

## William Shakespeare, Jaques' Soliloquy from *As You Like It* (1599) - Grade 7

**Learning Objective:** The goal of this two day exemplar is to give students the opportunity to use the reading and writing habits they've been practicing on a regular basis to unpack the meaning of Jacques' soliloquy from William Shakespeare's *As You Like It*. By reading and rereading the passage closely and focusing their reading through a series of questions and discussion about the text, students will be able to understand the structure and purpose of this particular soliloquy and how it delves into universal themes regarding the human condition. When combined with writing about the soliloquy, students will discover how much they can learn from even a very short selection of a text.

**Reading Task:** *Students will silently read the passage in question on a given day—first independently and then following along with the text as the teacher and/or skillful students read aloud. Depending on the difficulties of a given text and the teacher's knowledge of the fluency abilities of students, the order of the student silent read and the teacher reading aloud with students following might be reversed. What is important is to allow all students to interact with challenging text on their own as frequently and independently as possible. Students will then reread specific passages in response to a set of concise, text-dependent questions that compel them to examine the meaning and structure of Shakespeare's prose. Therefore, rereading is deliberately built into the instructional unit.*

**Vocabulary Task:** *Most of the meanings of words in the exemplar text can be discovered by students from careful reading of the context in which they appear. Teachers can use discussions to model and reinforce how to learn vocabulary from contextual clues, and students must be held accountable for engaging in this practice. Where it is judged this is not possible, underlined words are defined briefly for students to the right of the text in a separate column whenever the original text is reproduced. At times, this is all the support these defined words need. At other times, particularly with abstract words, teachers will need to spend more time explaining and discussing them. In addition, in subsequent close readings of passages of the text, high value academic ('Tier Two') words have been **bolded** to draw attention to them. Given how crucial vocabulary knowledge is for academic and career success, it is essential that these high value words be discussed and lingered over during the instructional sequence.*

**Sentence Syntax Task:** *On occasion, students will encounter particularly difficult sentences to decode. Teachers should engage in a close examination of such sentences to help students discover how they are built and how they convey meaning. While many questions addressing important aspects of the text double as questions about syntax, students should receive regular supported practice in deciphering complex sentences. It is crucial that the help they receive in unpacking text complexity focuses both on the precise meaning of what the author is saying and why the author might have constructed the sentence in this particular fashion. That practice will in turn support students' ability to unpack meaning from syntactically complex sentences they encounter in future reading.*

**Discussion Task:** *Students will discuss the exemplar text in depth with their teacher and their classmates, performing activities that result in a close reading of Shakespeare's prose. The goal is to foster student confidence when encountering complex text and to reinforce the skills they have acquired regarding how to build and extend their understanding of a text. A general principle is to always reread the passage that provides evidence for the question under discussion. This gives students another encounter with the text, helping them develop fluency and reinforcing their use of text evidence.*

**Writing Task:** *Students will examine different passages in Jacques' soliloquy and then write an explanatory essay examining its tone or structure. Teachers might afford students the opportunity to revise their in-class paraphrases after participating in classroom discussion or even rewrite their*

*explanation after receiving teacher feedback, allowing them to refashion both their understanding of the text and their expression of that understanding.*

**Text Selection:** This exemplar text, taken from Shakespeare’s play, *As You Like It*, addresses universal themes with regard to aging and the meaning of life. The organizational structure of the speech, as well as the illuminating imagery, offers vivid and concrete avenues for exploration and close reading.

**Outline of Lesson Plan:** This lesson can be delivered in two days of instruction and reflection on the part of students and their teacher.

**Standards Addressed:** The following Common Core State Standards are the focus of this exemplar: RL.7.1, RL.7.2, RL.7.3, RL.7.4, RL.7.5; W.7.1, W.7.4, W.7.9 (addressed in Appendix A); SL.7.1; L.7.4, L.7.5.

