“The Drummer Boy of Shiloh”
Text-Dependent Questions

1. In the first three paragraphs, how does the author describe Joby’s thoughts and feelings?

2. What details in the first three paragraphs on page 554 help establish the setting?

3. In the third paragraph on page 554, the word “solemn” is used three times. What does it mean and why do you think the author chose to repeat this word? What effect does it create?

4. On page 555, the author says, “. . . raw youth their protection and benediction.” Why did the author choose to use the word benediction?

5. On page 555, how does Joby compare himself to the other soldiers?

6. Using evidence from page 555, describe the feelings that Joby has about the upcoming battle.

7. How does Joby view the other soldiers?

8. On page 555, Joby states, “Nothing was as it once was.” What does this statement tell us about Joby’s state of mind? Support your answer with evidence from the text.

9. What is the author trying to portray with this quote on page 555: “If he lay very still, when the dawn came up and the soldiers put on their bravery with their caps, perhaps they might go away, the war with them, and not notice him lying small here, no more than a toy himself.”
10. On pages 555-556, the general discovers that the crying soldier is Joby, the drummer boy. How does the general's presence and conversation comfort Joby?

11. On page 556, the general says, “Fool question . . . Do you shave yet, boy? Even more of a fool. There’s your cheek, fell right off the tree overhead.” What is the general saying about the boy in this quote?

12. On page 556, the general admits that he cried the night before. How does this affect Joby? What is the general afraid of?

13. On page 558, the general states, “When you got a bunch of wild horses on a loose rein somewhere, somehow you got to bring order, rein them in.” Why would he tell this to Joby?

14. Why does the general say that the drummer boy is the “heart of the army”? Provide evidence from the text to support your answer.

15. The author spends time describing the interaction between Joby and the general. How does the interaction on page 558 help Joby understand his importance in the battle?

16. On pages 555-559, how does Joby's conversation with the general help him to overcome his fears?

17. At the end of the story, “Joby swallowed, wiped his eyes and cleared his throat, he settled himself. Then, at last, very slowly and firmly, he turned the drum so that it faced up toward the sky.” What does this mean?
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Answer Key

1. In the first three paragraphs, how does the author describe Joby’s thoughts and feelings?
   The boy was on edge as stated “…like panic, which jerked the boy upright.” “He listened to his own heart ruffle away – at last gone from his ears and back in his chest again.”
   Joby gives into his fear by turning “the drum on its side, where its great lunar face peered at him whenever he opened his eyes,” a constant reminder of what will happen the next morning.
   “His face, alert or at rest, was solemn. It was indeed a solemn time and a solemn night for a boy just turned fourteen in the peach field…”

2. What details in the first three paragraphs on page 554 help establish the setting?
   It is April; the time is around midnight; the place is a peach field near Owl Creek, not far from the church at Shiloh.

3. In the third paragraph on page 554, the word “solemn” is used three times. What does it mean and why do you think the author chose to repeat this word? What effect does it create?
   Solemn means serious and dignified. The repetition of the word “solemn” gives it more importance in the text. The word choice sets a serious, grave and somber mood about how Joby feels.

4. On page 555, the author says, “…raw youth their protection and benediction.” Why did the author choose to use the word benediction?
   Young soldiers may not be fully aware of the degree of danger that comes from war. This is evident in “The soldiers dreamed of how they may react when it was time for war: a leap, a yell, a blind plunge.” A benediction, or blessing, might be needed to help them to survive the danger.

5. On page 555, how does Joby compare himself to the other soldiers?
   “Me, thought the boy, I got only a drum, two sticks to beat it and no shield.” The soldiers have protection but the drummer boy only has his drum and sticks. He sees himself as unprepared to fight the battle.

6. Using evidence from page 555, describe the feelings that Joby has about the upcoming battle.
   Joby is thinking that he has only a drum and no weapons and that his family is moving farther away into the dark. He thinks that everything has changed in his life because he states, “Nothing was as it once was.” He hopes that if he lies still the soldiers might not notice him.
   “Here’s a soldier crying before the fight…” indicates that he is afraid.

7. How does Joby view the other soldiers?
   Joby guesses that the soldiers are confident. He imagined them whispering, “I’m the one of all the rest who won’t die.”
   Joby describes them as talking through the night that they will live and someone else will die in battle. He believes that they are prepared for battle and will return home. “…that’s all very well for them, they can give as good as they get!”

