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| **Invictus**  A Poem by William Ernest Henley (1849-1903) |
| **Tutor Notes** The theme of the poem is the will to survive in the face of a severe test. Henley himself faced such a test. After contracting tuberculosis of the bone in his youth, he suffered a tubercular infection when he was in his early twenties that resulted in amputation of a leg below the knee.     |  | | --- | | **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 soul.  Comments, *Night* is a metaphor for suffering of any kind. It is also part of a simile and a hyperbole in which the speaker compares the darkness of his suffering to the blackness of a hellish pit stretching from the north pole to the south pole. In line 4, unconquerable establishes the theme and a link with the title (Latin for unconquerable).  **2**  In the fell clutch of circumstance 5    I have not winced nor cried aloud.   Under the bludgeonings of chance     My head is bloody, but unbowed.  Comments,This stanza begins with another metaphor, comparing circumstance to a creature with a deadly grip (*fell clutch*). Alliteration occurs in **c**lutch, cir**c**umstance, and **c**ried, in **n**ot and **n**or, and in **b**ludgeonings, **b**loody, **b**ut, and un**b**owed.  **3**  Beyond this place of wrath and tears     Looms but the Horror of the shade,   10  And yet the menace of the years   Finds, and shall find, me unafraid.  CommentIn line 10, *shade* is a metaphor for death. In this same line, *horror* suggests that the speaker believes in an afterlife in spite of the seemingly agnostic third line of the first stanza. If there were no afterlife, there could be no horror after death. *Menace of the years* is a metaphor for advancing age.  **4**  It matters not how strait the gate,     How charged with punishments the scroll,   I am the master of my fate:   15    I am the captain of my soul.  Comment Here, *strait* means narrow, restricted. To escape from “the fell clutch of circumstance" and “bludgeonings of chance," the speaker must pass through a narrow gate. He believes he can do so—in spite of the punishments that fate has allotted him—because his iron will refuses to bend. |      |  | | --- | |  | |