THE ROLL CALL
by Dan Pagis

He stands, stamps a little in his boots,
Rubs his hands. He's cold in the morning breeze;
A diligent angel, who worked hard for his promotions.
Suddenly he thinks he's made a mistake: all eyes,
he counts again in the open notebook
all the bodies waiting for him in the square,
camp within camp: only I
am not there, am not there, am a mistake,
turn off my eyes, quickly, erase my shadow.
I shall not want. The sun will be all right
without me: here forever.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Weather conditions are mentioned. What does the poet want the reader to learn from the effect which the weather has on the man in "boots?"

2. Explain the irony in the poet's depiction of the person in charge of the roll call as "a diligent angel." . Why is this significant?

3. The men in the roll call are referred to as **bodies**. How doe the poet's choice of language reflect a major theme in the poem? We have come across this type of language often in our study of the Holocaust. Can you think of other examples?

4. Why is the square where the roll call takes place called a "camp within a camp?"

5. The poem is clearly divided into two short sections: In the first section, the focus is on the guard; in the second section, the focus shifts to the prisoner. Two words are repeated in both sections and dramatically link together the two parts of the poem. Find the words and then discuss how they function, i.e. how they are used to contrast the guard conducting the roll call and the victim? Go to the following Web site (http://members.tripod.com/~dhrc/exhibit.htm) and you will find a powerful visual image of what the poet expresses:

6. What does the line, "I shall not want"mean to you?

7. Speculate on the fate of the prisoner. How would you interpret the ending? Positive or negative? Give specific reasons for your choice.