

Rebecca Walker, "Putting Down the Gun"

MULTIPLE CHOICE

Rebecca Walker, *Putting Down the Gun*

The idea for this book was born one night after a grueling conversation with	
my	1
then eleven-year-old son. He had come home from his progressive middle school	2
unnaturally quiet and withdrawn, shrugging off my questions of concern with	3
uncharacteristic irritability. Where was the sunny, chatty boy I dropped off that	4
morning? What had befallen him in the perilous halls of middle school? I backed off	5
but kept a close eye on him, watching for clues.	6
An hour or so passed like this before he announced that he had a question. He	7
had morphed back into the child I knew, and was lying down with a colorful blanket	8
over his legs, using one hand to scratch behind the dog's ears. "I've been thinking that	9
maybe I should play sports at school."	10
"Sports?" I replied with surprise, swiveling around and leaning back in my	
chair.	11
"Any sport in mind, or just sports in general?"	12
A nonchalant shrug. "Maybe softball, I like softball."	13
I cocked my head to one side. "What brought this on?"	14
"I don't know," he said. "Maybe girls will like me if I play sports."	15
<i>Excuse me?</i>	16
My boy is intuitive, smart, and creative beyond belief. At the time he loved ani-	17
mals, Japanese anime, the rap group Dead Prez, and every thing having to do with	18
snowboarding. He liked to help both of his grandmothers in the garden. He liked to	19
read science fiction. He liked to climb into bed with me and lay his head on my chest.	20
He liked to build vast and intricate cities with his Legos, and was beginning what I	21
thought would be a lifelong love affair with chess.	22
<i>Maybe girls would like him if he played sports?</i>	23
Call me extreme, but I felt like my brilliant eleven-year-old daughter had come	24
home and said, "Maybe boys will like me if I stop talking in class." Or my gregarious	25
African-American son had told me, "Maybe the kids will like me if I act white."	26
I tried to stay calm as he illuminated the harsh realities of his sixth grade social	27
scene. In a nutshell, the girls liked the jocks the best, and sometimes deigned to give	28
the time of day to the other team, the computer nerds. Since he wasn't allowed to	29
play	
violent computer games — we forbade them in our house — he was having trouble	30
securing his place with the latter, hence his desire to assume the identity of the for-	31
mer. When I asked about making friends based on common interests rather than	32
superficial categories, he got flustered. "You don't understand," he said huffily. "Boys	33
talk about sports, like their matches and who scored what and stuff, or they talk about	34
new versions of computer games or tricks they learned to get to higher levels." Tears	35
welled up in his eyes. "I don't have anything to talk about."	36
He was right; until that moment I had had no idea, but suddenly the truth of	37
being a sixth-grade boy in America crystallized before me. My beautiful boy and	38
every other mother's beautiful boy had what essentially boiled down to two options:	39
fight actually in sport, or fight virtually on the computer. Athlete, gladiator, secret	40
agent, Tomb Raider. The truth of his existence, his many likes and dislikes, none of	41
them having to do with winning or killing of any kind, had no social currency. My	42
son could compete and score, perform and win, or be an outcast or worse, invisible,	43
is unique gifts unnoticed and unharvested, the world around him that much more	44
impoverished.	45
That night I went to sleep with several things on my mind: the conversation I	46
planned to have with the head of my son's school about the need for a comprehensive,	47
curricular interrogation of the contours of masculinity; the way girls find themselves	48
drawn to more "traditional" displays of masculinity because they are more unsure	49

than ever about how to experience their own femininity; and the many hours and
endless creativity I would have to devote to ensuring that my son's true self would not
be entirely snuffed out by the cultural imperative. 50
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And then there was the final and most chilling thought of all: 53
A bat, a "joy stick." What's next, a gun? 54
It occurred to me that my son was being primed for war, was being prepared to
pick up a gun. The first steps were clear: Tell him that who he is authentically is not
enough; tell him that he will not be loved unless he abandons his own desires and
picks up a tool of competition; tell him that to really be of value he must stand ready
to compete, dominate, and, if necessary, kill, if not actually then virtually, financially,
athletically. 55
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If one's life purpose is obscured by the pressure to conform to a generic type and
other traces of self are ostracized into shadow, then just how difficult is it to pick up a
gun, metaphoric or literal, as a means of self-definition, as a way of securing what
feels like personal power? 61
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1. Which of the following best recaps the observations Walker made about her son that formed the "idea for this book" (line 1)?
 - a. self-confident
 - b. insecure
 - c. irritating
 - d. energizing
 - e. amusing

