

Note: The transactional processes suggested in CISCE curriculum are highlighted in grey.

Learning Outcomes

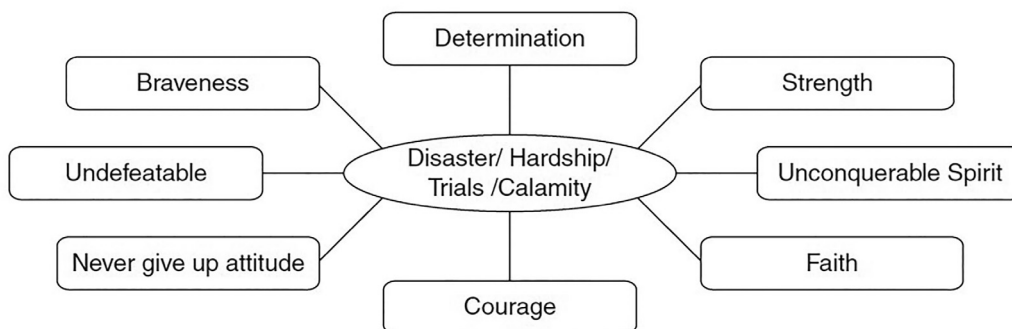
- To inculcate a positive attitude in difficult circumstances
- To be encouraged by the poet’s braveness and courage
- To enjoy reciting the poem with expression and emotion

Summary: Invictus is the Latin word for undefeated. The speaker in the poem thanks God for his indomitable spirit in fighting against heavy odds even when he cannot see the end in sight. He has not been cowed down/disheartened by his misfortune; he has held his head high. Apart from enduring the calamities of his present situation he has to face the fear of approaching death and whatever may lie beyond it as he is growing old. And yet, he is not afraid of the future. He is prepared to face the end and the consequences of his actions on earth because he is confident that he is in control of his spirit and knows how to steer it through life and death.

Pre-reading

Draw this mind map on a chart / board.

Ask students to list out all the things / qualities / attitudes we need to handle trials and tough situations.



(Note: The words given are only a suggestion. Your students may come up with more such words.)

READING

Students predict and paraphrase

Let students read the title and say what the poem is about.

Play the audio track on the Smart Book as this will help students with the stress, intonation and rhythm in the poem.

Tell students that this poem has been quoted by many famous people including Nelson Mandela, Winston Churchill, Barack Obama, US prisoners of war in Vietnam. It has also lent its title to a movie starring Morgan Freeman and Matt Damon.

Take it further by asking students the following questions and let them discuss the answers in groups.

What do you think the poet's difficulty / trial was? Why did he need an unconquerable soul? What did he do?

List their responses on the board, and conduct a classroom discussion on what his trouble might have been.

Note: Tell students the background of the poet:

Background of the Poet

Born in Gloucester, England, poet, editor, and critic William Ernest Henley's father was a struggling bookseller who died when Henley was a teenager. At age 12 Henley was diagnosed with tubercular arthritis that necessitated the amputation of one of his legs just below the knee; the other foot was saved only through a radical surgery performed by Joseph Lister. As he healed in the infirmary, Henley began to write poems, including *Invictus*, which concludes with the often-referenced lines "I am the master of my fate; / I am the captain of my soul." Henley's poems often engage themes of inner strength and perseverance.

Tell students to read the poem once again, aloud this time and feeling every emotion the poet wrote with, as they now know what his struggles were. Tell them to emphasise on every "strength" word or phrase. E.g.: "***I am the master of my fate; / I am the captain of my soul.***"

Tell students to paraphrase each stanza after answering the questions below:

Stanza 1:

Why is it black as a pit for the poet? (He is going through immense suffering) What does he mean by 'unconquerable soul'? (His will to survive has not allowed death to take his soul away. 'Invictus' means unconquerable in Latin. 'Unconquerable' links with the title to present the theme. A person with complete faith in

himself will not be daunted / disheartened by his circumstances whatever they are. He will have the undaunted courage to face his difficulties and triumph over them.)

