If
By Rudyard Kipling (1910)

Rudyard Kipling (1865-1939) was an English short story writer, poet, and novelist. He is best known for *The Jungle Book* (1894). As Kipling was writing in Victorian England, “If” (1910) may be representative of the ideal qualities of a “proper Englishman” during that time.

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;
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 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;
If you can bear to hear the truth you’ve spoken
   Twisted by knaves¹ to make a trap for fools,
Or watch the things you gave your life to, broken,

¹ A dishonest man
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 nor 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!

“If” by Rudyard Kipling first published in Rewards and Fairies.
This text is in the public domain.

2 Tissue that connects muscle to bone
Text-Based Questions:

Directions: Answer the following questions in complete sentences.

1. Who is the speaker? Who is the audience? Cite evidence to support your answer.
   ___________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________

2. What is the speaker’s tone? Support your answer with evidence.
   ___________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________

3. Reread lines 13 to 16. Rewrite this advice in your own words.
   ___________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________

4. According to the speaker, how should you respond if you fail in meeting your goals?
   ___________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________

5. Explain the line “don’t look too good, nor talk too wise.” In other work the speaker is advising his audience to act _____.
   ___________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________
6. What is the structure of this poem? What patterns do you notice?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

7. Which of the following best supports the effect of this structure on the poem overall?
   Choose the best answer and explain it on the lines below.
   a. The structure of this poem mimics the journey of becoming a man.
   b. The structure of this poem indicates the failure of the boy.
   c. The structure contributes to the eerie mood of this poem.
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

8. According to the speaker, what kind of qualities should a man have? List five qualities supported by evidence from the text.
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Discussion Questions:

Directions: Brainstorm your answers to the following questions in the space provided. Be prepared to share your original ideas in a class discussion.

1. Consider the line, “If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,/But make allowance for their doubting too.” Do you think it’s important to allow people to doubt you? Explain your answer.

2. The speaker says it’s important to not make your dreams your master. What does he mean by this? Do you agree or disagree? Explain your answer.

3. In the context of this poem, what does it mean to be grown up?
Suggested Text Pairings from CommonLit:

**Excerpt from “Our Department” (Non-Fiction)**
by John H. Young (1881)

In this Victorian manners book, the author describes the proper roles of men and women in “refined society.” Use this text pairing as a way to further explore the social rules of the Victorian period. Find “Our Department” at CommonLit.org (Social Change & Revolution → Why do people resist change? → 9th-10th Grade Reader).

**The White Man’s Burden (Poetry)**
by Rudyard Kipling (1899)

In this poem, Rudyard Kipling argues that it is America’s moral imperative to colonize and rule non-white nations. Use this text pairing as a way to further explore the Victorian period and/or the works of author Rudyard Kipling. Find “The White Man’s Burden” at CommonLit.org (Prejudice & Discrimination → How does prejudice emerge? → 9th-10th Grade Reader).

**Mother Teresa’s “Do Good Anyway” Poem (Poetry)**
Attributed to Mother Teresa

This poem is inscribed on a wall of Mother Teresa’s children’s home in Calcutta, India. Have students compare the message and structure of this poem to the message and structure of “If” by Rudyard Kipling. Find the text of this poem here: [http://www.dbooth.org/guat2000/small/teresa.htm](http://www.dbooth.org/guat2000/small/teresa.htm)

More Free Teaching Resources Related to “If” by Rudyard Kipling:

- “If” Audio, Read by Rudyard Kipling
  [https://archive.org/details/if_kipling_librivox](https://archive.org/details/if_kipling_librivox)

- Engage NY recommends pairing “If” by Rudyard Kipling with Bud Not Buddy in a 6th grade unit exploring “rules to live by.” Find the unit plan here: [https://www.engageny.org/sites/default/files/resource/attachments/6m2a.2.pdf](https://www.engageny.org/sites/default/files/resource/attachments/6m2a.2.pdf)