

Amanda Kuiken

English 112

Kim Groninga

4 April 2007

"If" by Rudyard Kipling

One word in the English language can separate us from our hopes and dreams. When used, it is usually put in a statement that includes something out of reach or something limited by circumstances. This one simple word is only two letters, yet it can change lives and create miracles. The poem "If" uses this word at its title and repeatedly contains the word throughout the entire poem. Rudyard Kipling uses the poem as a teaching device from father to son and shows this to the reader at the end of the poem. After reading this poem, I could not help but be instilled with motivation and determination to become a better person. It is powerful and will continue to have an influence on future readers.

Statements that include if are always followed by a result or a consequence that would happen if the prior statement actually came true. An example of this would be, "If I had more money, I would buy a bigger house." The first part containing the word if, includes the desire or the item out of reach. After this, the next part includes what would happen if this possible wish or dream actually came true. Kipling's poem starts out talking about the character of a human being, but never includes the result of the "if statements". Instead, he leaves it up to the reader to decide what could possibly occur if the previous part took place. This gives the poem a lot of flexibility and allows the reader to create his or her own ideas about the possible prospects of the poem.

As far as meter and rhyme, Kipling does a great job of enticing the reader through the poem. When read aloud, a clear rhythm can be heard, as well as some amazing rhymes. After I read each line, I couldn't wait to get to the next part in order to figure out something that seemed very important. It is almost as though there is some urgency in the author's voice as each stanza is completed, only to arrive at another imperative section. Each of the four stanzas addresses a different aspect of a human being and all are equally important. They include: pride, character, heart, and personality.

The first one talks a lot about pride and is shown in the first two lines which state, "If you can keep your head, when all about you are losing theirs and blaming it on you." Personally, I believe it takes a lot to do something like this. There have been plenty of times in my life where I have been blamed for something I didn't do. Growing up in a family of seven was not easy on my pride and I quickly learned to take the blame without any argument. At times, it could have been very simple to return the favor and accuse my sisters of committing a crime they had no part in, but I quickly learned this could become an endless, harmful cycle. The rest of the stanza deals with other parts of one's pride including: doubting, lying, hating and self image. To some, these four things influence their daily lives and also control a lot of the decisions they make. Lines five through seven include a few of these things, "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" (5-7). We are never told what would happen if these things were taken out or reduced, but are allowed to think about what our lives could be like without these prideful characteristics.

During the second stanza, I thought a great deal about the character I possess and whether it includes what I think is important or ideal. A majority of who I am is

expressed through my character, which I consider to be one of my best attributes. This stanza includes ideas about goals and thinking for yourself. Additionally, Kipling addresses the proper way to deal with triumph and disaster. We should be able to deal with these two things, but not go overboard. He also suggests to “treat those two imposters just the same.” I believe this means we should be able to handle triumph in an appropriate manner and also be calm when disaster strikes. There are many distasteful ways to respond to these two occurrences, but we are asked to do it in a respectable way. How we react to complications or successes in our lives shows a lot about our character. Kipling feels character is significant and uses it as a main aspect of his poem.

Heart is the next influential part Kipling addresses. Right after I read the third stanza, I immediately thought about the heart and soul it takes to achieve what is mentioned. Every line talks about an intricate piece of our inner beliefs and feelings that make up our soul. There are times in our lives when we are forced to give something up and act like nothing has happened. Some people like to make sure everyone knows how hard their life is and also won't let anyone forget the losses they have suffered. Kipling advises the reader to be able to lose everything and never let anyone know through our emotions, “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” (17-20). I believe this is saying multiple things including; money should not be the most important thing and loss should be dealt with in a minimal, discrete way. True heart is characterized by things like these. A person with a good heart is not ruled by money, nor are they interested in receiving pity from others. It takes a lot to have a good heart and this poem can help lead anyone in the right direction in order to achieve it.

The fourth and final stanza unleashes characteristics of personality and includes the final meaning Kipling wants the reader to take in. Kipling wrote about friendship, trust, virtue, and forgiveness. At the start, he begins with, "If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue/ or walk with kings--nor lose the common touch" (25-26). To me, this means we must remain humble and remember our roots. We can't let fame change our personality or cause us to act differently when we are within a crowd of people. It is important to keep a constant personality and not be two-faced when surrounded by diverse or large amounts of people. Plus, in a majority of life situations, it is easy to be swayed into wanting to be important. As Kipling states, those who walk with kings must not lose the common touch. At the end of this poem, the last two lines pull it all together and hit home in the minds of every reader. All these things that were previously mentioned, although seemingly difficult to achieve, can make a son or a boy into a man. When each one of these characteristics is accomplished, we are classified as grown-ups and ready to enter the real world. Not only will we be prepared to enter the real world, but we will moreover be able to make a lasting impact to be remembered.

A poem like this is timeless and will continue to last for many more years. The meaningful words apply to any reader and additionally provide motivation for a better life. This poem allows for a lot of personal thought and flexibility as far as significance goes. Looking at the poem, it seems as though there may be some parts missing; however, these parts were purposely left out in order to make the reader think for him or herself. Many different interpretations of this poem exist, but I urge everyone who reads this poem to create their own. I guarantee it will allow the reader to find out some

important things about life in general and will also help them look deeper into their own personality and make it better.

Works Cited

Kipling, Rudyard. "If." 4 April 2007 <http://www.poets.org/viewmedia.php/prmMID/1648>

If

By Rudyard Kipling

- 1 If you can keep your head when all about you
- 2 Are losing theirs and blaming it on you;
- 3 If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,
- 4 But make allowance for their doubting too;
- 5 If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,
- 6 Or, being lied about, don't deal in lies,
- 7 Or, being hated, don't give way to hating,
- 8 And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise;

- 9 If you can dream--and not make dreams your master;
- 10 If you can think--and not make thoughts your aim;
- 11 If you can meet with triumph and disaster
- 12 And treat those two impostors just the same;
- 13 If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken
- 14 Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,
- 15 Or watch the things you gave your life to broken,
- 16 And stoop and build 'em up with wornout tools;

- 17 If you can make one heap of all your winnings
- 18 And risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss,
- 19 And lose, and start again at your beginnings

20 And never breathe a word about your loss;
21 If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew
22 To serve your turn long after they are gone,
23 And so hold on when there is nothing in you
24 Except the Will which says to them: "Hold on";

25 If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,
26 Or walk with kings--nor lose the common touch;
27 If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you;
28 If all men count with you, but none too much;
29 If you can fill the unforgiving minute
30 With sixty seconds' worth of distance run--
31 Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,
32 And--which is more--you'll be a Man, my son!