Poetry Connection

The play in this issue of Scope takes its name from a poem called “Invictus,” written by the 19th-century English poet William Ernest Henley. “Invictus” gave Mandela strength during his 27-year jail sentence. In the play, Mandela gives a copy of the poem to Pienaar with the hope that it will give him strength too.

Directions: Read the poem below and answer the questions that follow.

Invictus

Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the Pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance
I have not winced nor cried aloud.
Under the bludgeonings of chance
My head is bloody, but unbowed.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears
Looms but the Horror of the shade,
And yet the menace of the years
Finds, and shall find, me unafraid.

It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll.
I am the master of my fate:
I am the captain of my soul.

1. **Invictus** is Latin for **unconquered**. What clue does this provide about the poem’s theme?
   - A. It will probably explore strength and bravery.
   - B. It will probably praise the city of Rome.
   - C. It will probably deal with Greek mythology.

2. What are bludgeonings (line 7)?
   - A. beatings
   - B. hungerings
   - C. storms

3. What does it mean to be bludgeoned by chance?
   - A. to receive a stroke of good luck
   - B. to be harmed by fate
   - C. to gain an understanding of the world

4. What is the tone in the first stanza?
   - A. humorous
   - B. declarative
   - C. angry

5. Which sentence summarizes the final stanza?
   - A. Ships must be steered.
   - B. Courage is hard to find.
   - C. No matter what stands in my way, I am always in charge of my life.

6. Which lines tell you that the speaker isn’t frightened of what life may bring?

7. Why isn’t the speaker frightened?

8. How does this poem apply to Nelson Mandela?