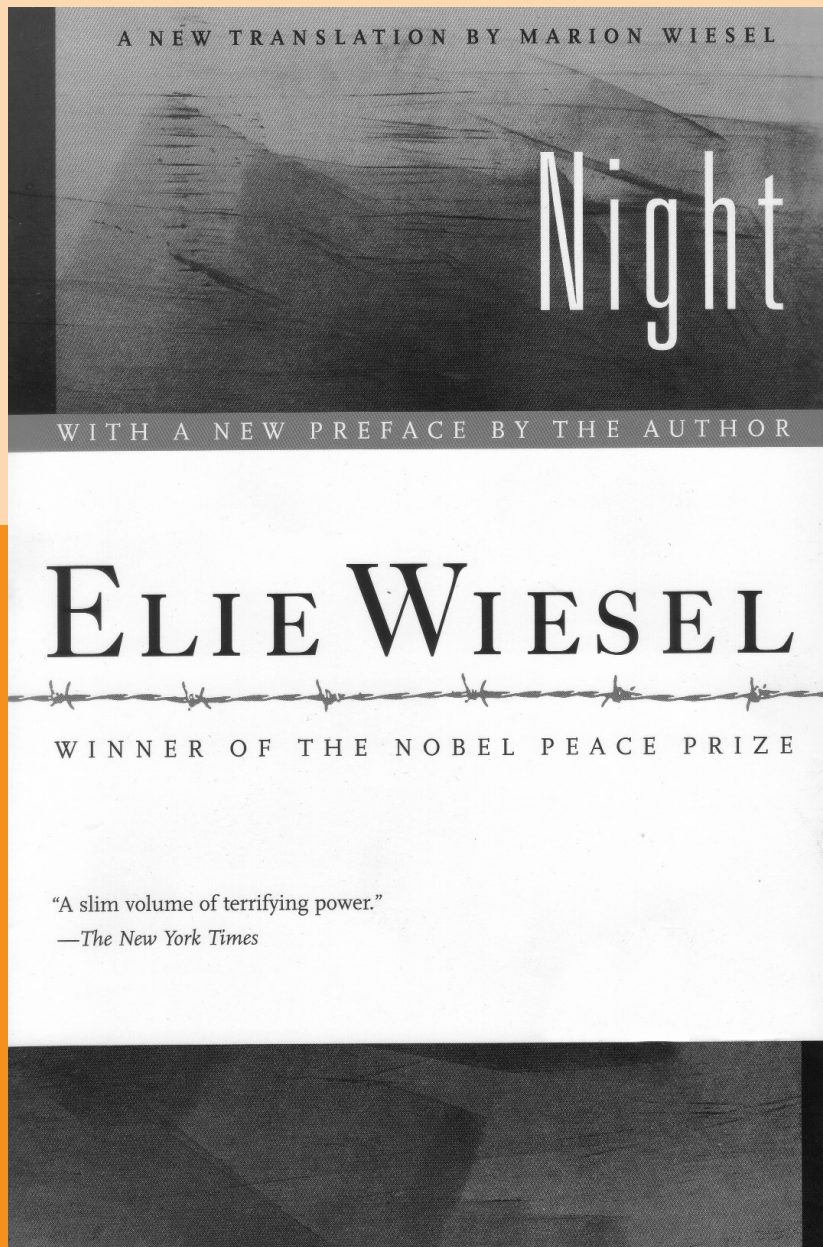


A TEACHER'S RESOURCE *for*



PART OF THE "WITNESSES TO HISTORY" SERIES PRODUCED BY

FACING HISTORY AND OURSELVES & VOICES OF LOVE AND FREEDOM

A TEACHER'S RESOURCE *for*

Night

by Elie Wiesel

Part of the "Witnesses to History" series produced by
Facing History and Ourselves & Voices of Love and Freedom

Acknowledgments

Voices of Love and Freedom (VLF) is a nonprofit educational organization that promotes literacy, values, and prevention. VLF teacher resources are designed to help students:

- appreciate literature from around the world
- develop their own voices as they learn to read and write
- learn to use the values of love and freedom to guide their lives
- and live healthy lives free of substance abuse and violence.

Voices of Love and Freedom was founded in 1992 and is a collaboration of the Judge Baker Children's Center, Harvard Graduate School of Education, City University of New York Graduate School, and Wheelock College.

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Facing History and Ourselves National Foundation, Inc. (FHAO) is a national educational and teacher training organization whose mission is to engage students of diverse backgrounds in an examination of racism, prejudice, and antisemitism in order to promote the development of a more humane and informed citizenry. By studying the historical development and lessons of the Holocaust and other examples of genocide, students make the essential connection between history and the moral choices they confront in their own lives.

For more information, contact FHAO, National Office, 16 Hurd Road, Brookline, MA 02445; 617-232-1595; <http://www.facing.org>.

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Witnesses to History

It has been said that memory is the imprint of the past upon us as individuals and as members of a family, an ethnic or religious group, a community, even a nation. Our memory is also the keeper of what is most meaningful to our deepest hopes and our greatest fears. *Voices of Love and Freedom* and *Facing History and Ourselves* have created teacher resources for six literary works that focus on individual encounters with history in ways that deepen our understanding of the connections between past and present. Each also reveals the importance of confronting history in all of its complexity, including its legacies of prejudice and discrimination, resilience and courage.

Voices of Love and Freedom and *Facing History and Ourselves* have developed a teacher resource for each of the following titles:

The Giver by Lois Lowry—a futuristic novel that explores the relationship between past and present, between identity and memory. **The Central Question:** How do our individual and collective memories shape who we are today and influence our futures?

Night by Elie Wiesel—a memoir that focuses on the final year of the Holocaust—a year the author spent at Auschwitz, a Nazi death camp. **The Central Question:** What is the relationship between our stories and our identity? To what extent are we all witnesses of history and messengers to humanity?

Farewell to Manzanar by Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston and James D. Houston—an account of a young girl’s experiences at an internment camp in the United States during World War II. It reveals how the time Jeanne Wakatsuki spent at Manzanar shaped her identity—her sense of who she is and what she might become. **The Central Question:** How do our confrontations with justice and injustice help shape our identity? How do those confrontations influence the things we say and do?

Warriors Don’t Cry by Melba Pattillo Beals—a first-hand account of the integration of Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas, in 1957. The book explores not only the power of racism but also such ideas as justice, identity, loyalty, and choice. **The Central Question:** What can we do alone and with others to confront racism? How can we as individuals and as citizens make a positive difference in our school, community, and nation?

Kaffir Boy: The True Story of a Black Youth’s Coming of Age in Apartheid South Africa by Mark Mathabane—a first-person narrative about the impact of racism and segregation on a young black South African in the 1970s. The book can be used to deepen an understand not only of racism but also of such concepts as identity, resilience, and resistance. **The Central Question:** What are different ways we struggle for freedom?

The Joy Luck Club by Amy Tan (coming in fall, 1999).

Teacher Resources

Each teacher resource is organized around a central theme or question related to the theme of the work. The following strategies are used to develop the central question and related ideas and promote literacy and social skills.

Central Theme or Question

While several themes from the story are explored in the teacher resource, the central theme has been selected to assure that activities build upon one another and provide students with a deep understanding of a key aspect of the story.

To Connect

The activities in the *To Connect* sections of the resources are pre-reading activities. They include suggestions for introducing the central theme, using teacher and student stories to encourage a connection with the central theme, discussing key concepts, and providing an historical and conceptual context for understanding the literary work. One of the primary purposes of these activities is to help students *to connect* their own personal experience to the issues raised in the story prior to reading the story.