2. In order of prevalence, which of the following best outlines the modes of discourse evident in the passage?
 - a. description, exposition, persuasion
 - b. narration, exposition, description
 - c. description, persuasion, exposition
 - d. narration, persuasion, exposition
 - e. exposition, narration, description

3. In lines 9–15, what is the determining factor at work in Walker's use of dialogue?
 - a. pacing
 - b. pathos
 - c. dissonance
 - d. characterization
 - e. voice

4. Paragraph 8 (lines 17–22) provides mainly
 - a. exposition about the son
 - b. argumentation from the mother
 - c. description of school sports
 - d. narration of preteen scheduling
 - e. understatement of humorous events

5. Besides italics, which two elements of composition are emphasized in lines 16, 23, and 54?
 - a. generalization and conundrum
 - b. rhetorical question and tone
 - c. anecdote and counterargument
 - d. coherence and hyperbole
 - e. None of the above

6. In context, “no social currency” (line 42) refers to
- a. the speaker’s income level
 - b. children’s desire for games
 - c. our society’s intolerance of diversity
 - d. the passage’s focus on greed
 - e. an argument favoring honesty
7. Which of the following best restates the idea behind the title “Putting Down the Gun”?
- a. Boys will be boys.
 - b. We need to encourage alternatives to gender roles.
 - c. Let’s commit to rebuilding kids’ games.
 - d. Kids should grow up without ridicule.
 - e. Let’s make fun of toys.
8. The last paragraph (lines 61–64) highlights the passage’s
- a. deductive reasoning
 - b. faulty analogies
 - c. inductive reasoning
 - d. hasty generalizations
 - e. logical fallacies

1. *Although Walker mentions that her son was “shrugging off” her questions with “uncharacteristic irritability” (lines 3–4), he was “unnaturally quiet and withdrawn” (line 3), which could be signs of uncertainty and insecurity on his part.*
2. *Walker uses mainly chronological details (narration) to persuade her audience that the dilemma that boys face as they approach adolescence is harmful to their growth. Occasionally, she also uses exposition to provide background details.*
3. *While pacing can influence a writer’s choice to use dialogue to move a literary piece from one section to another, in this passage, dialogue such as “What brought this on?” (line 14) and “Maybe girls will like me if I play sports” (line 15), along with dialogue tags such as “I replied with surprise” (line 11) and “A nonchalant shrug” (line 13) indicate that characterization was the determining factor for the use of dialogue.*
4. *In lines 17–22, Walker lists details that provide background information about her son and satisfy some questions that readers might have concerning his character traits and preferences.*
5. *“Excuse me?” (line 16), “Maybe girls would like him if he played sports?” (line 23), and “What’s next, a gun?” (line 54) are rhetorical questions about ideas the speaker wants the audience to consider. Besides the use of italics, Walker emphasizes the nature of these ideas with her tone, her attitude toward the subject of growing up male in America.*
6. *By using the phrase “social currency” (line 42), the speaker pinpoints our society’s tendency to overlook individuality and apply conforming pressure among children that disregards their emerging self-identity.*
7. *The passage’s title suggests we should reduce our reliance on traditional gender roles, especially those involving toy guns and sports competition for boys.*
8. *In lines 61–64, Walker uses inductive reasoning to conclude the passage. She forms a generalization in an interrogatory sentence that is based on a series of specifics on how gender roles constrict individual development.*