“What, of This Goldfish, Would You Wish?” by Etgar Keret

Critical Vocabulary – Define each word

1. Poignant
2. Wizened
3. Beleaguered
4. Fluent
5. Flashback
6. Character Motivation
7. Theme

Read the short story “What, of This Goldfish, Would You Wish?” by Etgar Keret. Then, reread the lines indicated with each question below. Answer each question, citing text evidence.

1. Lines 1–13: Based on the first two paragraphs, summarize what you know so far about Yoni’s project.
2. Lines 14–26: Which details help you more fully understand Yoni’s character and intentions? Evaluate the line, “No prep, no plotting, natural as can be…”
3. Lines 31–47: What are the cultural backgrounds of some of the characters?
4. Lines 60–72: What does Sergei want from life? Reread the sentences in lines 69–70.
5. Lines 60–72: How do the description of Yoni and the use of the words *knocking* and *rapping* help the reader understand the effect Yoni has when entering Sergei’s life?
6. Lines 73–77: Are Yoni and Sergei communicating well with one another? What evidence supports your view?
7. Lines 83–100: What do Sergei’s actions tell you about his personality? How do Sergei’s actions contrast with Yoni’s first impression of Sergei? What is the effect?
8. Lines 124–127: Explain what new information is revealed about Sergei’s character in these lines.
9. Lines 135–150: What do Sergei’s first two wishes reveal about his character? How are these wishes like his reaction when Yoni looks at his goldfish? How are the wishes different from his reaction?
10. Lines 135–144: What technique does the author use to tell us about Sergei’s wishes? What effect does this have?
11. Lines 159–166: What type of relationship do Sergei and the goldfish have? What evidence in the text reveals this? What does this say about Sergei?
12. Lines 176–181: Why does Yoni think the Arab he finds is perfect for his film?

Analysis Questions:

1. When Sergei realizes that Yoni is dead, he must make a decision. What conflicting motivations must he sort out before he can decide whether or not to use his last wish?
2. The last section of the story is a flash forward. Readers must infer what happens in the intervening time between Sergei’s conversation with the fish and Yoni’s final report on his video. Is this structure effective, or would it have been better to know the details about Sergei’s decision? Explain.
3. A theme is an important idea about life or human nature expressed through a story’s characters and events. What theme about happiness does this story convey through Sergei’s situation and actions and the outcome of events?

Language and Style

1. Identify an example from the text in which the author’s language illustrates informal tone. Re-write the example with a more formal tone.