To Discuss

After reading the story or a section of the story, a variety of discussion questions help teachers foster a lively conversation that deepens comprehension and widens students' perspectives. These questions also encourage interpretation of the text and develop important concepts as well as reinforce speaking, listening, and critical thinking skills.

To Practice

After students have read and discussed a story (or section), a variety of interactive activities provide practice in key literacy and social skills. Some of these activities involve the whole class in reenactments of key scenes, role playing, and debates. Others are partner or individual activities that provide opportunities to practice literacy skills (listening and speaking) and/or social skills (perspective taking and conflict resolution).

To Express

Students are encouraged to reveal their understanding of the story through the use of journals and structured writing activities. These activities help students appreciate the author's craft as well as develop their own writing skills. At the end of each teacher resource, the Final Writing Activity helps students express their understanding of the book and their responses to the Central Question.

To Participate

Some teacher resources contain suggestions for engaging students in community service projects at school, in the home, or in the neighborhood. These activities build on insights and values developed through reading and discussing the story.

Voices of Love and Freedom

Voices of Love and Freedom is a K–12 educational organization that helps students appreciate literature from around the world, develop their own voices as they learn to read and write, learn to use the values of love and freedom to guide their lives, and live healthy lives free of substance abuse and violence.

Facing History and Ourselves

Facing History and Ourselves is an educational organization that helps teachers and their students find meaning in the past and recognize the need for participation and responsible decision making. By providing an interdisciplinary framework for examining the meaning and responsibilities of citizenship, Facing History expands knowledge, challenges thinking, and stretches students' imagination.

About the Book

Story Summary

Night is a terse, terrifying account of the experiences of a young Jewish boy at Auschwitz, a Nazi death camp. The book opens in 1941 in his hometown of Sighet, a small isolated community tucked away in the mountains of Transylvania, then under Hungarian rule. Eliezer, the narrator, begins with a description of Jewish life in the town. He also draws a vivid picture of himself and his family. He focuses in particular on his fascination with his religion, particularly the mystical aspects of his faith.

In 1941, Europe is in its third year of war. By this time it has become more and more dangerous to be a European Jew. Yet, despite the news from other countries, the Jews of Sighet refuse to believe that they are at risk. They dismiss the stories of Moshe the Beadle, a foreign Jew who was deported to German-occupied Poland in 1941 along with thousands of other Jews who held foreign passports. After escaping from the Germans, Moshe returns to Sighet to alert the Jews to the danger and finds no one is willing to even imagine that he is telling the truth.

People prefer to be optimistic. Their optimism lingers even after German soldiers enter the town in the spring of 1944, force the Jews into ghettos, and, eventually, into cattle cars for deportation to Auschwitz-Birkenau in Poland. Among those Jews are fifteen-year-old Eliezer, his parents, and his sisters. Only when the trains pull into Auschwitz do they begin to realize the horror that lies before them. The women—including Eliezer's mother and sisters—are immediately separated from the men. It was the last time that Eliezer would see his mother and youngest sister.

In the weeks that follow, Eliezer and his father are stripped of their clothing, their hair, and ultimately their names. Each is now identified by a number tattooed on his arm. In the months that follow, they endure hunger, humiliation, and a violence beyond cruelty in the various camps that make up Auschwitz-Birkenau, including Buna, a slave labor camp. Then in the winter of 1945, as the Allies close in on the German army, the camp is evacuated. Eliezer, his father, and the other prisoners are forced to travel in winter on foot and in open cattle cars to yet another prison camp, this time Buchenwald in Germany. Not long after they arrive, Eliezer's father develops dysentery and slowly dies. Three months later, the camp is liberated. After several weeks in a hospital, hovering between life and death, Eliezer gathers the strength to look at himself in a mirror. He writes, "From the depths of the mirror, a corpse gazed back at me. The look in his eyes, as they stared into mine, has never left me." (page 109)

Critical Responses to the Book

Night was Elie Wiesel's first book. Written in Yiddish ten years after his liberation from Buchenwald, it was originally published under the title *And the World Has Remained Silent*. In 1958, it was condensed and printed in French as *La Nuit*, and translated into English in 1960 as *Night*. Wiesel wrote five other books in rapid succession: *Dawn* (1960), *The Accident* (1961), *The Town Beyond the Wall* (1962), *The Gates of the Forest* (1964), and *A Beggar in Jerusalem* (1968). In many ways, *Night* is

the starting point for Wiesel's other books.

Robert McAfee Brown, a professor of theology, has called *Night* the one book by Wiesel "that most cries out not to be touched, interpreted, synthesized. It must be encountered first hand."* Wiesel himself says of the book, "when I wrote it in 1955, while I wrote it, it might have been the only book I would have written. To me it would have been enough."** Although the book was favorably reviewed, it did not attract many readers. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, few people were willing to confront the Holocaust. Today the book has been translated into dozens of languages and is read by people around the world.

About the Author

Elie Wiesel was born in 1928 in Sighet, a border town of about 120,000 people. It is a town with a long and complicated history. After World War I, it was a part of Hungary, then handed over to Romania, and then taken back by Hungary at the beginning of World War II. During the war, the town became part of Hitler's Third Reich. After the war, it was under Russian rule for a time and then turned over to Romania.

Wiesel grew up in the Jewish section of Sighet. His father, Shlomo, was a shopkeeper who was deeply involved in the Jewish community. He wanted his only son (Elie Wiesel had three sisters) to be as practical as he himself was. The boy's mother, a well-educated woman, encouraged him to be pious. She would have liked for her son to become a rabbi. As a boy, Wiesel felt closer to his mother than his father. He immersed himself in religious studies and dreamed of becoming a scholar.

Then in March of 1944, the Germans entered Hungary and the boy's life changed forever. Within a month, the Nazis were deporting thousands of Jews from Transylvania, including about fifteen thousand from Sighet and eighteen thousand from neighboring villages. Wiesel, at the age of fifteen, was among those shipped to Auschwitz along with his parents and sisters. There his mother and youngest sister were immediately sent to the gas chambers. His two older sisters managed to survive, but he did not know their fate until after the war.

Wiesel and his father clung to one another from their arrival at Auschwitz to their entry into Buchenwald. There his father developed dysentery and died just three months before liberation.

After the war, Wiesel was sent to France along with four hundred other child refugees. At the border, the children were asked if they wanted to become French citizens. Wiesel, unable to understand the question, did not respond. As a result, he was stateless until 1963, when he became a U.S. citizen. Over the next few years, Wiesel studied French, continued his Jewish studies, and took classes in philosophy and literature. He supported himself by tutoring in Yiddish, Hebrew, and the Bible.

For Wiesel, the French language offered a "new beginning, a new possibility, a new world." Although he eventually became a reporter who wrote articles in

* Robert McAfee Brown, *Elie Wiesel, Messenger to All Humanity* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 51.

** Henry James Cargas, *Conversation with Elie Wiesel* (Justice Books, 1992), 89.

Hebrew, Yiddish, and English (which he learned in 1952 on a trip to India), all of his books except *Night* have been written in French. And it was a Frenchman who first encouraged him to tell his story. On one assignment in 1954, he met the French Catholic writer François Mauriac who not only urged the young reporter to write about his experiences but also helped him find a publisher. Two years later, Wiesel completed the first version of *Night*. After it was condensed and translated from Yiddish into French, Mauriac wrote the foreword.

