

Name _____

Date _____

What Was Buried: The Irena Sendler Story - Answer Key

Use the text to answer each question below.

1. Elżbieta's Truth

When Elżbieta Ficowska was 17, a friend asked her, “Why didn’t you tell me you were Jewish?” Elżbieta was perplexed—because she *wasn’t* Jewish. Elżbieta lived in a loving, Catholic home with her mother, Stanisława Bussold.

Elżbieta had never questioned her upbringing. But her friend’s strange question stuck in her mind, and Elżbieta began to realize that perhaps not all was as it seemed.

For example, the death date on her father’s tombstone was 1940—two years *before* Elżbieta’s birth. When Elżbieta had asked her mother about this at age 14, Stanisława explained that there was simply an error on the gravestone. Elżbieta had accepted this, but now she wasn’t so sure.

Eventually, Elżbieta uncovered the truth: She had been born to Jewish parents in Poland’s Nazi-controlled Warsaw Ghetto. As a baby, she had been smuggled out of the ghetto through Irena Sendler’s network. Stanisława was one of the network’s organizers.

Elżbieta’s Jewish parents died at the hands of the Nazis, and Stanisława thought it best not to tell her the truth of her story. But learning this truth was, as Elżbieta said later, good for her. She had been somewhat privileged and entitled as a child. Now, she no longer felt this way.

As an adult, Elżbieta became active in the Association of the Children of the Holocaust. But unlike some of the other members, she does not identify as Jewish. As she explained in an interview, to do so would not reflect the truth of her upbringing. “I am a Jew only when they beat Jews,” she said.

What theme does the title of this passage help develop?

A. Lying is a malicious action that is caused by a person’s ill intent. ☒

B.

Self-identity is highly personal and based on a person’s own truth.

By using the possessive, the title of the passage indicates that Elżbieta’s “truth” is unique to her. This idea is further developed by the statement that “unlike some of the other members” of the Association of the Children of the Holocaust, Elżbieta chooses not to identify as Jewish because she feels that this identity does not “reflect the truth of her upbringing.”

C. It is best to hide the truth from those who might be hurt by it.

D. Even after learning the truth, most people reject their identity.

2. Excerpt from “My Two Mothers” by Elżbieta Ficowska

I did not know then, I could not know, how much self-denial, how much heroism, was needed just to provide a roof over my head. I did not know then, but I have since learned, that there are two ways to extend a hand: one is as a fist and the other as an open palm offering help. My mothers chose the second way, my Jewish mother, who gave me life, and my Polish mother, who saved that life.

Both accomplished something that went beyond ordinary humanity. To save me in the nightmarish days of July 1942, my Jewish mother endured the pain of giving up her only child to Żegota, a Polish organization that provided help to dying Jews. Through this organization I was placed in less threatening hands, hands that at first had seemed alien but did not turn out so. My Polish mother fulfilled the deepest desires of my Jewish mother. She conquered her own fear to save me, showering great love on me to take the place of the one who brought me into the world and who was soon to leave it.

Although I was too small to remember her clearly, I will never forget my Jewish mother. I cannot even recognize her face in a photograph, but I see her in my dreams. Both my dead mothers are with me and will remain with me to the end. Their presence reminds me that there is nothing more destructive than hatred and nothing more blessed than human goodness.

What theme is developed in this passage?

A. Each person has only one mother.



B.

Love can conquer evil.

In the text, Elżbieta states that her Jewish mother gave her life, while her Polish mother “saved that life.” These acts required “heroism” and “self-denial.” She also states that remembering what her mothers did reminds her that “there is nothing destructive than hatred and nothing more blessed than human goodness.”

C. Evil starts with a single act.

D. Hatred is similar to love.

3. Excerpt from the poem “Both Your Mothers” by Jerzy Ficowski, husband of Elżbieta Ficowski

But the mother
who was saved in you
could now step into crowded death
happily incomplete
could instead of memory give you

for a parting gift
her own likeness
and a date and a name

so much

And at once it happened
that someone hurriedly took care
of your sleep
and then stayed for a long always
and washed you of orphanhood
and wrapped you in love
and became the answer to your first word

That was how
both your mothers taught you
not to be surprised at all
when you say
I am

Which line from the poem best helps develop the theme that “motherhood can extend beyond death”?



A.

The mother / who was saved in you

Although Elżbieta’s mother died (“stepped into crowded death”), she was “saved in” Elżbieta. When she saved Elżbieta’s life, she also saved her own motherhood.

B. Someone hurriedly took care / of your sleep

C. And washed you of orphanhood

D. And became the answer to your first word