

**Night, by Elie Wiesel, translated by Stalla Rodway. New York: Bantam, 1960.**

**Story Summary:** Elie Wiesel's autobiography is a moving account relating his experiences as a teenager in Transylvania. He shares his memories of living with his family in a ghetto, his transport to Auschwitz and then Buchenwald, and his eventual liberation. Elie lived with his family in the town of Sighet and prior to 1944 there was little effect felt from Hitler's regime. Despite warnings, the Wiesel family and others in the small town did not feel threatened by the rumors of roundups and mass killings. With the eventual liquidation of the ghetto, the Wiesels are sent to Auschwitz. Elie loses his mother and sister, and he and his father are forced to endure constant terror and unspeakable conditions. The two are able to remain with each other despite great hardship and Elie vows to remain faithful to his father regardless of his own needs. During his incarceration Wiesel struggles with the idea of his faith and even begins to question the existence of God. This is difficult for a young man who had so lovingly pursued the study of the Torah and other sacred texts of Judaism. Despite the attempts of the Nazis to degrade and dehumanize the prisoners, Elie and his father survive Auschwitz. With the approach of the Russian forces the Nazis marched the entire camp through freezing snow to Buchenwald. There, just four months before liberation Elie's father dies. Wiesel is very straightforward in his approach and shares his story with great sincerity and frankness. Concepts that can be approached through this book may include the use of physical and psychological terror used by the Nazis, the questioning of one's faith under extreme conditions, and the courage and strength of individuals.

**Objectives:** Students should be able to:

- understand how the Nazis denied Jews and others imprisoned basic human rights;
- recognize the effects of persecution on the lives of victims;
- identify the significance of maintaining self-reliance and respect in the face of adversity;
- learn from history and apply it to their lives;
- explore the life of Elie Wiesel since his liberation; and
- understand how religion plays a role in an individual's life.

**Suggested Topics for Discussion:**

Introductory

- Explain why this memoir is seen as the preeminent piece of Holocaust literature.
- Why are memoirs from individuals important to use when teaching historical events?
- If Elie Wiesel was sitting in front of you right now, what would you want to say to him?

Content Specific

- Why don't people believe Moshe the Beadle when he returns to Sighet? Do you think if it had been another individual they might have been more willing to believe?
- Tell why you think that people stayed so optimistic despite the news they heard coming from Budapest and surrounding countries.
- What was the irony behind Madame Schächter in the boxcar screaming, "Fire, fire, fire?"
- What were the consequences of the man telling Elie and his father that they are to be eighteen and forty, not fourteen and fifty?
- When Eli's father was struck by the gypsy in the barracks (pg. 37), why didn't Elie help or defend his father? What effect does this event have on Elie in the future?
- Explain why you think the Nazis tattooed each prisoner with a number.

- At what point does Wiesel no longer see himself as a human being? What steps are taken by the Nazis to reduce Wiesel and the others to merely “a body”?
- What is the purpose of the prisoners marching to music? How does it affect the prisoners psychologically?
- Why are the prisoners so afraid of dying at the hands of the Nazis, but are not afraid of the Allied bombings of the camp? Explain your answer.
- Why was the event of Yom Kippur an issue to struggle with for the Jews of the camp? What was Elie’s decision?
- How might have things been different had Elie and his father decided to stay in the hospital instead of evacuating?
- How did Juliek deal with the experience in the shed? What is the significance of his choice of music?
- Tell why you think Wiesel relates the story of his trip to Arden, France and the man who liked to “give charity.”
- When Elie found his father gone in the morning, he stated, “I did not weep, and it pained me that I could not weep. But I had no more tears. And, in the depths of my being, in the recesses of my weakened conscience, could I have searched it, I might perhaps have found something like – free at last!” What do you think Wiesel was trying to express with those words?
- What did Wiesel see when he looked into the mirror? Was it him or someone else who looked back at him?

#### General

- Discuss the references to times of day (dawn, day, night) throughout the book.