Paraphrase: The poet expresses that he is ready to overcome the trouble that is looming over him. He is unafraid and knows that he cannot be overcome by it. He also alludes to a god or gods meaning that he acknowledges that this *soul* which is *conquerable* is the creation of a higher power.

Stanza 2:

Which quality of the poet does this stanza portray? (He is strong-willed and proud, and does not cow down to the pressure of physical suffering.)

Paraphrase: The poet says that the problem he encountered is grave but no matter what, he will stand tall. He is determined to overcome it.

Stanza 3:

*What does this stanza say about the persona in the poem? Which word refers to death? (He is strong-willed and unafraid of death, though it appears to loom large / threaten, over him even as he grows older. The word *shade* refers to death.)*

Paraphrase: This third stanza relates to death and being unafraid of it. It says that beyond the trouble and misfortune he is encountering now, there is also the inevitable/unavoidable fear of death. The poet boldly states that he is unafraid to encounter the pangs of old age and death.

Stanza 4:

*What is the significance of the word 'charged'? (The word 'charged' has two meanings here: to be convicted or to be asked to pay up. The speaker will be *charged* even though he has gone through the narrow gates and borne severe sufferings due to his illness while on earth. However, he asserts that it does not matter what punishments one may bear from life and the after life as long as one is confidently in control.)*

Paraphrase: This last stanza means that each person is in control of how their life will turn out. It means that each person in their actions determines for themselves whether they will be successful or not. It means that no matter how hard it is, or how many mistakes you make, everyone is in charge of their fate and their overall outcome of life.

What are some of the struggles / difficult situations we face in life? How do we handle them with a positive attitude?

Poetic devices

It is composed of four quatrains and it is a lyric poem.

Rhyme scheme: Each stanza follows an *abab* rhyme scheme

Personification: night cannot actually cover someone; chance cannot beat or bludgeon, horror looming.

Simile: Black as the Pit

Alliteration: pole to pole

Metaphors: clutch of circumstance, the gate, menace of the years

Imagery: Visual images: My head is bloody, but unbowed.

Sound images: I have not winced nor cried aloud.

Internal rhyme: It matters not how strait the gate

Post-reading

Group work

- Get material on people who have surmounted heavy odds like fighting wars, battling illness, struggling against poverty, surviving accidents ...
- Prepare collages, hold an exhibition in class and talk about the personality you have chosen to portray

STUDENTS' BOOK ANSWER KEY

Invictus

Comprehension

A. 1. F 2. T 3. DNS 4. DNS 5. F 6. T

B. 1. *Suggested answers (accept any logical answer):*

- Night here is meant figuratively. Here, night refers to the darkness that the speaker feels surrounded by, because of the many difficulties he has to face.
 - 'From pole to pole' implies that the darkness seems to appear whichever way the speaker turns—it seems to cover his world or his vision.
- 'Chance' here may refer to fate or destiny, which throws different challenges in the speaker's way.
 - The second line means that as the speaker faces different difficulties, he suffers, he is pained and hurt, but he does not give up or break down. He keeps standing straight and goes on trying.
 - No, the lines that immediately follow this line are, 'Looms but the Horror of the shade, / And yet the menace of the years...' These lines say that beyond this place of suffering, there are horror, menace, and then eventually death, so they do not mention good things to come.
 - Even if he has nothing pleasant to look forward to, the speaker is sure of his own courage. He writes, 'Finds, and shall find, me unafraid', referring to the menace of the years. He means that no matter how many difficulties or challenges lie ahead, he will remain brave and face them boldly.

4. Defiance means to challenge or oppose some power—to not be afraid of it and to be brave enough to stand up against it. In these lines, the speaker says that no matter how tough things get, how many ‘punishments’ or sufferings he has to go through, he will always be in control of his fate and of his own soul. Thus he defies the problems thrown at him by destiny; he refuses to bow down before them. He resolves to remain standing upright and strong in the face of every storm.

