

Advanced Placement in
English Literature and Composition

Individual Learning Packet

Teaching Unit

Night

by Elie Wiesel



Prestwick House

Item No. 302055

Night

Objectives

By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to:

1. discuss the techniques Wiesel uses to convey character and character relationships.
2. analyze the use of literary elements like first-person narration, foreshadowing, suspense, and rhetorical questions.
3. understand the distinction between *Night* being a memoir instead of a piece of fiction.
4. respond to multiple-choice questions similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition exam.
5. respond to writing prompts similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition exam.
6. offer a close reading of *Night* and support all assertions and interpretations with direct evidence from the text.
7. discuss how Wiesel's style contributes to the dramatic development of the narrative.
8. demonstrate a literal, personal, interpretive, and critical understanding of the text.
9. analyze character dialogue to guide interpretation of a character's thought process.
10. analyze the characters of Eliezer, and his father, and their relationships to each other.
11. explain the importance of the title as a symbol throughout the narrative.
12. explain the central conflicts in the narrative, and explain the nature of the internal and external conflicts with which Wiesel copes.
13. understand how the decisions characters make affect their lives.
14. explain the escalating dehumanization process the Nazis imposed on the Jews.

Introductory Lecture

ELIE WIESEL

Elie Wiesel was born in 1928 in Sighet, a village in Transylvania, Romania. In 1940, Romania became part of Hungary, a country that was soon invaded by the Nazis. Wiesel had two older and one younger sister. His family belonged to the Hasidic branch of Judaism, which is an Ultra-Orthodox group. It is presumed that his mother and younger sister died in the gas chambers in Auschwitz when they first arrived, something he discusses in *Night*. He and his father were able to stay together through much of their time at the various concentration camps they were forced to travel between: Auschwitz, Buna, Gleiwitz, and Buchenwald. His father died during the last few months of WWII, but Wiesel survived and was freed when Buchenwald was liberated by the Allies on April 11, 1945. After the war, he learned that his two older sisters had also survived. Wiesel spent the next ten years living and studying in France, refusing to write anything about his experiences in the concentration camps. Eventually he wrote *Un die welt hot geshvign* (And the world kept silent). The original version of *Night* was written in Yiddish, and several years later, he wrote a French and an English version. Wiesel has written more than thirty books and numerous essays and short stories. In 1985, he was awarded the Congressional Medal of Freedom and, in 1986, the Nobel Prize for Peace. He is partially responsible for the creation of United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C.

ABOUT THE BOOK

Night is an autobiographical narrative of Elie Wiesel's experiences between 1941 and 1945, during World War II. The memoir originally contained close to nine hundred pages. When he translated it into English and French, he pared the narrative down in order to provide a first-person account of his experiences. While Wiesel uses figurative language and rhetorical features throughout the memoir, he allows the events to speak for themselves and does little to add to the brutality and terror that occurred. *Night*, *Dawn*, and *Day*, the trilogy of which *Night* is the first book, chronicle Wiesel's state of mind during and after the Holocaust. In the past few years, there has been some concern over the historical accuracy of *Night*. The teacher should note that Wiesel does not intend his autobiographical account to be a comprehensive picture of the Holocaust; the aim was not only to relate the horrible events he experienced during life in the concentration camps, but also to explore the relationships between fathers and sons, sacrifice and brutality, and humanity and God.

Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Make a list of the incidents that foreshadow the dangers that are coming to the people of Sighet. Explain why none of them, including Eliezer's family, believes that they are in danger.
2. Explain Wiesel's purpose in including Mrs. Schächter in the memoir. What function does she serve?
3. Throughout the memoir, Wiesel uses references to specific dates to help the reader understand the pacing of the events in the book. In fact, on several occasions he mentions Jewish holidays. How do the Jews in the concentration camps attempt to observe their religion in spite of the brutality they face on a daily basis?
4. Discuss Eliezer's character and the transition he makes from the young boy in Sighet to the man who is liberated.
5. Wiesel's story does not focus solely on the horrors of the concentration camps. At certain points in the memoir, he writes about events that gave him hope. Chronicle both the events and emotions that led Eliezer to wish for death and those that encouraged him to keep fighting to live.
6. Analyze Wiesel's unemotional response to highly charged incidents of murder, hanging, violence, and deprivation he witnesses after he is forced from Sighet. How are they different from the way he initially responds to being deported and his arrival at Auschwitz?
7. Wiesel brings up people who give up hope during their time in the concentration camps. Find examples of passages that illustrate the reasons why people choose to lose hope. Why are some people able to persevere and others not?
8. How does Wiesel demonstrate the dark side of human nature, in both the German soldiers and the Jewish prisoners? Describe the rhetorical and narrative techniques that he uses.
9. How does Wiesel's relationship with God change throughout the memoir?
10. Analyze the relationship between Eliezer and his father. Be sure to cite instances that demonstrate a shift in the relationship.
11. The title of this memoir alludes to one of the themes present in the book. Locate references to darkness and light, in its many different manifestations. Note the conflicts and emotions that are developed. Explain how the title relates to these scenes and how it functions as a unifying theme.

Night

Preface to the New Translation

1. Explain the reasoning Wiesel uses for writing this memoir.

2. Why does Wiesel consider *Night* the most important book that he has written?

3. How does Wiesel explain what saved him?

4. Explain Wiesel's purpose in writing the memoir.

5. What does Wiesel believe was the real purpose behind the Nazi movement?

Section One

1. Describe Moishe the Beadle. Explain the significance of beginning the narration with a description of a man who would normally be considered an outsider to the narrator.

2. In narration, the reader may learn a great deal about the narrator based on the details and observations he or she makes about other characters in the novel. What do we learn about Wiesel based on his interactions with Moishe the Beadle?

3. Explain the theme of the following passage; it will be revisited throughout the memoir.

He [Moishe the Beadle] explained to me, with great emphasis, that every question possessed a power that was lost in the answer...

Man comes closer to God through the questions he asks Him, he liked to say. Therein lays true dialogue. Man asks and God replies. But we don't understand His replies. We cannot understand them.

4. How does the following sentence serve as possible foreshadowing in the memoir?

"Every human being has his own gate."

5. Explain the community's reaction to the expulsion of the foreign Jews from Sighet.

6. What happens to Moishe the Beadle after he is expelled from Sighet?

7. Compare Moishe at the beginning of the memoir with how he is portrayed after his escape from death in the forest.

8. How do the people of Sighet respond to Moishe the Beadle's tales?

9. Wiesel writes, "This was toward the end of 1942." Explain the rhetorical strategy he uses on the next page: "Thus passed the year 1943." Why does Wiesel use this rhetorical technique to end the narration about 1943? What is the technique called?

10. Read the following line from the text: “We returned to our places, shame in our souls but fear gnawing at us nevertheless.” Why would Eliezer feel shame at this point?

11. How does the sentence structure in the final passage of this section reflect Eliezer’s emotions as they reach Birkenau?

“In front of us, those flames. In the air, the smell of burning flesh. It must have been around midnight. We had arrived. In Birkenau.”

Section Five

1. What is significant about the time of year that coincides with the beginning of the next section?

2. Concentrate on the paragraph that begins with “Why, but why would I bless Him?” What is Wiesel’s tone in this passage? How do you understand this passage?

3. Based on the paragraph that begins, “But now, I no longer pleaded...,” how has Eliezer changed?

4. Characterize the relationship between Eliezer and his father in the paragraph that starts with “I ran to look for my father.”

5. When Yom Kippur approaches, the men in camp debate the issue of fasting. Many of the men do not believe they should fast because of the dangers, and others want fast to show God that they still believe. Explain Eliezer’s reasoning and how he deals with this conflict.

Section Seven

1. With what specific motif does Wiesel begin the next section?

2. Explain the euphemism of “gravediggers.”

3. Explain the imagery of darkness and light as Wiesel uses it during the train ride to the middle of Germany.

4. Describe the scene that Eliezer relates that demonstrates the true brutality of both the German laborers and the Jewish prisoners.

5. Re-read the opening paragraph that begins with “In the wagon where the bread had landed....” Examine and explain the language Wiesel uses.
