

Individual Learning Packet

Teaching Unit

Night

by Elie Wiesel

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Night

Notes

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. Elie had two older sisters and one younger sister. His family was Jewish; Wiesel's family were members of 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, Buchenwald, and Gleiwitz. Elie's father died during the last few months of WWII. Elie 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 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.

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 camp, but also to explore the relationships between fathers and sons, sacrifice and brutality, and humanity and God.

All references are from the Hill and Wang edition of *Night*, copyright 2006.

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Objectives

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

1. provide support from the text that will demonstrate that a major theme in this book is that man's inhumanity to man has no limit.
2. state the significance of the title and point out what the word symbolizes.
3. write an essay in which comments and incidents from the book are used to support this generalization:
"A major theme in this novel is a boy's loss of innocence in a world he thought good and a loss of faith in a God he thought just."
4. recognize the cunning of the SS methods that, coupled with the human need to feel optimistic in the face of danger, led the Jews of Sighet to cooperate in their own destruction.
5. point out how the writer's style and use of irony in this narrative is unlike the style found in most first-person memoirs.
6. identify the following literary devices and point out how the author uses them:
 - simile
 - metaphor
 - personification
 - paradox
 - irony
 - foreshadowing
7. point out how the author uses symbols and imagery to convey ideas and images to the reader.
8. relate those aspects of the Holocaust that you have not known about previously.
9. recognize how a survivor of the Holocaust can be irrevocably changed by witnessing such horrific events.
10. infer from the text where the author believes that the guilt and responsibility for the Holocaust lies.
11. analyze the characters of Eliezer, Moishe the Beadle, Juliek, and Eliezer's father and their relationships to each other.
12. analyze character dialogue to guide interpretations of a character's thought process.

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Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Why do you think no one would listen to Moishe the Beadle's story?
2. There were several opportunities for Wiesel and his family to escape before they were sent to Auschwitz. What were these opportunities, and why did the family not take advantage of them?
3. Define irony, and discuss Wiesel's use of it in the first chapter of *Night*. What message is he trying to convey about the Jews' attitude, and how does his use of irony help him get his message across?
4. Define foreshadowing. Discuss Wiesel's use of foreshadowing in Chapter Two regarding Mrs. Schächter.
5. In Chapter Three, Wiesel says, "For the first time, I felt anger rising within me. Why should I sanctify His name?...What was there to thank Him for?" What is beginning to happen to the young religious scholar?
6. How would you describe Wiesel's style of writing? How does it affect the pace of the book?
7. Wiesel witnessed two hangings. After the first, he says, "I remember that on that evening, the soup tasted better than ever..." After the second execution, that of the young boy, "the sad-eyed angel," he writes, "That night, the soup tasted of corpses." It is unlikely that the soup's flavor differed greatly from day to day. What point is Wiesel making by comparing the two executions with the flavor of the soup?
8. On the eve of Rosh Hashanah, Wiesel says that he "felt very strong...stronger than this Almighty." Why does he say this? How is this a paradox? How have his experiences in the camps changed his views about his faith?
9. What do many of Wiesel's stories about camp life reveal about man's nature in the face of such overwhelming horror?
10. Discuss the symbolism and significance of the title, *Night*.
11. On one level this is a story of a young man's loss of faith. How does Wiesel illustrate that loss of faith throughout the book?

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Chapter 1

VOCABULARY

antechamber – a smaller room serving as an entrance into a larger room

billeted – to be quartered or lodged, especially in reference to troops

ghetto – an area of a city which contains and restricts a certain portion of the population; the Jews of various Eastern European cities were forcibly relocated into cordoned-off areas of the city where overcrowding, starvation, and forced labor were the norm. The ghettos were eventually destroyed, as Jews were deported to the death camps.

Hasidism – the ultra-orthodox branch of Judaism that teaches the individual to raise every action in life to the level of prayer

Kabbalah – the body of mystical teachings based on esoteric interpretations of ancient Hebrew scriptures

Miklós Horthy (1868-1957) – ruler of Hungary from 1920-1944; he initially enacted harsh laws against the Jews of Hungary but later rejected German pressure to deport Jews. Horthy was exiled after Germany took over Hungary.

[Moses] **Maimonides** (1135-1204) – a Spanish-born physician, philosopher, and religious scholar who fled to Egypt to escape anti-Semitism in Spain

Passover – a holiday celebrating the Jews' freedom from slavery in Egypt

phylacteries – small leather boxes containing strips of parchment inscribed with quotations from the Hebrew Scriptures used by Orthodox and Conservative Jewish men during worship

Red Army – the Soviet Russian army; Russia was one of the Allied powers (Britain, Free France, and the U.S.) during World War II.

Talmud – the codified body of Jewish civil and religious law including commentaries on the Torah

Torah – the first five books of the Old Testament of the Bible

waiflike – like a forsaken or homeless child

1. Who is Moishe the Beadle?

3. What has happened to Mrs. Schächter, and what does she do?

4. Mrs. Schächter’s hysterical screaming of “Fire! I see a fire!” is an example of what literary device?

5. How does this affect those in the cattle car with her?

6. When the prisoners are finally unloaded from the train, where are they?

6. What finally happens to the dentist?

7. What happens between Idek and Wiesel one day at the factory?

8. Who cleans the blood from Wiesel and soothes him with kind words? What is unusual about her?

9. Wiesel tells of meeting a woman many years later in Paris. What does he learn about her?

10. What else does Idek do to that harms the young Wiesel? How does Wiesel respond?

11. What does Franek, the Polish foreman, want from Wiesel? What is the boy's response?

Chapter 6

VOCABULARY

automatons – robots; people who act in a mechanical fashion

1. As the prisoners run through the night, what orders are the SS guards under?

2. “Death enveloped me, it suffocated me. It stuck to me like glue,” is an example of what literary device?

3. Although Wiesel feels that he could have easily given up and died, why does he run on?

4. Some time later, Eliezer’s father wakes him up. Why does he not let Eliezer sleep?

5. What agreement do Wiesel and his father reach?

5. Why do you suppose Wiesel then tells the story about the woman throwing coins to the natives?

6. Throughout this chapter, how does Wiesel view the average German civilian?

7. What scene does Eliezer witness? At the end of this scene, why might Eliezer have written that he was sixteen?

8. During the last day of their journey, what happens?

9. Of the one hundred men who had gotten on the train with Wiesel, how many survive? What does the death of Meir Katz suggest?

10. Where have the remaining prisoners finally arrived?