8. On page 555, Joby states, “Nothing was as it once was.” What does this statement tell us about Joby’s state of mind? Support your answer with evidence from the text.
   At this point Joby is feeling unprepared, lonely, and confused.
   - “There wasn’t a man-boy on this ground tonight who did not have a shield…” except for Joby.
   - “The boy felt his family move yet farther away in the dark…leaving him with this drum.”
   - “A peach blossom flicked him but it was a moth. Nothing stayed put. Nothing had a name.”

9. What is the author trying to portray with this quote on page 555: “If he lay very still, when the dawn came up and the soldiers put on their bravery with their caps, perhaps they might go away, the war with them, and not notice him lying small here, no more than a toy himself.”
   The author portrays the soldiers as “putting on their caps of bravery” symbolizing their courageous decision to go into battle. In contrast, Joby feels fearful and he is hoping that the soldiers will go away, “taking the war with them.” He compares himself to a toy which can be insignificant and left behind.

10. On pages 555-556, the general discovers that the crying soldier is Joby, the drummer boy. How does the general’s presence and conversation comfort Joby?
    The general encourages Joby to cry by saying, “Good get it over. Won’t be time once it all starts.” Once the general realizes that the young soldier is the drummer boy, he bends down closer to him and starts a conversation. The general’s scent is calming to Joby as he “smelled as all fathers should smell.”
    The general tries to comfort him by saying, “All right, Joby, don’t stir,” and pressing his chest gently. The text states that Joby relaxed after the general touched him.

11. On page 556, the general says, “Fool question . . . Do you shave yet, boy? Even more of a fool. There’s your cheek, fell right off the tree overhead.” What is the general saying about the boy in this quote?
    He is saying that the boy is too young to grow a beard. His cheek is covered with fuzz, like that on a peach.

12. On page 556, the general admits that he cried the night before. How does this affect Joby? What is the general afraid of?
    The general expresses his fears when he states, “It’s going to be a crazy time. More innocents will get shot out of pure enthusiasm than ever got shot before. Owl Creek was just full of boys splashing around in the noonday sun just a few hours ago. I fear it will be full of boys again, just floating, at sundown tomorrow, not caring where the tide takes
them.” Clearly, the general is afraid that the lives of many young soldiers will be lost. Joby responds, “You sir?” as if he is surprised. This is when Joby realizes that the general also has fears.

13. On page 558, the general states, “When you got a bunch of wild horses on a loose rein somewhere, somehow you got to bring order, rein them in.” Why would he tell this to Joby? The general uses this line to explain to Joby how he will have to unite the young soldiers. He is telling Joby this to let him know how much he will need him. The general knows that Joby is very afraid and he may think that being needed will give him courage to face his fears.

14. Why does the general say that the drummer boy is the “heart of the army”? Provide evidence from the text to support your answer.

He needs Joby to set a pace with his drum so that the men will fight with a strong spirit. “If he, Joby, beat slow tomorrow, the heart would beat slow in the men.” “But if he beat a sure, steady, ever fast rhythm, then, then their knees will come up in a long line down over that hill…” “He gave the orders, but Joby set the pace.” The beat is a controlling force; it sets the tone of war.

15. The author spends time describing the interaction between Joby and the general. How does the interaction on page 558 help Joby understand his importance in the battle? The general expresses his need for the drummer boy. “I got to make one army of them. And for that, boy, I need you.” “Do you know now you’re general of the army when the general’s left behind?”

16. On pages 555-559, how does Joby’s conversation with the general help him to overcome his fears? The general helps Joby to overcome his fears by sharing his own fears, dispelling the reality of war, and describing the importance of his role as the drummer boy leading the unit into battle. After the general explains that Joby’s drumming will start the “…blood moving fast…” and “…make men feel as if they put on steel. He must keep at it, at it!” Joby realized that in spite of his fears he must be the drummer boy.

17. At the end of the story, “Joby swallowed, wiped his eyes and cleared his throat, he settled himself. Then, at last, very slowly and firmly, he turned the drum so that it faced up toward the sky.” What does this mean? He slowly calmed himself and turned the drum upward. This may indicate that Joby found the courage to face his fears.