### **Suggested Activities:**

#### Journaling:

- Keep a double entry log. Dividing the log with a vertical line, label the left side of the paper “Quotation” and the right side “Response.” On the left ask students to record a phrase, passage, or sentence(s) from what they have been reading. They should note which page the excerpt is from. On the right side the student should give a personal response to what they have written on the left. They should include the impact or implication of the excerpt, emotions or feelings resulting from the reading, and anything that they are uncertain about in regards to the passage.
- Use the following response starters throughout the reading of the novel:
  1. I noticed \_\_\_\_\_
  2. I suppose \_\_\_\_\_
  3. I don’t see how/that \_\_\_\_\_
  4. Why did \_\_\_\_\_
  5. I wonder \_\_\_\_\_
  6. I can’t believe \_\_\_\_\_
  7. I know that feeling \_\_\_\_\_
  8. If I were \_\_\_\_\_, I’d \_\_\_\_\_
  9. I’m having trouble with \_\_\_\_\_
  10. The main thing the author is trying to get across is \_\_\_\_\_

#### Pre-reading:

- Using *Atlas of the Holocaust* and Map #155, locate the town of Sighet and then find it in relation to a world map.
- Brainstorm the meaning of faith.

- Write about a specific family member and his or her importance in your life.
- Discuss the differences between fiction and non-fiction and the differences between a diary and a memoir.

Post-reading:

- Wiesel was forced to travel throughout Europe against his will. Using a map, locate the places mentioned in *Night*. Calculate the number of miles traveled by Wiesel throughout the course of the book.
- Using Map #1 from *Atlas of the Holocaust* trace the routes of people deported to Auschwitz.
- Research the Nobel Peace Prize to determine the requirements for receiving it and then research its recipients. Share your findings with the class.
- Write letters to Wiesel after they finish reading. Ask questions you feel have been left unanswered. (See guidelines on working with a survivor.)

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- Conduct a bibliography search on Elie Wiesel to determine other works he has written.
- Research the dictionary meaning of the word Holocaust. Write an essay exploring the reasons for Wiesel keying the term Holocaust to refer to the persecution and systematic murder of Jews during WWII.
- Create a Found Poem based on the book. Use words, phrases, or quotations from the book to compose an original poem based on a theme from the story.
- Research the revolt at Buchenwald.
- Develop character descriptions for at least three characters in the book. Include physical and personality characteristics, and quotes to support your findings.
- Research the Torah, Talmud, and Cabala. How are they similar to the Bible or other religious writings you are familiar with? Ask a rabbi to come to your class to explain the writings.
- Read Viktor Frankl's *Man's Search for Meaning* and write an essay based on its relationship to *Night*.
- Find examples of metaphor and simile throughout the book. Discuss the effectiveness of this technique in the book.
- Invite a local survivor into your classroom to share his or her story. (See guidelines for working with survivors.)

**Related Materials:**

- *Auschwitz*. Emory University. 30 minutes in b/w.
- *Auschwitz: If You Cried You Died*. Impact America Foundation. 28 minutes in color and b/w.
- Fine, E. (1983). *The Legacy of Night: The Literary Universe of Eli Wiesel*. Albany, NY: University of New York Press.
- Frankel, V. (1984). *Man's Search for Meaning: An Introduction to Logotherapy*. New York: Pocket Books.
- Gutman, Y. and M. Berenbaum eds. (1994). *Anatomy of the Auschwitz Death Camp*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Leitner, I. (1983). *Fragments of Isabella: A Memoir of Auschwitz*. New York: Dell.
- Levi, P. (1987). *Survival in Auschwitz*. New York: Macmillan.
- *A Portrait of Elie Wiesel*. PBS Video. 58 minutes in color and b/w.
- Spiegelman, A. (1991). *Maus* [vols. I & II]. New York: Pantheon.

- Wiesel, E. (1961). *Dawn*. New York: Bantam Books.
- -----(1995). "Never Shall I Forget". *Holocaust Poetry*. New York: St. Martin's Griffin.
- (1982). *The Town Beyond the Wall*. New York: Schocken.