The publication of *Night* marked the beginning of Wiesel's literary career. Since then, he has written more than thirty-five books. After their marriage in 1968, his wife, Marion, served as his English translator. The Wiesels live in New York City with their son, Elisha. Today Wiesel is not only a writer but also a teacher. He is Andrew W. Mellon Professor in the Humanities and University Professor at Boston University. He is also an observant Jew who continues to be a witness to history. He has spoken out repeatedly against injustices wherever they occur in the world. Over the years, he has received many awards for his work, including the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the United States Congressional Gold Medal, the French Legion of Honor, and, in 1986, the Nobel Peace Prize. In presenting the award, Egil Aarvik, the chair of the Nobel Committee, said the following of Wiesel:

His mission is not to gain the world's sympathy for the victims or the survivors. His aim is to awaken our conscience. Our indifference to evil makes us partners in the crime. This is the reason for his attack on indifference and his insistence on measures aimed at preventing a new Holocaust. We know that the unimaginable has happened. What are we doing now to prevent its happening again?

Through his books Elie Wiesel has given us not only an eyewitness account of what happened, but also an analysis of the evil powers which lay behind the events. His main concern is the question of what measures we can take to prevent a recurrence of these events.*

By the 1990s, Wiesel was expressing his concern by traveling to war-torn countries to call attention to violations of basic human rights.

About the New Translation

Elie Wiesel poses the question in the Preface to the new translation by Marion Wiesel, his wife and longtime translator, "Why this new translation, since the earlier one has been around for forty-five years?" His response is simple. Because he was an unknown author who was just getting started, he was simply pleased that his story was finally being published. He recalls thinking the original British translator's version of his memoir "seemed all right," but admits to never rereading it until now. Wiesel writes, "And so, as I reread this text written so long ago, I am glad that I did not wait any longer. And yet, I still wonder: Have I used the right words?"

* Egil Aarvik, "The Nobel Peace Prize, 1986" (Sweden, 1986).

What does Wiesel’s question open up for teachers and students to discuss in the classroom? What are the “right words” to express and document one’s experience in the camps? In the opening of the new Preface, Wiesel begins to respond to this important question by stating,

In retrospect I must confess that I do not know, or no longer know, what I wanted to achieve with my words. I only know that without this testimony, my life as a writer—or my life, period—would not have become what it is: that of a witness who believes he has a moral obligation to try and prevent his enemy from enjoying one last victory by allowing his crimes to be erased from human memory.

The Context of the Story

Much of *Night* takes place within a single year, 1944–1945. It was the final year of what later became known as the *Holocaust*, a Greek word that means “complete destruction by fire.” Between 1933 and 1945, Adolf Hitler and his followers murdered about one-third of all the Jews in the world. Young and old alike were killed *solely* because of their ancestry.

Roots of Antisemitism

Scholars are still debating why the Jews were singled out for destruction. Historians have traced negative feelings about Jews back over two thousand years to the time of the Roman Empire and the beginnings of Christianity. Jesus lived as a Jew in Palestine at a time of crisis. After the Romans conquered the country, they insisted that the Jews not only obey Roman laws but also worship Roman gods just as other conquered people did. When Jews refused to do so, they were labeled “stubborn,” “clannish,” and “hostile.” As pressure to accept Roman culture mounted, Jews searched desperately for a way to maintain their religious identity. Some urged open rebellion against Rome. Others, including Jesus, argued for peace.

As each side marshaled arguments in defense of its position, the debate increased in intensity. Still, all of the attacks and counterattacks took place within the context of Judaism. Only when Jesus’s disciples separated themselves from Judaism, did their words take on new meaning. They became, in the words of Krister Stendahl, a professor of Christian Studies, “missiles hurled from a mainly gentile Church toward the Synagogue across the street, from which now those Jews who followed Jesus had been excommunicated. And by that shift Christian anti-Judaism was born.” He goes on to say that much has been written about why and how the parting of ways happened, but no one factor was decisive. But once the division was established, both the Church and the Synagogue “felt the necessity to define themselves by sharpening their differences” even though the two faiths are more alike than they are different. As a result, each came to regard the other as not only different but also suspicious,

even dangerous.*

As a small minority in Europe, Jews were particularly vulnerable to attacks by the Christian majority. By the sixteenth century, many were totally isolated from their Christian neighbors. In a number of countries, people of the Jewish faith were confined to ghettos, sections of a city or town enclosed by high walls and guarded by Christian gatekeepers. With more rigid separation came new myths and misinformation. Jews and other minorities were increasingly portrayed as agents of the devil responsible for every catastrophe, from random crime to plague and drought. People had moved from fearing those they did not know to regarding them as the enemy.

Race and Antisemitism

By the 1700s and 1800s, even as the walls of the ghettos were coming down, a new idea was reviving the old myths and misinformation. That idea was *race*. Until the 1800s, the word referred mainly to people who shared a nationality or were related to one another in some way. Now many scientists used the term *race* to refer to those who shared a genetic heritage. Some were so certain that “race” explained all of the cultural differences they observed in the world that they distorted facts or made claims they could not substantiate. Many even ranked the “races.” At the top were the “Aryans,” a mythical people that left India in the distant past and carried its language and culture westward.

A number of people took pride in tracing their ancestry to the “Aryans.” Increasingly, these Europeans and Americans believed that, as the descendants of the “Aryans,” they were superior to other “races,” including the Jewish or “Semitic race.” In the past, Jews were targeted for discrimination because of their religious beliefs. Now they were excluded because of their “race.” *Antisemitism*, which literally means “against Semites,” was coined specifically to describe this new hatred of Jews.

Scientists who showed the flaws in racist thinking were ignored. In the late 1800s, the German Anthropological Society tried to determine whether there really were racial differences between Jewish and “Aryan” children. After studying nearly seven million students, the society concluded that the two groups were more alike than different. Historian George Mosse notes that the survey had surprisingly little impact: “The idea of race had been infused with myths, stereotypes, and subjectivities long ago, and a scientific survey could change little. The idea of pure, superior races and the concept of a racial enemy solved too many pressing problems to be easily discarded.”**

By the early 1900s, “race” had become the distorted lens through which too many people viewed the world. And as racist thinking became “respectable,” attacks against Jews and other minorities intensified. These attacks were particularly virulent in times of stress and uncertainty, like the worldwide depression that began in the late 1920s and early 1930s. At such times, having a “racial enemy” who can be blamed for society’s problems offers an easy answer to complex problems.

*Krister Stendahl, “Can Christianity Shed Its Anti-Judaism?” *Brandeis Review* (Spring 1992), 26.

**George Mosse, *Toward the Final Solution: A History of European Racism* (Fertig, 1978).

In 1933, for example, a Protestant minister in Germany wrote, “In the last fifteen years in Germany, the influence of Judaism has strengthened extraordinarily. The number of Jewish judges, Jewish politicians, Jewish civil servants in influential positions has grown noticeably. The voice of the people is turning against this.”* Yet government statistics paint a very different picture. In 1933, Jews made up less than 1 percent of the population. And of the 250 Germans who held prominent government posts between 1919 and 1933, only four were Jews. The myth of a Germany dominated by Jews was fostered by groups like Adolf Hitler’s National Socialist, or Nazi, party. In speech after speech, they maintained that the Jews were everywhere, controlled everything, and acted so secretly that few could detect their influence. The charge was absurd; but after hearing it again and again, many came to believe it.