**The Text: Shakespeare, William. Jaques' Soliloquy from *As You Like It* (Act II, Scene vii)**

Exemplar Text	Vocabulary

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,  
 5 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,  
 10 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 honor, sudden and quick in quarrel,  
 Seeking the bubble reputation  
 15 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  
 20 Into the lean and slippered 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  
 25 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.

*sad; song that tells a*

*story a leopard*

*chicken-like fowl*

*proverbs; the latest news or thing*

*¾ length pants*

*stockings worn by fashionable men  
with pantaloons; calf of leg*

*total*

*forgetfulness*

*without (French)*

Day One: Instructional Exemplar for Jacques’ Soliloquy from *As You Like It* (Act II, Scene vii)

Summary of Activities

- 1. Teacher introduces the day’s passage with minimal commentary and students read it independently (5 minutes)
- 2. Teacher or a skillful reader then reads the passage out loud to the class as students follow along in the text (5 minutes)
- 3. Teacher asks the class to discuss the first set of text-dependent questions and perform targeted tasks about the passage, with answers in the form of notes, annotations to the text, or more formal responses as appropriate (35 minutes)
- 4. After, the teacher reads the text out loud again and invites students to read small sections out loud (5 minutes)

<div>T e x t  U n d e r  D i s c u s s i o n</div>	<div>Directions for Teachers/Guiding Questions For Students</div>
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<p>All the world's a stage,  And all the men and women <b>merely</b> 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.  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 <u>woeful ballad</u>  Made to his mistress' eyebrow. Then a soldier,  Full of strange <b>oaths</b> and bearded like the <u>pard</u>,  Jealous in honor, sudden and quick in quarrel,  Seeking the bubble reputation  Even in the cannon's mouth. And then the <b>justice</b>,  In fair round belly with good <u>capon</u> lined,  With eyes <b>severe</b> and beard of formal cut,  Full of wise <u>saws</u> and <u>modern instances</u>;  And so he plays his part. The sixth age shifts  Into the lean and slippered <u>pantaloon</u>,  With spectacles on nose and pouch on side;  His youthful <u>hose</u>, well saved, a world too wide  For his shrunk <u>shank</u>, 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 <u>oblivion</u>,  <u>Sans</u> teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything.</p>	<p><i>sad; song that tells a story</i></p> <p><i>a leopard</i></p> <p><i>chicken-like fowl</i></p> <p><i>proverbs; the latest news or thing</i>  <math>\frac{3}{4}</math> length pants</p> <p><i>stockings worn by fashionable men with pantaloons; calf of leg</i></p> <p><i>total forgetfulness without (French)</i></p>	<p><b>1. Introduce the passage and students read independently.</b>  Other than giving the brief definitions offered to words students would likely not be able to define from context (underlined in the text), avoid giving any background context or instructional guidance at the outset of the lesson while students are reading the text silently. This close reading approach forces students to rely exclusively on the text instead of privileging background knowledge and levels the playing field for all students as they seek to comprehend Jacques' soliloquy. It is critical to cultivating independence and creating a culture of close reading that students initially grapple with rich texts like Shakespeare's prose without the aid of prefatory material, extensive notes, or even teacher explanations.</p> <p><b>2. Read the passage out loud to the class as students follow along in the text.</b>  Asking students to listen to Jacques' soliloquy exposes students a second time to the rhythms and meaning of Shakespeare's language before they begin their own close reading of the passage. Speaking clearly and carefully will allow students to follow Shakespeare's analysis, and reading out loud with students following along improves fluency while offering all students access to this complex text. Accurate and skillful modeling of the reading provides students who may be dysfluent with accurate pronunciations and syntactic patterns of English.</p>
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**Directions for Teachers/Guiding Questions For Students**



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 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,  
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 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.

