

How to become a man: understanding "if-"



**ASSIGN
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Rudyard Kipling's "If-" explores the themes of manhood, hard work, and discipline. The speaker feels that one should have humility, confidence, and several other virtues in order to be a man. Kipling uses literary techniques including anaphora, juxtaposition, and personification to persuade his son to become a man, giving the poem significance to readers in all eras who are trying to find their own sense of "manhood".

The speaker emphasizes the importance of being confident, humble, and balanced throughout the entirety of the poem, suggesting that one can fulfill his or her greatest potential by following the poem's guidelines. The speaker feels that one should "keep [his] head when all about [him]/Are losing theirs and blaming it on [him]"(1-2) while also making "allowance for their doubting too"(4). It is good to be confident in oneself, but arrogance should be avoided; one must have strong self-trust while being open to the possibility that others could be correct instead. He thinks that one should be able to "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"(18-20). One must be humble and disciplined from complaining when things go wrong in order to be a true man. He states that one can be a man "If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you"(27) and "If all men count with you, but none too much"(28). There must be equilibrium between keeping a thick skin in all relationships and valuing all people's opinions. If all of these things are achieved, then "Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,/And- which is more- you'll be a Man, my son!"(31-32) The speaker is giving the poem's advice to his son, but additionally to the readers of the poem, who also

indirectly learn that the completion of all these things will give them the world as well as manhood.

Kipling highlights his argument using the literary techniques of anaphora, juxtaposition, irony, and personification, making readers relate to and believe his message more easily. He begins nearly every other line with "If you..." and continues with what should be done in each situation. By repeating this structure, the importance of following each rule is emphasized. He then juxtaposes inaction with action when he stresses being able to "dream- and not make dreams your master"(9) and "think- and not make thoughts your aim"(10). One cannot simply be enthralled with dreams and thoughts to be a man; one must act and not become a slave to complacency. He later values being able to "meet with Triumph and Disaster/And treat those two impostors just the same"(11-12). He calls them both "impostors" because they are both temporary, and he ironically capitalizes the concepts' names to highlight that they are seemingly important, but should be treated as insignificant. By using these devices, Kipling makes his poem effective, engaging, and persuasive to a wider audience.

The speaker's emphasis on endurance and self-restraint parallels my value of hard work and perseverance, resulting in a strong connection between me and the poem. He maintains the significance of being able to "[be] lied about, [and not] deal in lies/Or being hated [not giving] way to hating"(6-7). He thinks one should aspire to make your heart and body "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!"(22-24) These lines appeal

specifically to those who harbor a strong work ethic, those who always manage to focus myself on the task at hand and complete it even under duress. He highlights that one can be a man by filling “ the unforgiving minute/With sixty seconds’ worth of distance run”(29-30). He feels it is necessary to make the most of all the time we can use, leading readers to appreciate the benefit of acting wholeheartedly; putting half effort into a task or project will result in a mediocre outcome, whereas a concentrated attempt would have produced a much better product and only taken slightly more effort. Because the speaker’s view towards hard work and choices are easily understandable, the poem is more impactful and memorable than other ones.

Rudyard Kipling’s “ If-” highlights the value of hard work and becoming a man through actions. He feels that if we try to take the easy way out, we will never truly be great. In societies plagued by vices such as hatefulness and laziness, this poem can be brought to mind to remind its readers that hard work is required for success.