“Woman’s Work” by Julia Alvarez

Who says a woman’s work isn’t high art?
She’d challenge as she scrubbed the bathroom tiles.
Keep house as if the address were your heart.

We’d clean the whole upstairs before we’d start downstairs, I’d sigh, hearing my friends outside.
Doing her woman’s work was a hard art.

to practice when the summer sun would bar the floor I swept till she was satisfied.
She kept me prisoner in her housebound heart.

She’s shine the tines of forks, the wheels of carts, cut lacy lattices for all her pies.
Her woman’s work was nothing less than art.

And I, her masterpiece since I was smart,
was primed, praised, polished, scolded and advised to keep a house much better than my heart.

I did not want to be her counterpart!
I struck out... but became my mother’s child:
a woman working at home on her art,
housekeeping paper as if it were her heart.

1. What does this line from “Woman’s Work” reveal about the speaker’s attitude toward her mother?

   Her woman’s work was nothing less than art.

   A. She made fun of her mother.
   B. She respected her mother.
   C. She feared her mother.
   D. She didn’t understand her mother.

2. The ellipses in the line “I struck out... but became my mother’s child” help to emphasize ________.

   A. The speaker’s annoyance with her mother.
   B. Her attempt to break away from her mother.
   C. A sports analogy to appeal to a wider audience.
   D. The speaker’s affection for her mother.

3. Which of the following lines creates an image of the speaker assuming the mother’s role?

   A. “And I, her masterpiece”  
   B. was primed, raised, polished
   C. “did not want to become her counterpart”  
   D. “became .../a woman working at home on her art”

4. In what way does the speaker become her mother’s child?

   A. She keeps her own house spotlessly clean.
   B. She treats her own daughter the way her mother treated her.
   C. She does her work at home and toils at it with great care.
   D. She shines forks and makes lattices for her pies.

5. What does the word “bar” mean in line 7?

   A. a tavern  
   B. make crossed lines
   C. an iron pole  
   D. to prohibit from entering

6. Which line is evidence that her mother is meticulous (very careful) about cleanliness?

   A. “Doing her woman’s work was a hard art.”  
   B. “Keep house as if the address were your heart.”
   C. “She’d shine the tines of forks”  
   D. “She kept me prisoner in her housebound heart.”

7. Which evidence suggests that the speaker of this poem is Julia Alvarez herself?

   A. She uses first-person throughout.  
   B. She is credited as the poem’s author.
   C. She calls herself a “masterpiece”.  
   D. At the end, she says that (writing) paper is her art.