

If by Rudyard Kipling

If you can keep your head when all about you
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you,
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,
But make allowances for their doubting too;
If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,
Or being lied about, don't deal in lies,
Or being hated, don't give way to hating,
And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise:

If you can dream - and not make your dreams your master;

If you can think - and not make thoughts your aim;

If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster

And treat those two imposters just the same;

If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken

Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,

Or watch the things you gave your life to, broken,

And stoop and build 'em up with worn-out tools:

If you can make one heap of all your winnings

And risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss,

And lose, and start again at your beginnings

And never breathe a word about your loss;

If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew

To serve your turn long after they are gone,

And so hold on when there is nothing in you

Except the Will which says to them: 'Hold on!'

If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,
Or walk with Kings - nor lose the common touch,
If neither foes or loving friends can hurt you,
If all men count with you, but none too much;
 If you can fill the unforgiving minute
 With sixty seconds' worth of distance run,
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,
And - which is more - you'll be a Man, my son!

Questions

1. Who is the poem written for? Give evidence for your answer.
The poem is written for the poet's son because the last line says 'And - which is more - you'll be a Man, my son!'
2. Why did Kipling write this poem?
Kipling wrote this poem to give his son important words of advice.
3. Explain the phrase '...keep your head...'.
The phrase means to keep calm or level-headed.
4. Which quality is the poet writing about in the fifth line?
The poet is writing about having patience.
5. Explain the phrase '...don't deal in lies,'.
The phrase expressed the importance of not telling lies.
6. Which poetic device is used in lines 11 and 12? Explain your answer.
Personification is used in lines 11 and 12. The words 'Triumph' and 'Disaster' are given capital letters which suggest that they are names. They are also referred to as being 'imposters' on the next line.
7. What might the word 'knaves' mean?
The word knave means a dishonest man.
8. Summarise the meaning behind lines 21-24.
The poet is saying that when you feel as if you can't go on, you must tell yourself to 'Hold on!' and not give up.
9. Explain your understanding of the following line: 'Or walk with Kings - nor lose the common touch,'.
The poet could be saying that if his son was to spend time with people as important as royalty, then he mustn't start believing that he is better than everyone else.
10. What did the poet mean when he wrote the following lines? Explain your reasoning.
'If you can fulfil the unforgiven minute
With sixty seconds' worth of distance run,'
The poet is saying that you must make the most of every minute of your life. The poet describes the minute as 'unforgiving' as time isn't ever given back to you.
11. Which do you think is the best piece of advice? Explain your reasoning.

12. Write a new piece of advice which would be appropriate to add to the poem.
