



### Worksheet 1. Reading: *If*, a Poem

**Read the introduction to the poem and the poem itself by Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936). Then complete the exercises that follow it. A paraphrase of each verse follows the poem.**

The poem *If* was written in 1910. It describes the virtues that Kipling believes are necessary to become a mature man. (In those days, women were not included in such a description.) Kipling means the poem to be instructive. He doesn't list abstract values about what it takes to be a full person. Instead he gives concrete examples of the situations that face human beings. In modern times, this poem is regarded as a popular classic of English literature.

- 1) 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 allowance for their doubting too,
- 2) 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:
- 3) If you can dream--and not make 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 impostors just the same;
- 4) 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:
- 5) If you can make one heap of all your winnings  
And risk it all on one turn of pitch-and-toss,  
And lose, and start again at your beginnings  
And never breathe a word about your loss;



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- 6) 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!"
  
- 7) If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,  
Or walk with kings--nor lose the common touch,  
If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you;  
If all men count with you, but none too much,
  
- 8) 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!

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### Paraphrase by verse

If you can

- 1) remain calm when everyone near you is not calm, and they are holding you responsible for the problem; have confidence that you are acting correctly when everyone thinks you are wrong, and at the same time, understand their doubts;
- 2) be patient, and can tolerate lies being told about you (you don't lie) and being hated; not hate anybody yourself; not try to look or sound too good;
- 3) dream but not just dream; instead, be realistic and be goal-oriented; function in both good situations and bad and realize that you will have both throughout your life;
- 4) tolerate the fact that people have twisted your words or wrecked your projects; rebuild your projects and rebuild your life again when necessary;
- 5) risk everything you have, lose it and then start all over again (without complaint);
- 6) not give up when you feel weakened physically and mentally; hang in there;
- 7) resist being corrupted by ordinary people or by people in high positions; not be hurt by either enemies or friends, value everyone, but not any one person too much;
- 8) make the most of every minute of life; then you will be an honorable and trustworthy human being.



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### Glossary

- Verse 3 *Triumph and Disaster* — victory, and an event that causes great damage  
Verse 4 *knaves* — an old-fashioned word for dishonest men  
Verse 4 *build 'em up* — *build **them** up*; rebuild the broken parts of your life  
Verse 6 *sinew* — a part of your body that connects a muscle to a bone; in a literary meaning, something that gives strength or support

### Comprehension practice

#### 1. Check all the statements that are true, according to the poem.

- a.  You should always be calm.
- b.  You should neither lie nor hate.
- c.  Always look your best and speak in a very wise manner.
- d.  It's all right to dream but act on reality.
- e.  Realize that you will have both good and bad in your life.
- f.  Even if someone hurts you badly, get up and start over.
- g.  When you feel stressed, take some time off.
- h.  Adopt the ways of people in higher social positions.
- i.  If you follow these rules, you'll be a success in life.

#### 2. Check all the statements that are true by inference.

- j.  If you lost all your money in a stock market crash, you would remain calm.
- k.  If people hated you, you would hate them in return.
- l.  If you faced triumph or if you faced disaster, you would deal with the situation.
- m.  If you lost everything, you could never start over.
- n.  If you lost your strength, you would regain it.
- o.  If you associated with bad people, you would adopt their bad habits.
- p.  If you could follow this advice, you would be a strong and excellent man.