*sad; song that tells a story*

*a leopard*

*chicken-like fowl*

*proverbs; the latest news or thing*

*¾ length pants*

*stockings worn by fashionable men with pantaloons; calf of leg*

*total forgetfulness*

*without (French)*

**3. Ask the class to answer a small set of text-dependent guided questions and perform targeted tasks about the passage, with answers in the form of notes, annotations to the text, or more formal responses as appropriate.**

As students move through these questions and reread Jacques' soliloquy, be sure to check for and reinforce their understanding of academic vocabulary in the corresponding text (which will be **boldfaced** the first time it appears in the text). At times, the questions themselves may focus on academic vocabulary.

**(Q1) What is the extended metaphor of this soliloquy?**

Students should easily identify the metaphor of the stage. Shakespeare presents a brief drama in seven acts, each representing a different time in the life of a man. The metaphor surfaces not only in the opening frame, but in later lines, as well ("and so he plays his part," "last scene," and "history," which refers to a kind of play). Students should find all of these textual references.

**(Q2) What is the effect of "mere" in line 2?**

Mere means *only* or *just*. Without it, the image sounds rather grand and wonderful; with it, the idea of being an actor is hollowed out and made to feel fake.

**(Q3) A transition is a movement from one idea to the next. What is the first transition you can find in the soliloquy?**

Line 5: ". . . His acts being seven ages. At first, the infant . . ." In this transition, Shakespeare moves from framing the metaphor to developing it.

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**Directions for Teachers/Guiding Questions For Students**

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*sad; song that tells a*

*story a leopard*

*chicken-like fowl*

*proverbs; the latest news or thing*

*¾ length pants*

*stockings worn by fashionable men with pantaloons; calf of leg*

*total forgetfulness*

*without (French)*

**(Q4) Are there any other transitions in the soliloquy? If so, where are they?**

After the soliloquy moves from establishing the metaphor to developing it, we find transitions between each of the seven acts:

infant to schoolboy (l.7) . . .  
 to lover (l.9) . . .  
 to soldier (l.11) . . .  
 to justice (l.15) . . .  
 to old man (l.20) . . .  
 to very old man near/at death (l.25) . . .

Teachers should encourage students to use the word transition as they answer the question.

**To test for comprehension, ask students to carefully parse and paraphrase either (a) Shakespeare's sentence about the soldier or (b) his sentence about the justice.**

**Ask students to explain each of the seven ages of man.**

Teachers should move through each transition and character used to represent it in order, being mindful of pacing. The focus during this activity should be on ensuring students acquire a basic literal understanding of each so that they will have a strong foundation for the lesson on Day 2, when they will explore how word choices and specific details contribute to the deeper meanings Shakespeare conveys. The teacher should ask the class what words seem odd enough to set aside for tomorrow's discussion. (Below in parentheses there is a pre-selected list teachers can make use of to supplement the words the students select.)

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*Details regarding the seven ages of man*

- (1) An **infant** who is crying and puking (**mewling**)
- (2) An **unwilling schoolboy** going to school carrying a book bag (**morning**)
- (3) A **man in love** singing a love song and sighing like a furnace. (**eyebrow**)
- (4) A **bearded soldier** who loves to fight in defense of his honor regardless of the odds (**bubble**)
- (5) The **strict, fat judge** with witty sayings (**Wise saws**)
- (6) An **aging man** that contrasts with the judge (**well saved**)
- (7) An **old man** on the verge of death (**mere oblivion**)

**(Q5) What words does Shakespeare choose to emphasize the transition between (5) the judge and (6) the aging man?**

Students should be able to find the following transitions:

- "fair round belly" vs. "lean" "shrunk shank"
- "eyes severe" vs. "spectacle on nose"
- "wise saws . . . instances" vs. "world too wide" (he seemed to know everything, and now the world is changing and is too big and different for him)
- "big manly voice" vs. "childish tremble"

**Teacher reads the soliloquy out loud again and then asks student to read out loud the different acts of man.**

A fresh reading brings students back to the un-dissected text and allows them to experience the reading with greater understanding and practice paying close attention to punctuation and appropriate pacing.

