The Little Boy with His Hands Up

Yala Korwin

Your open palms raised in the air
like two white doves
frame your meager face,
your face contorted with fear,
grown old with knowledge beyond your
years.
Not yet ten. Eight? Seven?
Not yet compelled to mark
with a blue star on white badge
your Jewishness.

No need to brand the very young.
They will meekly follow their mothers.

You are standing apart
Against the flock of women and their brood
With blank, resigned stares.
All the torments of this harassed crowd
Are written on your face.
In your dark eyes--a vision of horror.
You have seen Death already
On the ghetto streets, haven't you?
Do you recognize it in the emblems
Of the SS-man facing you with his camera?

Like a lost lamb you are standing
Apart and forlorn beholding your own fate.

Where is your mother, little boy?
Is she the woman glancing over her
shoulder
At the gunmen at the bunker's entrance?
Is it she who lovingly, though in haste,
Buttoned your coat, straightened your cap,
Pulled up your socks?
Is it her dreams of you, her dreams
Of a future Einstein, a Spinoza,
Another Heine or Halévy
They will murder soon?
Or are you orphaned already?
But even if you still have a mother,
She won't be allowed to comfort you
In her arms.

Her tired arms loaded with useless bundles
Must remain up in submission.

Alone you will march
Among other lonely wretches
Toward your martyrdom.

Your image will remain with us
And grow and grow
To immense proportions,
To haunt the callous world,
To accuse it, with ever stronger voice,
In the name of the million youngsters
Who lie, pitiful rag-dolls,
Their eyes forever closed.

Published in To Tell the Story - Poems Of the Holocaust, Holocaust Publications, NY
"The Little Boy with His Hands Up" by Yala Korwin (poem and picture),
Adapted from Elin Rosberg’s materials

Multiple-Choice Questions
1. The first two lines of the poem, “Your open palms raised in the air/like two white doves” is an example of what poetic device?
   A personification
   B metaphor
   C simile
   D onomatopoeia

2. In the poem, why does the speaker say that there is no need to brand the young?
   A At this point in the war, little children will be killed immediately
   B The children are kept behind bars and are not a danger.
   C Some Jewish children will be freed and adopted by Aryans.
   D Little children will follow their mothers instead of trying to run away.

3. In this poem, the use of the word, “brand” suggests all of the following except
   A Jews were branded or tattooed with numbers in the concentration camps.
   B Animals, not people, are usually branded.
   C Branding suggests that the person or animal is a thing to be owned.
   D Brand suggests something brand new. It is clean, pure, reborn.

4. The speaker sees this child “…standing apart against the flock of women and their brood….” To what is there an implied comparison here?
   A a collection of animals
   B a helpless bird
   C a lost jewel
   D an officer and enlisted men

5. According to the poem, what is it that the child has already experienced?
   A life in the concentration camps
   B having his picture taken
   C losing his mother
   D death on the streets of the ghetto

6. According to the poem, what dreams did his mother most likely have for the boy?
   A that he would join the Nazi party
   B that he would escape from the ghetto
   C that he would grow up to be a great man of his people
   D that he would be a rich man

7. How will the boy’s image “grow and grow to immense proportions”? What does that really mean? It means that
   A The child’s image will always remain with the reader.
   B People will see the boy in the picture and know what has been done to a million children like him.
   C The photographer will make the boy’s image larger and larger.
   D The boy’s picture will be lost, and he will be forgotten

8. Why does the speaker compare the millions of children to “pitiful rag dolls”?
   A because their clothing is ragged and dirty
   B because they are all dressed in rags
   C because they are cute as little rag dolls
   D because in death they are as lifeless and limp as rag dolls