The Rise of Hitler

In January 1933, Adolf Hitler became chancellor, or prime minister, of Germany. Within weeks, he had set into motion a series of laws and orders that replaced a democratic government with a dictatorship based on “race” and terror. From the start, he targeted Jews as “the enemy.” Little by little, step by step, they were separated from their neighbors. Then in 1935, Hitler announced three new laws that stripped Jews of citizenship and made it a crime for Christians to have contacts with them.

Once he was firmly in control of Germany, Hitler turned his attention to neighboring countries. By 1940, he ruled much of Eastern and Western Europe. In one conquered nation after another, Jews were identified, isolated, and ultimately singled out for murder. By 1943, most European Jews were either dead or on the way to death camps.

Only one large group was still alive: the Jews of Hungary. They were safe chiefly because Hungary was an ally of Germany rather than a conquered nation. As an ally, Hungary had its own anti-Jewish laws, but Miklos Horthy and the nation’s other leaders were not willing to murder or expel Hungarian Jews. By 1943, Hitler was demanding that they do so. He wanted jurisdiction over Hungarian Jews. When the Hungarians refused to grant it, he took control of the government. By the spring of 1944, the Nazis were shipping twelve thousand Hungarian Jews a day to their death. *Night* is the true story of a teenager who was among the hundreds of thousands of Jews deported that spring. Fewer than one out of every four of them survived the Holocaust.

*Victoria Barnett, *For the Soul of the People* (Oxford University Press, 1992), 24.

About the Teacher Resource

Exploring the Central Question



**What is the relationship between our stories and our identity?
To what extent are we all witnesses of history and messengers to
humanity?**

The Central Question, one of several important questions explored throughout the book, focuses on the ways memory, identity, and voice are linked. The question is reflected in the corpse-like image the narrator sees in the mirror at the end of *Night*. Wiesel has spoken of that image:

One day as I was looking in a mirror, I didn't recognize myself... I then decided that since everything changes—even the face in the mirror changes—someone must speak about that change. Someone must speak about the former and that someone is I. I shall not speak about all the other things but I should speak, at least, about *that* face and *that* mirror and *that* change. That's when I knew that I was going to write.*

This teacher resource explores how the author tells the story of *that* face, *that* mirror, and *that* change. It also considers why he views his writing as bearing witness. He once said in an interview, "In the Jewish tradition a witness is a kind of messenger. The witness says, 'That is how things are.' 'Amen' in Hebrew means, 'That's how it is.' The witnesses we are make us into messengers."** To the question of what that means to his readers, Wiesel replies:

True writers want to tell the story simply because they believe they can do something with it—their lives are not fruitless and are not spent in vain. True listeners want to listen to stories to enrich their own lives and to understand them. What is happening to me happens to you. Both the listener and the reader are participants in the same story and both make it the story it is.†

This teacher resource focuses on questions that help students better understand the links between our identity and the stories we tell, as well as those that bring together the storyteller with those who listen to or read his or her story.

Resource Overview

Students explore the Central Question by focusing on several connected ideas—identity, stories and storytellers, and witnessing. As a pre-reading activity, they are asked to list the memories, experiences, and ideas that have shaped their own identity. Then as they read, they begin to explore the identity of Eliezer, a young Jew who lives in a small town in the Carpathian Mountains during World War II. As the story

* From Henry James Cargas, *Conversation with Elie Wiesel* (Justice Books, 1992), 88.

** *Ibid.*, 84.

† *Ibid.*, 86.

progresses, students trace the way the boy's view of himself and others changes. At the end of the book, they consider why the author feels he must tell this story and how that story links us to him. Students will also reflect on the ways their own stories shape their identity and their role as both witness and messenger.

This teacher resource divides *Night* into five separate readings. In the first, teachers will want to not only introduce the Central Question but also place the book in an historical context. The next three readings focus on Eliezer's struggle to maintain his identity at Auschwitz. In the final section, students consider why Elie Wiesel believes he must tell the world what happened there and what that story means to readers. Students also reflect on their own stories and decide which require telling.

Literary Analysis

In *Night*, Elie Wiesel uses a variety of literary techniques in telling his story. Many of the discussion questions, practice activities, and journal suggestions explore these techniques in greater detail.

Genre: *Night* is not an easy book to classify. In many ways, it defies labels. Although it is a book that reads like a novel, it is a true story. Although it is autobiographical, it is not an autobiography. Elie Wiesel has called *Night* a *memoir*—"an autobiographical story, a kind of testimony of one witness speaking of his own life, his own death."* The witness speaks not in his own voice but as "Eliezer." In structuring the book in this way, Wiesel suggests that *Night* is as close as he can come to the truth of his experiences.

Some critics have described *Night* as a series of vignettes that follow a pattern found in initiation stories and stories of journeys. In an initiation story, a youngster goes through difficult trials to discover something new about himself or herself, people in general, or the world. Books about journeys are organized in a similar way. They, too, are stories of discovery, growth, and change.

Theme: Of his first night at Auschwitz-Birkenau, Wiesel writes, "Never shall I forget that night, the first night in the camp, which has turned my life into one long night..." The story that Eliezer tells is in effect a journey through a darkness that eclipses light. It is the darkness of Auschwitz, the darkness of the Holocaust itself. The quotation hints at other ideas explored in this teacher resource—remembrance and voice. Other themes include the following:

- Barriers to knowing
- The concept of "choiceless choices"—choices made in the absence of significant alternatives
- Survival

* From Henry James Cargas, *Conversation with Elie Wiesel* (Justice Books, 1992), 86.

-
- The relationship between parent and child
 - Dehumanization

Point of View: *Night* is written in the first person as an eyewitness account. It reflects Wiesel's belief in the importance of giving public expression to one's memories through personal testimony. This teacher resource explores why the telling of one's own story in one's own voice is important to both the storyteller and the reader.

Style: The original manuscript of *Night* was 862 pages long. Wiesel cut the manuscript to 245 pages for the first edition in Yiddish, the everyday language of the Jews of Eastern Europe. Later the manuscript was pared even further. The French edition is 178 pages long and the English edition, 109 pages. Wiesel says the following of his taut, concise writing style:

All my subsequent works are written in the same deliberately spare style as *Night*. It is the style of the chroniclers of the ghettos, where everything had to be said swiftly, in one breath. You never knew when the enemy might kick in the door, sweeping us away into nothingness. Every phrase was a testament. There was no time or reason for anything superfluous... If the violin is to sing, its strings must be stretched so tight as to risk breaking; slack, they are merely threads.*

Critics suggest other reasons for Wiesel's direct style. At the beginning of *Night*, Wiesel describes how Moshe the Beadle tells the townspeople of what he himself witnessed—the mass murder of thousands of Jews. No one pays attention to his story. Wiesel seems determined that, unlike Moshe the Beadle, he will be heard and believed. To accomplish that goal, he uses the techniques of a reporter. He writes with such directness and clarity that events speak for themselves. Each word is carefully chosen. Sentences are short and to the point. Some are just one or two words in length. The controlled language offers a sharp contrast to the reality about which it speaks—a reality that was beyond control.

Social Skills and Values

The social skills and values emphasized in this teacher resource are perspective taking, cultural awareness, and social awareness.

Perspective taking: The major social skill emphasized in this resource is perspective taking. Students are encouraged to view events from the narrator's perspective. In a sense, he is initiating the reader into his world.

Social and cultural awareness: Students are encouraged to explore Elie Wiesel's identity as a Jew in Transylvania in the early 1940s and examine the ideas, events, and experiences that shaped his identity.