Day Two: Instructional Exemplar for Jacques’ Soliloquy from *As You Like It* (Act II, Scene vii)

Summary of Activities

- 1. Teacher introduces the day’s passage with minimal commentary and students read it independently (5 minutes)
- 2. Teacher or a skillful reader then reads the passage out loud (or plays a recording) to the class as students follow along in the text (5 minutes)
- 3. Teacher asks the class to discuss the first set of text-dependent questions and perform targeted tasks about the passage, with answers in the form of notes, annotations to the text, or more formal responses as appropriate (35 minutes)
- 4. After, the teacher reads the text out loud again and invites students to read small sections out loud (5 minutes)

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**Text Under Discussion**

**Directions for Teachers/Guiding Questions For Students**



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*sad; song that tells a story*

*a leopard*

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*proverbs; the latest news or thing*

*¾ length pants*

*stockings worn by fashionable men with pantaloons; calf of leg*

*total forgetfulness*

*without (French)*

**3. Ask the class to answer a small set of text-dependent guided questions and perform targeted tasks about the passage, with answers in the form of notes, annotations to the text, or more formal responses as appropriate.**

As students move through these questions and reread Jacques' soliloquy, be sure to check for and reinforce their understanding of academic vocabulary in the corresponding text (which will be **boldfaced** the first time it appears in the text). At times, the questions themselves may focus on academic vocabulary.

**(Q6) What evidence from the text can you find to determine whether the tone of this soliloquy is funny or sad? Use the words found on Day 1 as initial beginning points for the discussion. What would be the effect on the tone of changing or eliminating these words?**

By asking students to argue for and against different interpretations of the soliloquy's tone, evidence for both sides should come out in the course of the discussion. Teachers might want to ask more advanced students who argued for one side to switch to the other. Students should systematically work their way through the various acts, and teachers can guide the discussion using the notes below.

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**Directions for Teachers/Guiding Questions For Students**

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**The infant (mewling):** Students should be able to hear the meaning in the whimpering sound. Not only is mewling onomatopoeic, but we also hear the assonance with puking.

**The schoolboy (morning face):** This description has many meanings—in the morning on the way to school; the morning of his life, metaphorically; but also as if he is in mourning—going “unwillingly” to school—as if it is a funeral.

**The lover (eyebrow):** The lover has chosen a silly object to fixate upon; or perhaps he is too shy to meet his love’s eye? Changes worth exploring include altering eyebrow to the more traditional eyes or lips; “Sighing like a furnace” could devolve into the clichéd “sighing like a gentle wind” as well.

**The soldier (bubble):** One’s reputation can be easily lost, like a popped bubble; seems big and yet empty. Eliminating bubble would result in the listener accepting the image at face value.

**The justice: (wise saws):** Saw can be like sawing wood. The sound is hardly one we associate with wisdom. These are sayings that are pompous and foolish.

**An aging man (mere oblivion):** The character is simply forgetting everything (“second childishness”), yet in the context of the full poem, he is also being forgotten. There is an implied contradiction to the justice with his wise saws and the soldier who cared so much for his reputation—their importance, and things that seemed important to them at the time are gone. The final line strengthens the image of oblivion by repeating “sans” three times for emphasis.

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 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 honor, 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 slippered 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.

*sad; song that tells a story*

*a leopard*

*chicken-like fowl*

*proverbs; the latest news or thing*

*¾ length pants*

*stockings worn by fashionable men with pantaloons; calf of leg*

*total forgetfulness*

*without (French)*

**(Q7) How does Shakespeare use words related to sound in the soliloquy?**

Sound words include "mewling," "whining," "sighing," "strange oaths," "wise saws," and "trebles, pipes and whistles." Shakespeare also relates these sounds together and organizes them intentionally. For example, "strange oaths" is partly a reference to the oaths soldiers may take to defend their country or be true to their unit. Their strangeness implies that they might not be understood, foreshadowing the confusion at the end of the soliloquy. The sounds seem to progress and get louder until the sixth age, where they get abruptly quieter, culminating in the final scene, where there is no sound at all.

