

This is a free resource by one of the authors of the Opening Doors series,

LEAH CRAWFORD,

to help you celebrate

SHAKESPEARE'S BIRTHDAY

in April



This is a **FREE** resource by one of the authors of the Opening Doors series, Leah Crawford, to help you celebrate **Shakespeare's birthday in April.**

Born an unremarkable son of a glove maker from Stratford Upon Avon, William Shakespeare became perhaps the world's most famous poet and playwright. He was born in April 1564 (most likely to be 23rd) and died on 23rd April 1616 – hence this date became a day to celebrate his life.

So, what better way to introduce or celebrate his living voice with your students than the famous Seven Ages of Man speech from the pastoral comedy *As You Like It*, 'All the world's a stage...'

Use the links and ideas in this lesson plan to explore Shakespeare's playful literary music and metaphor, explore the character of Jacques and invite students to create and perform their own seven ages of life speech.

Pre-reading: create readiness and connections

Share **this illustration** of The Globe Theatre, explaining that the speech you will explore as a class was performed on the stage of the 1599 Globe – not far from where the replica Globe Theatre in Southwark now stands. Students' experience of live theatre will vary widely, so encourage experiences and connections to be made and shared.

In 1599, a flag of Hercules, carrying the globe was raised above the theatre with the Latin motto 'totus mundus agit histrionem', - 'all the world's a play-house', or in some translations, 'all the world plays the actor'.



Invite students to **Think – Pair – Share**:

- ♥ What do you think of this metaphor?
- ♥ In what ways can life be like acting a series of parts in a play?

Ask each pair to draw together the two most interesting ideas they have had and ask them to turn to another pair to share these.

Ask your students:

- ♥ Is this a positive or negative way to think about life?

After discussion, 'take the temperature' of students' viewpoints and ask if they think this is a positive or negative way to think about life with a blind vote. Without naming any names, feedback on the results to the class.

Reveal a sliver of text:

Now read the opening lines of the speech:

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.

Check that the terminology of players – actors – and stage exits and entrances are understood – referring to the image of the theatre (linked above) if necessary.

Zoom in on the word 'merely'. Do your students use this word?

Synonyms for merely in a modern dictionary are just, only and simply. Does the phrase **simply** players mean the same as **only** or **just** players?

Now reveal/remind your students that it was not Shakespeare who spoke these lines. A character from one of his comedies is speaking these lines and revealing his view of life to the other characters, and in turn to the audience.

Do the class think so far that this character has a positive or negative view of life? Does it depend on how we understand and say the word 'merely'?

Reveal the next sliver:

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.

Zooming in on the first two 'ages' of man, ask your students:

- ☛ What do the verbs mewling and puking suggest about the baby?
- ☛ How would you read them aloud?

You could introduce or return to the notion of onomatopoeia here – the unpleasant music of these words sounds like their meaning and so comes to life when being performed.

Can we infer the speaker's view of the first 'act' of life when we are babies?

Invite students to **Expose – Explore – Expand:**

What is the speaker's view of the schoolboy?

There are four pieces of evidence to draw on. Step back and see if students in pairs or groups can locate this evidence, *expose* the meaning of each and then *explore* the inferences.

Can they even *expand* to suggest the speaker's more complex view of the 'age' of the schoolboy?

Evidence	Expose	Explore	Expand
Whining	Complaining and whingeing	This suggests the schoolboy is immature and irritating	There are some mixed messages here. Maybe the schoolboy's shining morning face would stay full of life if he didn't have to go to school!
Whining morning face	His face is shining in the morning sun	This suggests he is bright, optimistic, full of life	
Creeping like snail			
Unwillingly to school			

from Tennent, W (2015) Chapter 11, 'Teaching Comprehension: pedagogy in practice' from *Understanding Reading Comprehension: Processes and Practices*, SAGE, London.

Pause for a moment to look at the clever style techniques that bring these first two ages of man alive:

- ☛ Look at how the choice of non-finite ‘ing’ verbs brings each age alive:
mewling, puking, creeping.
- ☛ Look at how ‘ing’ verbs can be used as adjectives in the phrases ‘shining morning face. And ‘whining schoolboy’.
- ☛ Think about how the simile of the snail makes you imagine the schoolboy’s whole demeanour, not just his slow movement – and how is this reinforced with the adverb ‘unwillingly’.