* Elie Wiesel, *All Rivers Run to the Sea: Memoirs* (Knopf, 1995), 321.

Cross-Curricular Activities/Facing History and Ourselves

Night offers many opportunities for cross-curricular activities in social studies. It can be used to deepen understanding of ideas and content important to the study of history, psychology, and sociology, as well to the themes developed in a Facing History and Ourselves (FHAO) course. Many Facing History teachers teach the book along with the case study on the Holocaust.

Defining Identity

(pages 3-22)

Overview

Night begins toward the end of 1941 in Sighet, a small isolated town in Hungary. In introducing the community to the reader, Eliezer, the narrator of the book, focuses on Moshe the Beadle, the man who initiates him into the *kabbalah*, a form of Jewish mysticism. The story itself begins on the day that all foreign Jews in Sighet are expelled, including Moshe. He and the others are shipped to German-occupied Poland where the Nazis force them to dig their own graves before slaughtering them. Moshe miraculously escapes and returns to Sighet to alert his friends to the danger, but no one believes him. Moshe grows more and more silent as life goes on as usual. By the spring of 1944, the townspeople are hopeful that the war will soon be over. They hear on the radio that Russian troops are advancing farther and farther west. But within days of those broadcasts, German soldiers appear on the streets of Sighet. They order every Jew to wear a yellow star. Soon after, they set up two ghettos in the town. And just a few weeks later, deportations begin—this time all Jews are expelled. Eliezer, his parents, and sisters are among those marched to the railroad station and herded onto cattle cars headed for an unknown destination.

Teaching Focus

The Whole-Class Activity places *Night* in an historical context. The other activities focus on the factors that shape identity, our own as well as Eliezer's.

To Connect

Introduce the Central Question

Q: What is the relationship between our stories and our identity? To what extent are we all witnesses to history and messengers to humanity?

Pre-reading activities that help students to connect their personal experiences to the story

Night is a memoir—an autobiographical story. The term comes from a Latin word meaning “to remember.” In the book, Elie Wiesel recalls what he saw and experienced during the Holocaust. He tells too of how that story changed him as a person. When asked why he has chosen to tell it, he responds by speaking of those who did not survive to tell their own stories. “I owe them my roots and memory. I am duty-bound to serve as

* Elie Wiesel, "Why I Write," in *Confronting the Holocaust: The Impact of Elie Wiesel*, edited by Alvin Rosenfeld and Irving Greenberg (Indiana University Press, 1978), 202.

their emissary, transmitting the history of their disappearance, even if it disturbs, even if it brings pain. Not to do so would be to betray them, and thus myself."* Discuss that statement with students. What is he suggesting about the relationship between the story he tells and his identity? About the importance of "bearing witness"? Share with students the Central Question and explain that they will continue to explore these questions as they read the book.

Teacher Activity: *Who Am I?*

To help students understand the relationship between identity and memory, have them consider some of the factors that shape their own identity. Point out that "Who am I?" is a question almost everyone asks at one time or another. In answering, we define our identity. Our identity is a combination of many factors. It includes both the labels others place on us and the words and phrases we use to describe ourselves. Gender, ethnicity, religion, occupation, and physical characteristics are all part of one's identity. So are ties to a particular neighborhood, school, or nation. Our values and beliefs are also a part of who we are as individuals, as are the experiences that have shaped our lives. Some of these experiences are personal and private. Others demand to be told, because they make a difference to us all.

One way to help students think about identity is by creating identity boxes. To model the process, create your own box. It might focus on your identity today or when you were a teenager. On the outside of a cardboard box, write words that others might use to describe you then or now. Inside the box place pictures of people important in your life and brief descriptions of events that made a difference in your life or mementos of those experiences. Share several items both inside and outside of the box with the class. Be sure to explain the significance of each item you chose by telling how it helped to shape your identity.

Partner Activity: *Creating Identity Boxes*

Ask students to create their own identity boxes (or brown paper bags). Then have them share items in their boxes with a partner. They may also wish to share their boxes with the class as a whole. Encourage them to notice experiences they have in common, as well as the things that make each of them unique. Encourage students to add to their boxes as they read *Night*, a book about a young teenager whose identity was shaped by experiences very different from their own. Explain that their boxes will be used for a writing project after they have finished the book.

Whole Class Viewing: *Introduction to Night*

Tell students that they are going to be reading a story about a boy who survived a time in Europe when millions of children, women, and men were systematically murdered by the Germans solely because of their ancestry. That time in history is known as the *Holocaust*.

To provide students with a context for the book, you may wish to share the material provided in About the Author, the Context of the Story, and the Timeline of the Holocaust (Appendix B). You may also wish to show the first twenty minutes of the video *Survivors of the Holocaust* (TBS, sixty minutes, color; available from Facing History and Ourselves). The documentary draws on the experiences of young Jews in Europe before, during, and immediately after World War II. Produced by Steven Spielberg, it is structured chronologically and conveys both the diversity of survivor experiences and the enormity of the Holocaust. The first part of the film (through the creation of Auschwitz) establishes an historical context for *Night*.

The video can be used to expand on earlier discussions of identity:

- What do the survivors remember about their childhood? How are their memories similar to your own? What differences seem most striking?
- How did the Nazis' rise to power, first in Germany and then in other European countries, affect the way the various speakers saw themselves and others?
- Why do you think these survivors have chosen to tell their stories to the world? What do they expect you and others to learn from such stories?

At the end of this discussion, tell students that they will be revisiting these and others questions of memory and identity throughout their reading of *Night*.

Wrap-Up Suggestions

Explain to the class that they will be reading and discussing an autobiographical story set in Europe during World War II. The book focuses on a fifteen-year-old boy. It explores his identity, his experiences in a Nazi death camp, and his insistence on remembering what he witnessed so that he can tell the world. Identity. Memory. Witness. Messenger. These four ideas are central to understanding the book and applying its lessons to our own lives.

To Read

You may wish to have individual students read the first section (pages 3-22) aloud to the class as a whole or have pairs of students read to one another. Alternately, you might read the first three pages aloud to the class and then have them silently read the remainder of this section on their own.

To Discuss

After students have completed the reading, ask what questions or comments they have about what they have read. Help them find answers to their questions and address their concerns before considering the questions that follow. These questions have been grouped to focus the discussion on particular themes or subthemes. Many are designed to build critical thinking or reading comprehension skills. As students respond to these questions, encourage them to refer to passages or examples from the book that support their ideas.

*Open-ended questions that help students **to discuss** the most important themes and issues*

Explore the factors that shape Eliezer's identity.

- How does Eliezer describe himself?
- What is his family like? To whom in his family does he seem most attached? With whom would he like to be closer?
- What role does Moshe the Beadle play in Eliezer's life?
- How important is religion to the way Eliezer defines his identity?

Consider why no one believed Moshe the Beadle.

- How does Eliezer view Moshe at the beginning of the book? How do others in Sighet regard him?
- Why were Moshe and other foreign Jews expelled from Sighet? How do other Jews in the community respond to the deportation of foreign Jews?
- What did Moshe witness when he was shipped to Poland? Why does he want the Jews of Sighet to know what he saw?
- Why is it so important to Moshe that he be believed?
- Was Moshe a madman as some people claim? What does that label seem to mean in Sighet? What does the word mean to you?

Explore the relationship between Sighet and the outside world between 1941 and 1944.