- C. 1. inspirational 2. contest 3. difficulties 4. mental
5. hardships 6. challenges 7. courage

Appreciating the Poem

Suggested answers (accept any logical answer):

1. Yes, we can find both these elements in this poem. Here, the speaker does not mention a specific problem, but he speaks about problems and difficulties in general when he uses words and phrases like ‘night’, ‘black as the pit’, ‘fell clutch of circumstance’, ‘bludgeonings of chance’, ‘wrath and tears’, ‘menace of the years’ and ‘charged with punishments the scroll’. All these refer to the various problems that the speaker faces and has to overcome. The goal he has to achieve is to stay undefeated, unafraid and in control of his own life. We do not know if he manages to overcome every problem, but he achieves the goal to a certain extent since he says that no matter what troubles he comes across, he shall remain unafraid, his head will remain unbowed.
2. The first-person narration—I—works more effectively than ‘we’ or ‘you’ in this poem because here, the speaker describes his own challenges and how he faces them or fights them. ‘We’ would not have worked here because not everyone may face the same degree of difficulty in their lives. Neither would it be effective to use ‘you’, because then the poem may sound preachy. If the poem told the reader that the reader must remain unafraid and unbowed no matter what problems came across their way, then it could sound insensitive or impractical. It is only because the speaker speaks of his own troubles himself that he can write these lines.
3. Yes, the title of the poem is suitable since ‘invictus’ means ‘unconquered’ or ‘undefeated’, and that is how the speaker comes across from his account of his problems and his attitude. Other words that have meanings close to ‘invictus’ are ‘unconquerable’, ‘unbowed’, ‘unafraid’, ‘master’ and ‘captain’.

Vocabulary

- | | | |
|-----------|-------------|-------------|
| 1. simile | 2. metaphor | 3. metaphor |
| 4. simile | 5. metaphor | 6. simile |

Sentences: *Free response*

QUESTION BANK

Invictus

A. Answer in brief.

What is the poet, in the poem *Invictus*, thankful for?

Ans: The poet is thankful for the strength and tenacity with which he could face all hardships in life. The poet suffered a lot of hardships and struggles but his soul always

remained undefeated and unconquered. He is thankful to the force that has helped him keep his head high against all odds.

B. Answer in detail.

How did the poet face the challenges in his life?

Ans: The poet had been the unfortunate victim of circumstances. Though he was heavily burdened with a lot of struggles in life, he never complained and continued living like any normal person. The difficulties beat him down like a cudgel beating a helpless person. However difficult his sufferings, the poet did not surrender or bow his head in defeat. He never 'winced or cried aloud', never complained openly about his pain nor did he allow sorrow to get the better of him. He remained unconquered.

C. Choose the correct answer.

'I am the master of my fate, I am the captain of my soul'

What does the poet mean in these lines?

- a. Challenges make one stronger, but mentally submitting to these impediments makes a man brave.
- b. Challenges are difficult, but one's attitude to keep moving forward without submitting to fate is what matters.
- a. It is not about God and losing hope, but the actions in life that make one surrender while faced with challenges.

Ans: b

D. Read the lines and answer the questions.

It matters not how strait the gate,

How charged with punishments the scroll.

I am the master of my fate:

I am the captain of my soul.

- a. What is the poet not bothered about?
- b. What punishment does the poet anticipate?
- c. What do you understand about the attitude of the poet from the last two lines?

Ans: a. The poet talks about life beyond death. He is not worried about the narrow gate his soul may have to pass through after his death.

- b. He probably is talking about the punishment a person may get if they have not lead a good life on earth.
- c. The poet, in the last two lines, boldly concludes that he and only he is responsible for his destiny. No one can change or tamper with it.

E. Answer in detail. (Think and answer)

Why do you think the poet has chosen the theme which is about one's fight against adversity in life? Do you know anyone who is similar? Write a short sketch of such a person.

Free response *Suggested answer:*

The poet contracted tuberculosis at a very young age and his leg had to be amputated. He wrote the poem shortly after that. This poem is about the courage he showed when faced with death and ill health. It is about the way he held on to his courage and dignity totally undeterred by the cruel game played by fate in his life. This fighting spirit of his is what we see in the poem.

(Free response for the 2nd part)