



Comprehension questions

1. What is the message of this poem as a whole?
2. Explain the meaning of the following phrases in your own words.
 - A. If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,
But make allowance for their doubting too;
 - B. 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:
 - C. If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster
And treat those two impostors just the same;
If you can dream – and not make dreams your master;
 - D. 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
3. There are no full stops in the poem until the exclamation mark at the end. What effect does this have on the meaning of the poem?
4. Why do you think 'Triumph and Disaster' have capital letters?
5. The poem is addressed to 'you'. This word can be used for both singular and plural. What does this tell you about the author's purpose with this poem?
6. How does this poem make you feel, and why?



Reading activities

1

Each stanza has a different theme (e.g. the first verse is about being true to yourself and not compromising your beliefs or good nature). Explain the general theme of each of the other verses.

2

With a partner, decide which two pieces of advice in the poem are the most useful or important. Discuss why they are so valuable.



Writing tasks

1

Rewrite the poem as a letter from Rudyard Kipling to his son, giving him advice on how to be a good man, a good leader and how to be successful in life. You could write a paragraph for each stanza of the poem.

2

Imagine you are Kipling's son and you have received this poem as a gift. Write a diary entry responding to the advice you have been given.

3

Write a similar poem, giving advice or instruction on how to be successful. In the same way that Kipling uses 'If' as a repeated word, try to think of your own (e.g. 'Always' or 'Try to').



Speak up!

What is success?