- What do the Jews of Sighet know about the outside world in 1941? How do they respond to what they know?
- Why do you think they refuse to believe Moshe when he returns to Sighet?
- Do you think people really believe that Moshe is lying to them? What is the difference between saying that someone is lying and saying that you cannot believe what he or she is saying?
- What kinds of stories do you find it easiest to believe? What kinds of stories do you find it hardest to accept as true? What are the main differences between the stories you believe without question and those you doubt?
- What do the Jews of Sighet know about the outside world by the spring of 1944? How do you account for the way they respond to the stories they hear by word of mouth? Over the radio? Have you or someone you know ever responded to news in similar ways?
- How do the Jews of Sighet react to the arrival of the Germans? The creation of the ghettos? Their own deportation? How do you account for these responses?

Discuss the way the author tells his story.

- Why do you think Elie Wiesel begins *Night* with the story of Moshe the Beadle?
- What lessons does the narrator seem to learn from Moshe's experiences in telling his own story?
- Why do you think Elie Wiesel tells his story in the first person perspective? If *Night* were written in the third person, would it be more or less believable?

To Practice

Partner Activity: *Creating Eliezer's Identity Box*

Have students work with a partner to create an identity box for Eliezer much like the ones they constructed earlier. Ask students to insert in the box the labels Eliezer would use to describe himself. What events or expe-

*Interactive activities that help students **to practice** literary skills, social skills, and values*

periences seem most important to him? What books and ideas have shaped his identity? Have students write on the outside of the box the words or phrases Eliezer's family might use to describe him. How might Moshe the Beadle speak of Eliezer? Other Jews in Sighet? The Germans? Encourage students to compare and contrast their own identity box with the one they make for Eliezer. How are the boxes alike? What differences seem most striking? Tell students that they will add to Eliezer's box and their own as they continue reading the book.

To Express

Writing activities that help students to express their understanding of what they have read and learned

Encourage students to maintain a journal as they read *Night*. Unlike a finished work, a journal documents the process of thinking. Much like history itself, it always awaits further entries. A journal also allows a writer to witness his or her own history and consider the way one's ideas grow and change.

Journal Suggestions

- Write your responses to the book so far. You might also list questions and comments that come to mind as you read this part of the book.
- Create a timeline to show what has happened so far in the story. Add to the timeline as you continue reading.
- Continue to work on your identity box by writing thoughts and insights into your own identity as you read about Eliezer's. Are there connections between his identity and yours?
- The word *night* is a key word in this section of the book. What does the word mean early in the first chapter? How does the meaning change as the story progresses?
- The narrator from time to time breaks away from the story to tell the reader about something that happened later or to ask a question. Why do you think he has chosen to do so? How is he preparing you for the rest of the story?
- The narrator mentions a number of events in this section that take place for the first or the last time. List as many as you can find. What do these events have in common? Why do you think the author has chosen to draw your attention to them?
- Draw a picture or describe in words what you think Eliezer looks like in the spring of 1944.

Related Readings and Viewings

You may wish to explore the themes and subthemes in this section with videos and related readings.

- Read “Legacies” from the *Facing History and Ourselves Resource Book* for an interview with Maya Angelou. In it, she tells of one of the people who shaped her identity and the legacies he left. Ask students to name someone in their life who has given them a similar legacy.
- Read “Finding One’s Voice” from the *Facing History and Ourselves Resource Book* to explore how literature helped shape Julius Lester’s identity. Discuss with students what books and ideas have had a similar impact on their identity.
- Obtain *Challenge of Memory* from Facing History and Ourselves. It is a video montage designed to accompany *Night*. The first clip shows Elie Wiesel speaking to a group of students from schools in the Boston area. Discuss the message he wants to convey about the stories he and other survivors tell.
- Share with students the first story in *A Scrap of Time and Other Stories* by Ida Fink (Schocken Books, 1987). What is the “scrap of time” to which the title refers? Discuss why Fink calls it a time not measured in months and years but in “actions.”

Initiation to Auschwitz

(pages 23–46)

Overview

Eliezer and his family are crammed into a cattle car on their way to an unknown destination. As night falls, Madame Schächter, a woman Eliezer knew well, screams “Fire!” Her cries disturb the frightened families huddled in the car, but no one else sees the blaze. After people, including her own son, are unable to reassure her, they beg her to remain silent.

When the train finally pulls into a station, the first thing people notice is fire. Flames are gushing out of huge chimneys against the black sky. The Jews of Sighet have arrived at Birkenau, a reception center for Auschwitz. An SS officer orders: “Men to the left! Women to the right!” Eliezer and his father are immediately separated from his mother and sisters. As they are marched away from the station, the “veteran” prisoners are angry and amazed to discover that the newcomers have never heard of Auschwitz.

Almost immediately, an initiation begins. Eliezer and his father are stripped of their belongings, their hair, even their names. They are pushed from place to place, beaten, and humiliated without explanation. Eventually they are taken from Birkenau to Auschwitz where an officer tells them that they must work or go to the crematorium. Those are their only choices. A Polish prisoner quietly advises them to “help one another. It is the only way to survive.” Three weeks later, they are moved yet again, this time to another part of the Auschwitz complex—a slave labor camp called “Buna.”

Teaching Focus

Before assigning this reading, you may want to introduce or clarify names and terms used in this section of the book that may be unfamiliar to students. Brief definitions or explanations are provided at the end of this section. The partner activity and many of the To Discuss questions focus on the way the Nazis tried to strip Jews of their identity. The small group activity helps students understand how Elie Wiesel uses language to convey hidden meanings.

To Read

You may wish to have individual students read the second section (pages 23–46) aloud to the class as a whole or have pairs of students read to one another. Alternately, you might read the first three pages aloud to the class and then have them silently read the remainder of this section on their own.

Students are likely to encounter these terms and names as they read.

Auschwitz-Birkenau—established in 1940 as a concentration camp, a killing center was added in 1942 at Birkenau. Also part of the huge camp complex was a slave labor camp known as Buna-Monowitz.

Concentration camp—a prison camp in which individuals are held without regard for accepted rules of arrest and detention. The Nazis constructed concentration camps to hold Jews, “Gypsies,” communists, and others considered “enemies of the state.”

Death camp—a camp where the Nazis murdered people in assembly-line style. The largest death camp was Auschwitz-Birkenau. The term was also used for concentration camps such as Bergen-Belsen and Dachau where thousands died of starvation, disease, and maltreatment.

Kapo—a prisoner forced to oversee other prisoners.

Mengele, Josef (1911–1979)—senior SS physician at Auschwitz-Birkenau from 1943–1944. He carried out “selections” of prisoners upon their arrival at the camp and conducted experiments on some of those prisoners.

“Selection”—the process the Nazis used to separate those prisoners who would be assigned to forced labor from those who were to be killed immediately.

SS—in German, Schutzstaffel; the elite guard of Nazi Germany. It provided staff for the police, camp guards, and military units within the German army.

To Discuss

After students have completed this reading, encourage comments and questions. Important themes developed in this section include barriers to knowing, dehumanization, and the relationship between father and son.

Explore the relationship between knowing, madness, and belief.

- Why does Madame Schächter scream? Why does she later become silent and withdrawn?
- How do people react the first time she screams? How do they respond when her screams continue?
- Is she a madwoman? A prophet? Or a witness? What is the difference between the three labels?

- How is Madame Schächter like Moshe the Beadle? Does she, too, know or sense something that others refuse to believe?
- How do the “veteran” prisoners respond when they discover the newcomers have never heard of Auschwitz? How do you account for their reaction?
- What does it mean to know but not acknowledge what you know? When do people do it?

