

400-Meter Freestyle

THE GUN full swing the swimmer catapults and cracks

s
i
x

feet away onto that perfect glass he catches at

a
n
d

throws behind him scoop after scoop cunningly moving

t
h
e

water back to move him forward. Thrift is his wonderful

s
e
c

ret; he has schooled out all extravagance. No muscle

r
i
p

ples without compensation wrist cock to heel snap to

h
i
s

mobile mouth that siphons in the air that nurtures

h
i
m

at half an inch above sea level so to speak.

T
h
e

astonishing whites of the soles of his feet rise

a
n
d

salute us on the turns. He flips, coverts, and is gone

a
l
l

in one. We watch him for signs. His arms are steady at

t
h
e

catch, his cadent feet tick in the stretch, they know

t
h
e

lesson well. Lungs know, too; he does not list for

a
i
r

he drives along on little sips carefully expended

b
u
t

that plum red heart pumps hard cries hurt how soon

i
t
s

near one more and makes its final surge. Time: 4:25:9

—Maxine Kumin

Name _____

Questions for Analysis

1. What does Maxine Kumin do to involve you in the race? _____

2. Do you think the swimmer won the race? Give the reason for your conclusion. _____

3. What is the swimmer's secret? _____

4. Name three actions the swimmer takes during the race. _____

5. What two poetic devices are used in the first line of this poem? _____

6. How does the absence of punctuation affect the poem? _____

7. Where does the poet's word choice sound like the movements of the racing swimmer? ____

8. What picture has Maxine Kumin created with the words on the page? Does the visual quality of the poem add to your enjoyment of it? _____

