

Teacher Guide

Grades 9–12

Night

Elie Wiesel

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NIGHT

by
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Teacher Guide

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Note

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Summary

The starving prisoners on the train fought to the death for a crust of bread. Meir Katz, who saved Eliezer from being strangled in his sleep, was among the 88 of the original 100 in Elie's car who died before the train arrived at Buchenwald ten days later. Eliezer's father, weakened by dysentery and too ill to leave his bunk, moaned for water, and an officer struck him in the head. He was taken to the crematory while Eliezer slept in the bunk above him. A couple of months after Buchenwald was liberated, Eliezer, looking in a mirror, was horrified at his corpse-like appearance.

Vocabulary

livid 93	obscene 96	dregs 94	inert 94
grimace 96	passenger 96	robust 97	leather 97
contagion 97	vulnerable 100	visitation 100	riveted 103
delirious 104	spasmodically 106		

Vocabulary Activity

Divide the class into four groups, each responsible for a group pantomime of one column of words from the list.

Discussion Questions

1. How does Wiesel convey a sense of hopelessness in the final section of the book? (See phrases like "indifference deadened the spirit" page 93.) What do you think would have happened to him if his father had died much earlier?
2. Why did the two men try to throw Wiesel's father from the carriage? (He appeared dead.) Why did the living reject him when the order came to throw out the corpses? (There would be more room.) Is the author saying that the prisoners themselves became less human as time went on?
3. How did the prisoners in the wagon (page 97) act like animals? (They fought to the death over food.) Why did the German workmen take a "lively interest in the spectacle" when they had merely stopped and stared at the marching prisoners, before? (Wiesel seems to be saying that they enjoyed the animal-like fighting and suffering.) Can you think of other examples of human beings enjoying the spectacle of other human beings in pain and misery?
4. Why didn't Wiesel join in the scramble for food (page 96)? (He didn't have the strength to fight the men.) How were Meir and his son like other fathers and sons Wiesel has described? (Meir's son deserted his father—indeed fought with him for bread—as Rabbi Eliahou's son had deserted his father.) What is he saying about how the concentration camps affected the bonds between loved ones? (The bonds weakened and broke; survival became the most important thing.)

5. How did Meir Katz save Elie Wiesel's life? (*Someone was strangling the sleeping Wiesel and Katz responded to the father's call for help.*) How did Wiesel's father try to save Katz? (*He told him not to lose faith.*) How do you know he didn't succeed? (*Katz died.*) When the author describes the various deaths, does he reveal regret? outrage? fear?
6. Why is it that Wiesel "could have wept with rage" when his father begged for rest upon arrival at Buchenwald (page 100)? (*Wiesel wanted a hot shower, didn't want to have to worry about his father's freezing to death after they had made it this far.*) Why did Wiesel feel that he was arguing "with death itself"? (*He knew that his father's life depended on his keeping moving.*)
7. Why did Wiesel leave his father when the sirens wailed? (*He wanted to quickly get out of the wing; on some level, he wanted to be free.*) How can you tell that he felt guilty about this later? (*He looked for his father in the mess hall to get coffee and food for him. Was his father angry? (It doesn't seem so, he was just grateful for the coffee.)*) Why did Wiesel feel that "no better than kabbal Eliahou's son had I withstood the test"? (*He felt guilty that he had deserted his father.*)
8. What emotions did Wiesel experience as he watched his father die that last week? (*anger, helplessness, emptiness—and also a sense of "free at last"—his father from his suffering. Wiesel didn't worry about his father*) What do you suppose was hardest for Wiesel?
9. Why did Wiesel decide to be an "invalid" (page 105)? (*so that he would be allowed to stay near his father*) Why didn't he see his father die? (*He was asleep when the body was taken away.*) Why couldn't he cry? (*He felt numb: had no tears left.*)
10. What were Wiesel's thoughts during the months after his father's death? How did he "cope"? (*Nothing mattered; he was idle, wanted only to live.*)
11. What would have happened if the children had gone to the assembly place, as ordered? (*Probably the Germans would have killed them.*)
12. Why did the SS flee the camp? (*a resistance movement within the camp decided to act.*) When was Wiesel finally freed? (*April 10, a couple of months after his father's death*) Why was he sent to a hospital? (*Three days after the liberation he became ill with food poisoning.*)
13. On what note does this book end? (*There is a haunting sense of hollowness: He looked at the mirror and "a couple gazed back at me."*) Would this be a better book if Wiesel had attempted a more uplifting tone at the end? Why do you suppose he does not?

- What should the response be to those who deny that the Holocaust ever happened—or claim that the atrocities were greatly exaggerated? Why do you think so many sites dedicated to these arguments have been set up on the Internet? Should they be allowed?

Drama

1. Work in small groups to act out key episodes from *Night*.
2. Rewrite a section of the story for “Reader’s Theatre.” There should be lines for a narrator plus a few speakers who read their lines while seated, using gestures and simple props.
3. Act out a trial based on one of the people in *Night* (such as one of the SS officers who forbade the mother to sit down and laughed as they ate soup off their neighbors’ blocks, page 62).

Language Study

1. Make a glossary of terms from *Night* referring to Judaism (e.g., cabbala, Talmud, Zionism).
2. Make a list of similes and metaphors found in *Night*.
3. *Night* was translated from the French by Stella Rodway. Discuss decisions translators typically have to make and problems they face. For those who read French—obtain a copy of *Night* written in French and do your own translation of a passage for comparison with Rodway’s.

Art

1. Discuss the cover illustration. Produce an alternate one.
2. Create a “scrapbook” of significant items in *Night*. Include captions.
3. Create a collage (using magazine cut-outs and/or small objects glued to posterboard) that conveys impressions from *Night*.
4. Create a “classroom museum” in which items related to World War II are exhibited. (First write or talk to family and community members willing to share experiences and memorabilia for the exhibit.)
5. Find and share artistic depictions of the Holocaust (for instance, paintings by Chagall). (The resource *Art from the Ashes* is a useful one.)
6. How have Jewish stereotypes been perpetuated in popular literature (even Shakespeare)? For example, find out more about 19th-century political cartoons that depicted Jews with horns and find out how horns became a central part of the stereotype.

Music

1. Prepare a “books on tape” reading of one section of *Night*. Include background music that captures the mood.