The character making this speech is called Jacques. You have probably detected so far that he has a rather downbeat view of life, but, he is also funny. His satirical wit (comedy that judges and ridicules others) is sometimes enjoyed by those with whom he travels in the forest and often enjoyed by the audience.

Taster draft!

Encourage your students to have a go at re-writing the first two ages of man/woman/humankind!

Get their creativity flowing with these questions:

- ☛ Do you wish to make your view more optimistic – a celebration of life? Or will you keep the sense of satirical humour and poke fun at a stereotype of what babies and schoolkids are like in the world today?
- ☛ Feel free to create a paint palette of ideas with your class by playing with the techniques identified in Jacques’s speech.
- ☛ What ‘ing’ verbs of sound and movement could you use? Might you place them before the noun e.g. ‘babbling, dribbling baby’?
- ☛ Can you create a vivid simile to bring the character alive in the listener’s mind and intensify it with an adverb e.g. ‘staring intensely like a zombie over his phone.’

Reveal the whole speech:

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 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 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 – poetic song of love

pard – leopard

bubble reputation – how robust is a reputation if you can burst it like a bubble?!

capon – a roast chicken

pantaloon – stock pantomime figure of an old man

sans – French for ‘without’

Access strategies:

Of course, this is not an easy read, but the effort and strategy employed to yield meaning builds interpretation, not just understanding, and increases confidence for further reading encounters. To support readers in building their own meaning and responses, you could:

- ☛ Provide students with the image of **this leaded glass window** of the seven ages in the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, asking them to match details from the speech to those in the illustrated window. **Henry Moore’s sketches** are a more modern interpretation you may wish to compare, or you can zoom in on details in **this 19th-century oil painting** by George James de Wilde.
- ☛ Invite students to create a freeze frame for each ‘age’ as you read or play a reading of the speech. Spotlight some of the most inventive and well-judged freezes to explore with the class.
- ☛ Watch some professional performances of the speech to gain a more global sense of Jacques’ stance and demeanour. Once you’ve watched all the way through the overall effect can be discussed first. You can

then rewatch the speech in stages, exploring trickier words and phrases in context. Here are some great examples of performances that you could use:

- ♥ **Sophie Stone's performance at The Globe** using British Sign Language scaffolds understanding beautifully for all viewers.
- ♥ **Zawe Ashton's** performance for the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's death creates a sombre tone.
- ♥ This **Digital Theatre** capture shows the scene in mid-performance – revealing Jacques' master, Duke Senior, as rather unimpressed with his bitter satire.
- ♥ You may wish to focus your attention on how each of these skilled actors uses Shakespeare's pentameter – five beats in each line – to keep the steady heartbeat of the speech pacing forward towards the bleak humour of the final line.
- ♥ Ask groups of students to take on the reading and interpretation of one stage to share with the whole class. Ask them to clarify something Jacques finds ridiculous about their 'age' of man. Invite them to explore their performance stance. How will you read it?
 - ♥ As if you are weary with the world?
 - ♥ As if it's all just a bit of a laugh?
 - ♥ As if you hate your audience – you find people ridiculous?

These access and fluency approaches will build familiarity and begin to break down barriers to unfamiliar language and verse.

Going deeper with what is at work in this speech will not only be the engine for deeper understanding in reading, but will provide momentum and drive creativity when your students reach the writing stage.

These questions will certainly be springboards for discussion and may lead to thoughtful, personal written responses and/or annotations of the speech.

The Opening Doors question with radial supports:

Opening doors to a rich and literary text for all is ultimately about supporting a response to its global or overall effect. What holds this speech together is Jacques's view of life – so our central question brings students back to this. The radial questions enable teachers and students to enter this central question in manageable ways, seeing how part relates and builds to a whole.

How important are moments of physical description? Can you find examples where sound effects emphasise the physical dimension like the old man's 'shrunk shank'?

Can you find further examples of the sound each player makes? How are the sound of their voices linked to their changing character?