Consider how the Germans created terror at Auschwitz.

- How do the Germans orchestrate the arrival of newcomers to the camp?
- Why don't they tell the new arrivals what to expect?
- Why do you think the Germans take away the inmates' personal belongings? Their clothing? Why do they cut off their hair? Tattoo a number on each person's arm?
- Why does much of this section of the book seem to take place at night?

Explore the relationship between Eliezer and his father.

- Eliezer tells the reader, “Eight words spoken quietly, indifferently, without emotion. Eight simple, short words.” (page 29) What are those words and why is Eliezer unable to forget them? How do they help explain why Eliezer and his father cling to one another in Auschwitz?
- How does Eliezer respond when his father is beaten for the first time? How does that response affect the way he sees himself? What does he fear is happening to him?
- What advice does Eliezer's cousin from Antwerp give his father? How is it like the advice the Polish prisoner offers? What do both pieces of advice suggest about the meaning of a word like *family* in a place like Auschwitz?

Consider the way the Germans systematically strip Eliezer and other prisoners of their identity.

- How does Eliezer respond to the removal of his clothes and other belongings? To the shaving of his hair? The number tattooed on his arm? How do you account for these responses?
- Primo Levi, who was also at Auschwitz-Birkenau, wrote:

It is not possible to sink lower than this: no human condition is more miserable than this, nor could it conceivably be so. Nothing belongs to us any more; they have taken away our clothes, our shoes, even our hair; if we speak, they will not listen to us, and if they listen, they will not understand. They will even take away our name: and if we want to keep it, we will have to find ourselves the strength to do so, to manage so that behind the name something of us, of us, as we were, remains.*

How are Levi's responses to his initiation into Auschwitz similar to those of Eliezer? What differences seem most striking?

- Wiesel, in recounting the first night in the concentration camp says, "Never shall I forget that night, the first night in the camp, that has turned my life into one long night..." What does it mean for a life to be turned into "one long night"?

* Primo Levi, *Survival at Auschwitz*, translated by S. Woolf (Collier Books, 1993), 38.

To Practice

Small Group Activity: *Reading for Meaning*

Elie Wiesel has said that in his writing "the unspoken is as important as the spoken." Meaning often lies in the images he tries to convey through a single word or phrase. Perhaps that is why there are so many very short, even one-word, sentences in the book. Those sentences signal the reader that the author wants them to stop and think about the meaning of these words or phrases in this particular context. The word *night* is a good example. It clearly refers to more than a time of day. In the book, it symbolizes the Holocaust.

Divide the class into small groups and have members take turns reading aloud one scene from this section of the book. Then ask them to read a second time, this time pausing whenever they come to a word or phrase that seems to have more than a literal meaning. Ask students how they know where to pause and for how long. Discuss how those moments of silence affected their understanding of the scene.

Partner Activity: *Revising Eliezer's Identity Box*

Have students work with their partner to add to the identity box they created for Eliezer in the previous reading. How has his arrival at Auschwitz changed him? What parts of his identity does he cling to? What parts seem to be less important than they were even a few days earlier?

To Express

Journal Suggestions

- Write your responses to this section of the book. You might also record any questions or comments you have about the reading.
- Add to the timeline you started in the previous reading. What seems to be happening to Eliezer's sense of time?
- What did you find surprising or difficult to understand in this section of the book?
- The word *night* takes on new meaning in this section of the book. What has the word come to symbolize? How are the words *re* and *ame* used in this section of the book? What do you think these words mean to the narrator?
- Draw a picture of Eliezer or describe in words how he looked soon after his arrival at Auschwitz. How does this portrait differ from the one you created in the previous reading?

Related Readings and Viewings

You may wish to explore the themes and subthemes in this section using poetry, documentaries, and related readings.

- Share with students “Reserve Police Battalion 101” from the *Facing History and Ourselves Resource Book*. It focuses on what motivated the perpetrators of a massacre of the Jews of Jozefow, Poland. Discuss what Browning means when he writes that “after Jozefow, nothing else seemed terrible” to the soldiers who participated in the murders.
- Read aloud the diary selection by an unknown brother and sister in the Lodz (Poland) Ghetto reprinted in *Children in the Holocaust and World War II: The Secret Diaries* (Pocket Books, 1995). The entries were written at about the time Eliezer and his family arrived at Auschwitz. How does the mood of the diary resemble Eliezer's mood as he enters Auschwitz? The last entry is undated and the diary itself is unfinished. Discuss what probably happened to the writers.
- Share with students the poem entitled “O the Chimneys” by Nelly Sachs in *Against Forgetting: Twentieth-Century Poetry of Witness* edited by Carolyn Forché (W.W. Norton and Company, 1995). Sachs was a German Jew who survived the Holocaust by escaping to Sweden. In 1966, she was awarded the Nobel Prize in literature. Ask students what the chimney in her poem represents? What picture of the death camps does her poem evoke?

- In an article entitled “Beyond Judgment” in *Elements of Time* (available from Facing History and Ourselves), Primo Levi addresses the questions most frequently asked by students: Why didn’t the victims escape? Why didn’t they rebel? Why didn’t they avoid capture beforehand? Discuss with students the gap he describes between “things as they were ‘down there’ and things as they are represented by the current imagination fed by books, films, and myths that only approximate the reality.”
- Read “Auschwitz” from the *Facing History and Ourselves Resource Book* for three perspectives on the camp. The first is an account by Rudolf Hoess, the commandant of Auschwitz; the second by Rita Kesselman, a survivor who describes her first views of the camp; the third by Primo Levi who recounts the effect the camp had on him. Ask students how each of these views deepens their understanding of what Auschwitz was like. At the end of the selection, Levi tells of breaking off an icicle that hung outside a window. A guard immediately took it away from him. When Levi asked why, he was told, “There is no why here.” Discuss what the guard meant by that statement. How is that idea expressed in *Night*?
- Show the third clip from *Challenge of Memory* available from Facing History and Ourselves. In it, a survivor, Edith P., describes a transport that took her from Auschwitz to a labor camp in northern Germany. She tells of how she looked out through the wooden slats of the cattle car to see the sun shining and people going about everyday routines. Have students compare her description with Wiesel’s account of the outside world on page 41. Discuss why he and she, like many other survivors, are surprised by the sun.

Identity and Indifference

(pages 47–65)

Overview

At Buna, Eliezer and his father endure routine humiliations and random violence. At one point, a Kapo's assistant tries to take Eliezer's shoes. Sometime later, a Kapo demands the gold crown on his tooth. On yet another occasion, Eliezer is beaten for no reason at all. At the same time, his father is finding it harder and harder to keep up. Eliezer is torn between anger at him for not knowing how to march and his love for the man. More and more, Eliezer feels he is becoming a "starved stomach." Although a public hanging troubles him briefly, he and the other men are too hungry to think much beyond their dinner. Then a child and two adult prisoners are hanged for hiding weapons. Watching the boy slowly die, a prisoner asks, "For God's sake, where is God?" Eliezer, deeply moved by the hanging, hears a voice answer, "Where He is? This is where --hanging here from this gallows..." (page 65)

Teaching Focus

The activities that accompany this reading continue to explore identity. Several focus on the efforts of the Nazis to "dehumanize" the inmates by stripping them of their identity. Others, including the To Practice activity, consider the relationship between identity and resistance. A structured writing activity encourages students to relate the author's experiences to his struggle to maintain identity.

