

Lindsay Beckman, a student at Meramec, wrote the following poem. What is the poem's message? Is she inventing the concentration camp reality for the sake of dramatic effect or is she writing about events that could have taken place? You will find the answer in comments written at the end of the poem. **Please don't read these comments until you have read and discussed the poem.** Discussion in class or in the chat room

Black Light

In our shells of sack cloth
we huddled together
on the hard wooden bunk.
Most of the other women were asleep
or passed out,
so she used a hushed voice.
“My name is Helen,
not B6327,” she whispered
as she looked to her forearm
and then began to cough
violently.
I reached my arm
around her shoulders and nodded.
“I know.”

The next week I reached my same arm
out to gather the next swatch of material
for lampshade construction. I wrapped it
around the wire frame.
Desperately,
I tried to sew over
That part marked B6327

The scene of the poem is the Buchenwald Concentration Camp. Ilse Koch, the wife of the camp commander, had become a symbol for the extremes of Nazi cruelty.

“She was a very beautiful woman with long red hair, but any prisoner who was caught looking at her could be shot,” recalled Kurt Glass, a former inmate who worked as a gardener at the Koch family villa. “She got the idea she would like lamp shades made of human skin, and one day on the Appelplatz we were all ordered to strip to the waist. The ones who had interesting tattoos were brought to her and she picked out the ones she liked. Those people were killed and their skin was made into lampshades for her. She also used mummified human thumbs as light switches in her house

In 1947 an Allied court sentenced Ilse Koch to life imprisonment. She committed suicide in jail 20 years later.

1. Do you find any incongruity in the fact that Ilse Koch made lampshades from human skin while at the same time she had a gardener on duty?