How does Shakespeare bring Jacques' dark, humorous view of the seven ages of man to life?

How do deft moments of figurative language like 'bubble reputation' (simile and metaphor) bring a new dimension to building characters in your mind?

Why does the lover write a love song to his mistress's eyebrow? Would this work in modern satire?

What is the mood and tone of the 'last scene of all' and the rhythm and repetition in the final line?

Which of these seven ages still ring 'true' – are still to some degree recognisable - even 400 years on?

Now you try it!

Now encourage your students to try writing and performing their own Seven Ages speech for the 2020s. The speech could encapsulate their own views of life, or can take on a stance or a character like Jacques. Different students can take on different ages and then put them together for a shared performance. Ask them the following questions to inspire creativity:

- ☞ Will the speaker be satirical, funny, optimistic, celebratory...?
- ☞ Will the seven ages of life in the 2020s be different? Is seven enough – or too many?! How about being an activist? A business leader? A parent? A politician?

Whichever you choose, Shakespeare's witty literary techniques can still serve you well over 400 years later!

Excellent speeches will include:

- ☞ The ages of man/woman/humanity that you feel will engage, entertain and 'ring true' with your listeners.
- ☞ A coherent mood and tone of voice through the ages.
- ☞ A deft visual description that economically builds each character's stereotype.
- ☞ The sound of each 'player's' voice and how this changes.
- ☞ Well-judged alliteration, repetition and other sound effects to focus the ear of the listener on core details.
- ☞ Precise and cutting use of figurative language that brings an extra dimension to characterisation.
- ☞ Potentially embracing the challenge of writing in blank verse – no rhymes at the end of lines are necessary, but the five beats in each line

hold your listener's ear and support you to deliver the speech with steady, heart-beat-like momentum.

And why not share, perform, and record emerging speeches as a true celebration, not only of Shakespeare, but of the inspiration his work can provide to nurture the poets, dramatists (and satirists) of the future?

Further link reading:

Valerie Bloom, *Seasons*.

W. B. Yeats, *The Four Ages of Man*.

Speech from Act 5 of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, 'Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow...'

Jacob Sam La-Rose, *A Life in Dreams*.

Students might wish to research the roots of the seven ages idea, which goes much further back than Shakespeare to Hippocrates in ancient Greece.

Or perhaps inspire a different view on ageing as in Jenny Joseph's poem, *Warning*, which is far more a celebration of freedom and irreverence in our later years.

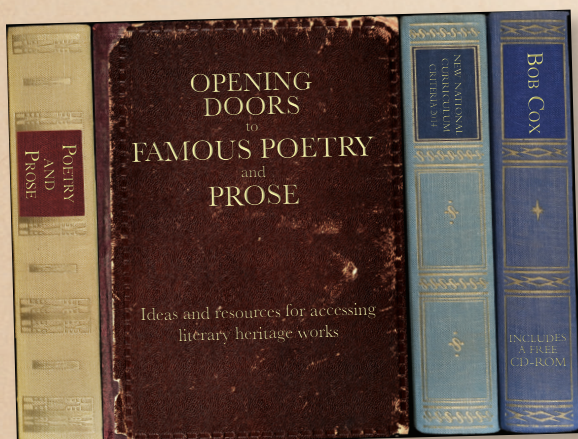
To find out more about the 'Opening Doors' series, and Bob Cox its creator, visit: www.searchingforexcellence.co.uk

To find out more about Leah visit her website: leahcrawford.com

You can also find Leah on Twitter/X: [@think_talk_org](https://twitter.com/@think_talk_org)

And get in touch via email: leah@leahcrawford.com

Visit the Crown House Publishing website for more on the series: www.crownhouse.co.uk/opening-doors



Leah Crawford has 15 years of experience as a local authority English inspector and adviser, working across both the primary and secondary phases, and now leads Thinktalk education consultancy. She is a tutor for King's College London's Let's Think in English cognitive acceleration programme, is on the Wildern Partnership SCITT leadership team and is delivering the new NPQ in Leading Literacy. She has spent her career in education championing equitable and inclusive dialogic teaching and learning.