**(Q8) What images, words, and even sentence structures from the beginning of the soliloquy repeat toward the end? How do these unify the soliloquy?**

Some examples:

- "All" becomes "sans everything"
- "Infant" returns in the form of an adult "child"
- Second use of "mere"
- Returning to the "stage" via "last scene"
- His use of the semi-colon in sentences

This return of words from the opening of the soliloquy show that man's life has come full circle.

### **Explanatory Writing Assignment: Directions for Teachers and Students / Guidance for Teachers**

Teachers might want to create a writing assessment that rephrases the first guiding question of Day 2 by asking students to establish a position on the tone of the soliloquy. Consider creating a prompt in a similar vein to this:

**Analyze how Shakespeare ends his soliloquy on a sad or tragic note and explain whether the rest of the soliloquy either reflects this sadness or lessens it. Be sure your essay frames a thesis statement that answers the question, and use the rest of your essay to establish a clear position and defend it with enough details to convince the reader you are correct. Keep in mind that readers of your essay might have a different opinion, and so part of your job is to acknowledge the strengths of the alternative opinion, and explain why you believe your interpretation is correct.**

Another essay option is to simply ask students a very open question, giving every student an opportunity to show what they know in a focused essay. For example, teachers can give students a first line like: *Shakespeare uses Jacques' soliloquy to tell us two very important things about life. One is . . . The other is . . .* and then students write a well-structured essay proving the points they select. Students should be reminded to offer thorough and convincing evidence of whatever they have set out to prove.

The following essay question gives students a chance to revisit their thoughts from a day earlier to develop and reassess:

**You work for a company that is creating a series of picture books for young children. Each book in the series will be based upon the poetry of a different famous writer. There will be no words in these books, only pictures, but the company wants the pictures in the book to accurately represent what the author said. The company also wants to choose works that will make children laugh.**

**Your boss has asked you to read Jacques' soliloquy carefully and then submit your professional opinion on whether or not the company should include it in the series. As you write:**

- Be sure to establish a clear position on whether or not Jacques' soliloquy is appropriate for a children's picture book.
- Support your opinion with ample persuasive details to convince your boss that you have thoroughly considered the question, and that you are correct.
- Keep in mind that the most convincing arguments address the opposing view and acknowledge its strengths.

## Appendix A: Additional Instructional Opportunities for Jacques' Soliloquy from Shakespeare's *As You Like It*

1. The following makes an excellent follow-up activity for students. Students would work in groups for 7-10 minutes and then explain their reasoning to the class. There is no correct answer, but students should be prepared to challenge each other and defend their choice based on direct citation.

**CHOOSE ONE OF THE FOLLOWING shapes and explain why it best represents the soliloquy and, where appropriate, to point to specific lines to justify your answers.**

**NOTE:** Teachers or students can substitute other shapes. Students do surprisingly good work with challenges like this, and it encourages them to think of the overall structure of the soliloquy in tangible ways.

2. Share a video recording with students at the end of Day 1 or the start of Day 2. Many are available on the internet, but here are three that might be of special interest to your class:

**Bruce Gentry** takes a ruminative approach here that is highly nuanced in its expression and well worth a listen:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vSpciEMZjYk>

**Morgan Freeman's** reading is more straightforward, and yet quite dramatic. Freeman is an actor familiar to many students:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ziXqEX6AwKA&feature=related>

**6<sup>th</sup> graders:** Delightful! [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cQhlz\\_zLGD4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cQhlz_zLGD4)

3. Shakespeare is not the only great writer who has offered a layout for the progress of our lives. Teachers could set up a mock debate between Shakespeare and another writer. For example, In *Oedipus Rex*, Sophocles uses a riddle to suggest that man's life has three stages. The riddle asks, "What walks on four legs in the morning, two in the afternoon, and three in the evening?" The answer is a human being (babies crawl, adults walk, older people use a cane).