Big 5 Questions Assignment on I Have Lived a Thousand Years by Livia Bitton-Jackson.

This is one of my favorite books within the Holocaust realistic fiction genre. It is a true story about a 13 year old girl, Ellie, living in Hungary and how her life becomes her worst nightmare. As a Jewish family, more and more of her family’s rights are taken away until their rights no longer exist. The family must fight for existence in numerous concentration camps. Most of the story takes place in Auschwitz.

Question 1. Despite the graphic nature of the book, the grace of language makes the story great. The word choice is purposeful and moving. It isn’t just a group of entries that recount what happened. The language makes you relive what Ellie went through. The story is raw and the author doesn’t hold anything back. For example, Ellie is devastated by the reality of how Jews are going to be treated the day Jews are sent home from school. On p. 24, her schoolmates start singing Jew Girl as she leaves.

“Tears choke my throat. Sweat runs down my back… I run to my room and bury my face in the pillow. I weep and weep. I weep for the classroom that will never be my classroom again. I weep for my school that will never again be my school. I weep for my life, which will never be the same.”

Here is another example. They are working in a factory to make intricate parts. A sound goes off on completion of the object. “The instrument is working perfectly, and we have made it. We have created something intricate and complex and difficult. It is also a tragic sound. The success of our work contributes to the success of the German war effort. We are toiling against ourselves.”

The word choice reveals so much emotion and allows the reader to experience in a small way what these people endured.

Question2. What would I change? I would erase this part of our world history. As this is a memoir, I really can’t change it. However, I do have a question. Why didn’t the Jewish people fight? Revolt? There was an uprising in another camp, but it failed. The German guards were ruthless, if someone escaped then the guards would punish or torture ten prisoners for the escapee. Or worse, they would kill a few remaining ones. I would have had the Jewish people refuse to go on the trains to the camps while they were still healthy and strong. Unfortunately, the Jewish people didn’t realize that they were fooled into going to labor camps. The gate at Auschwitz stated, “Work will set you free.” No one could have predicted such an inhumanity.

Question 3. The one important thing that the author wants me to know is that no matter what your circumstances, never give up. This is very encouraging as she lived through such a dark and dangerous life experience.

Question 4. I believe the author wrote this because she wanted to encourage people to have hope even when things seem so hopeless. She stated, “Although this is a story of cruelty and suffering, it is at the same time a story of hope, faith, perseverance and love.” People rise up and stand up for other people in terrible times. That is the beauty of the human spirit.

Question5. To better understand the story, I think it would be important to learn more about Hungary and Germany- Europe pre-war. Also, not all German people were aware or a part of Hitler’s master plan to create an Aryan Race, “a perfect people”.