

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Class: \_\_\_\_\_

# Invictus

By William Ernest Henley  
1875

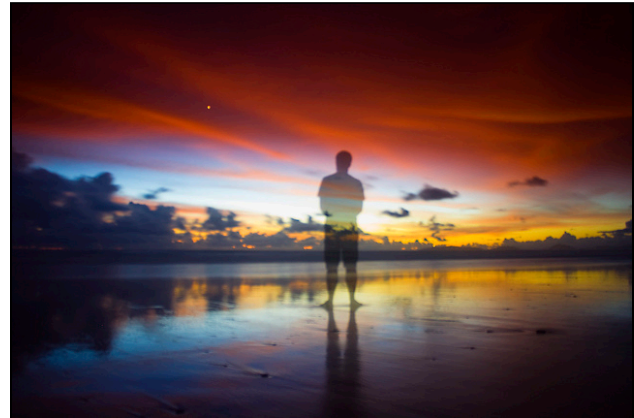
*William Ernest Henley (1849-1903) was an English poet, critic, and editor. His best known poem is "Invictus," published in 1875, which he wrote just following the amputation of his foot due to tuberculosis. As you read, take notes on the tone of the speaker.*

[1] Out of the night that covers me,  
Black as the pit from pole to pole,  
I thank whatever gods may be  
For my unconquerable<sup>1</sup> soul.

[5] In the fell<sup>2</sup> clutch of circumstance  
I have not winced<sup>3</sup> nor cried aloud.  
Under the bludgeonings<sup>4</sup> of chance  
My head is bloody, but unbowed.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears  
[10] Looms<sup>5</sup> but the Horror of the shade,  
And yet the menace<sup>6</sup> of the years  
Finds and shall find me unafraid.

It matters not how strait the gate,  
How charged with punishments the scroll,  
[15] I am the master of my fate,  
I am the captain of my soul.



*"I am the master of my fate, I am the captain of my soul" is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.*

*Invictus by William Ernest Henley is in the public domain.*

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1. **Unconquerable (adjective):** unable to be defeated
  2. **Fell (adjective):** fierce, cruel, terrible
  3. **Wince (verb):** to flinch
  4. **Bludgeon (verb):** to beat
  5. **Loom (verb):** to stand threateningly
  6. **Menace (noun):** a threat

## Text-Dependent Questions

**Directions:** For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: What is this poem mostly about? [RL.2]
- A. Refusing to follow the rules
  - B. The importance of being yourself
  - C. Not being afraid of "the menace of the years."
  - D. Never giving up, no matter what difficult circumstances life brings

2. PART B: Cite a piece of evidence from the text that supports the answer to Part A. [RL.1]

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3. What is the author's tone in this poem? Support your answer with evidence from the text. [RL.6]

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4. Reread the last stanza of the poem. What is the author's message? [RL.2]

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5. Explain what the author means in lines 6-8. Use other lines in the poem to help you answer. [RL.4]

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6. In line 10, what does the "shade" symbolize? [RL.4]

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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. How do you think the author would feel about receiving help from others? Cite the text in your answer.
2. How does a person overcome adversity? Use evidence from this poem, your own experience, and other literature or art in your answer.
3. Do you think it is a good thing or a bad thing to rely on others in the face of adversity?
4. Can we ever truly be independent? Explain your answer.
5. There seems to be some tension in this text: the author claims to control his own life, yet he is subjected to the cruelty of chance and feels threatened by the future. Discuss this tension. According to the author, how can we be the “master of our fate” when there are circumstances beyond our control?