity

Student Activities

- Activity #1
- Activity #2

Activity #1

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The four Shakespeare Folios are one of the most important collections in the Library. These are the earliest texts of William Shakespeare's work, published in the 17th century.


Links