

If by rudyard kipling – analysis

Experience, Human Nature



The poem 'If' is directed to Kipling's son, and is a message to him on his route to manhood. This is seen in the very last line of the poem, when Kipling writes: " And- which is more- you'll be a Man, my son! " The poem is about setting goals, taking risks, being a leader and self-belief, but all in moderation. An example in the text is: " If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you. But make allowance for their doubting too". Kipling tells his son to believe in himself but to never be over-confident. Throughout the poem, Kipling writes what it takes to be a man, and what his son should aspire to be.

The purpose of the poem is to both inspire and warn the reader. An example in the text is " If you can dream- and not make dreams your master;". This phrase inspires readers to dream and set goals in their life, through hardships and failures. However, it also warns readers to never let these dreams consume them, and to be able to detach from these dreams when they need to. This phrase sends a message to keep a balance. You can work towards a dream, but it should not be all you work towards, and you should not be a slave to that dream. Throughout the poem ' If', emotion is expressed.

At the start of the poem (stanza 1), the emotion is generally quite sad and more depressing than the rest of the poem. This is shown in the second line " Are losing theirs and blaming it on you;". However, as the poem progresses the emotion of the poem becomes happier and more inspirational. This is shown in the line " Or walk with Kings- not lose the common touch". The poem seeks to make the reader reflect on their own life and to compare the

attitudes and feelings to the ones described in the poem. Kipling uses many writing techniques in his poem to help get his message across.

A few of these include personal pronouns, repetition, and personification. An example of personification in the text is: “ Except the Will which says to them”, where Kipling personifies a will. Kipling uses personal pronouns such as “ you” to make the reader feel as if the poem is directed to them, and therefore make it more personalised. This use of personal pronouns could inspire readers, as they feel they are being directly spoken to. Kipling uses repetition to emphasize certain points, an example of this in the text is “ if you can”.

This phrase is also repeated to inspire, as readers may think, “ If I can do something, I’ll be able to get this”. The poem is made up of four octaves. Every other line of the poem rhymes with each other (e. g. ABAB rhyming structure). The first line of the poem has eleven syllables and the second has ten syllables this pattern continuous throughout the poem, with every other line having 11 syllables. Throughout the poem there are only two main sentences, from stanza one to three, and the last stanza is its own sentence. In the poem a semi-colon or colon splits the main phrases up.

The lack of punctuation throughout the poem makes the poem easier to read, as it is almost one collective thought. Kipling could possibly be showing the confusion in a boy’s head when entering manhood. The poem is almost constructed as an instructional manual, as the language of the poem is quite descriptive and somewhat instructional, yet mainly simple words are used throughout the poem. This is shown in the first two lines, where Kipling

writes: “ If you can keep your head when all about you Are losing theirs and blaming it on you”.

This type of language is quite appropriate as it is supposed to be directed to his son (so simple words are used), and is a guide towards how his son should act (so the instructions in the poem are clear). Using this type of language the instructions are easy to understand. Kipling uses various techniques to get different images in the reader’s head; commonly used techniques include metaphors and personification. An example of personification in the text is “ If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster, and treat those two imposters just the same.”

Where Kipling personifies Triumph and Disasters as two people who have betrayed someone. An example of a metaphor in the poem is “ If you can fill the unforgiving minute With sixty seconds' worth of distance run”, where he uses running as a metaphor for life. In this metaphor Kipling says you must try you’re hardest all the time, even if it leaves you exhausted, which is what running does. These different forms of imagery could have been written in order to make the reader imagine and dream. Therefore, they can get a better understanding of what message the writer may be trying to convey.

The poem ‘ If’ has a regular rhythm following the pattern of an iambic pentameter. An example in the poem is (where the capitalised words are stressed syllables): “ if YOU can KEEP your HEAD”. The regular rhythm of an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable is quite calming and reassuring. The poem flows very well and it is almost written like a song. This steady rhythm allows readers to be inspired, as they are reassured by the

calmness of the poem. Kipling uses alliteration throughout his poem to emphasise key points.

An example in the text is when Kipling writes “ Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools”. In this sentence a hard ‘ t’ sound starts three different words. The hard ‘ t’ sounds could be said to reinforce negativity in the sentence. The last two words of the line have a ‘ f’ sound at the start which could be said to reinforce the ‘ fools’ sound. The last word of every other line in the poem rhyme with each other (e. g. ABAB) rhyming structure. For example “ not make dreams your master... Meet with Triumph and Disaster”. This structure could be implemented to make the poem more interesting.

I feel like this poem was written very well as through the use of many techniques it does achieve the poet’s purpose, which is to inspire. The poem is written in a very easy way to understand, as the language is relatively simple, the rhythm is regular, great imagery is used and the poem is structured well. The poem teaches one to be a leader, to have a strong work ethic and to be self-righteous, yet always be able to detach from these things when necessary. Due to the strong message the poem conveys and great craftsmanship, I really enjoyed this poem.