To Read

You may wish to have individual students read the third section (pages 47–65) aloud to the class as a whole or have pairs of students read to one another. Alternately, you might read the first three pages aloud to the class and then have students silently read the remainder of this section on their own.

To Discuss

Be sure to address any questions or concerns students have about the reading before focusing attention on the questions raised here. These questions continue to focus on the themes of dehumanization and identity. They also consider an idea that Wiesel explores in this part of the book and in many of his speeches and other writings: the opposite of

good is not evil but indifference. He explains this idea in the last section of his book *The Town Beyond the Wall*.

To be indifferent—for whatever reason—is to deny not only the validity of existence, but also its beauty. Betray, and you are a man; torture your neighbor, you're still a man. Evil is human, weakness is human; indifference is not.

Consider the relationship between Eliezer and his father.

- Give examples of the ways Eliezer's relationship with his father is changing. What is prompting those changes?
- What does Eliezer mean when he refers to his father as “his weak point”? Why has he come to view love as a weakness?
- How do the changes in his relationship with his father affect the way Eliezer sees himself as an individual? The way he views his father?

Consider how the process of dehumanization affects Eliezer and his fellow prisoners.

- How do words like *soup* and *bread* take on new meaning for Eliezer? Why does he describe himself as a “starved stomach”? What did it mean to see bread and soup as one's “whole life”? (page 52)
- Eliezer describes two hangings in this section. He tells the reader that he witnessed many others. Yet he chose to write only about these two. Why are these two hangings so important to him? How do they differ from the others?
- Why do you think Eliezer and the other prisoners respond so emotionally to the hanging of the child?
- Why do you think the Germans chose to hang a few prisoners in public at a time when they are murdering thousands each day in the crematoriums?
- When the young boy is hanged, a prisoner asks, “For God's sake, where is God?” Eliezer hears a voice answer, “Where He is? This is where—hanging here on this gallows....” What does this statement mean? Is it a statement of despair? Anger? Or hope?

Discuss the meaning of the word *resistance* at Auschwitz.

- What does the word *resistance* mean to you? Some insist that “armed resistance” is the only form of legitimate resistance. Others stress the idea that resistance requires organization. Still others argue that

resistance is more about the will to live and the power of hope than it is about either weapons or organization. Which view is closest to your own?

- Use your ideas about and definitions of resistance to decide whether each of the following is an act of resistance:
 - Eliezer’s refusal to let the dentist remove his gold crown
 - Eliezer’s decision to give up the crown to protect his father
 - The French girl’s decision to speak in German to Eliezer after he is beaten
 - The prisoner’s choosing to die for soup
 - The prisoners who attempted to stockpile weapons, for which they were later hanged
- In each act of resistance that you identified, who or what are the prisoners resisting?

View the behavior of other inmates from Wiesel’s perspective.

Elie Wiesel said the following of inmates who tried “to show the killers they could be just like them”:

No one has the right to judge them, especially not those who did not experience Auschwitz or Buchenwald. The sages of our Tradition state point-blank: “Do not judge your fellow-man until you stand in his place.” In other words, in the same situation, would I have acted as he did? Sometimes doubt grips me. Suppose I had spent not eleven months but eleven years in a concentration camp. Am I sure I would have kept my hands clean? No, I am not, and no one can be.*

* Elie Wiesel, *All Rivers Run to the Sea: Memoirs* (Knopf, 1995), 86–87.

- How does Wiesel try to help us understand why it is so difficult to judge those who “tried to play the executioner’s game”?
- Wiesel writes that he prefers to remember “the kindness and compassion” of his fellow prisoners rather than those who were cruel or violent. How does he describe both groups in this reading? Why does he view both as victims?

To Practice

Whole Class Discussion: *Stories of Auschwitz*

Show excerpts 4 and 5 from *Challenge of Memory*, a video montage of interviews with survivors of the Holocaust available from Facing History and Ourselves. Each deepens our understanding of life at Auschwitz.

Excerpt 4 is the testimony of Helen K., a survivor who was also at

Buna. She describes an act of sabotage in which women working in an armaments plant at the camp smuggled gunpowder to male prisoners working near the crematoriums. With the women's help, the men blew up one crematorium. The Nazis traced the gunpowder and hanged all of the women involved.

- What type of preparation does it take to plan such an act of resistance? To carry it out?
- Do you think the rebels thought they would succeed? If so, how? If not, why did they risk their lives for a hopeless endeavor?
- Compare Helen's story of resistance with the one Wiesel describes in *Night*. What differences seem most striking?
- Some scholars believe that the right question to ask about resistance is not why there were not more such acts but why there were any at all. What do you think they mean by that statement? Do you agree?

Excerpt 5 is the testimony of Hannah F. She tells of how she stole a piece of bread from a bunkmate. She struggles for the right words to explain why she did so.

- Is “theft” an appropriate word for her action? What other word might be more appropriate?
- Professor Lawrence Langer, who has studied the testimonies of many survivors, suggests that prisoners in camps like Auschwitz faced “choiceless choices”—alternatives that were equally impossible. To what extent was Hannah confronted with a “choiceless choice”? What “choiceless choices” did Eliezer and his fellow prisoners face?
- How does Hannah judge herself for stealing the bread? How does Hannah's testimony help us understand what Eliezer means when he describes himself as a “starved stomach”?

To Express

Writing Activity: *A Letter to Elie Wiesel*

Over the years a number of students have written or asked Elie Wiesel questions about his experiences and their own. Suppose you were asked to write him a letter. What questions would you ask him about the book so far or about the violence and hatred he describes or that you have witnessed in your own life. What would you want him to know about you as a person? Write a letter that reflects these questions.

Journal Suggestions

- Write your responses to this section of the book. You might also list any questions you have about anything you read in this part of the book.
- Add to the timeline you started in previous readings. How do you explain why it is becoming more and more difficult to place events in chronological order?
- The word *hunger* takes on new meaning in this section of the book. What does the word mean to Eliezer? What other words have taken on new meaning in this section of the book?
- Draw a picture or describe the way Eliezer now looks. How does your description differ from those you created earlier?

Related Readings and Viewings

You may wish to explore the themes and subthemes in this section using poetry, documentaries, and related readings.

- Share with students the poem entitled “Buna” by Primo Levi in *Against Forgetting: Twentieth-Century Poetry of Witness* edited by Carolyn Forché (W.W. Norton and Company, 1995). How is his account of the slave labor camp like Wiesel’s? What differences seem most striking?
- Read “Choiceless Choices” in the *Facing History and Ourselves Resource Book*. Is a choiceless choice really a choice? See *Elements of Time*, also available from Facing History and Ourselves, for additional comments and observations by Lawrence Langer.
- Read “A Commandant’s View” in the *Facing History and Ourselves Resource Book*. The reading is an interview with the commandant of the death camp at Sobibor and later Treblinka. How does his account of the death camps deepen our understanding of the process that Elie Wiesel describes—a process in which the Nazis reduce a person to a prisoner, the prisoner to a number, and the number to an ash?
- Show students all or part of the video *Students Confront Hatred and Violence: A Discussion with Elie Wiesel*, available from Facing History and Ourselves. Discuss the questions students ask Wiesel as well as his responses. Ask how students think they would have answered the questions raised in Chicago. What did Wiesel say that they wish they might have said? What did he say that surprised them? For what reasons?

Faith and Survival at Auschwitz

(pages 66–84)

Overview

On the eve of Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, Eliezer attends services with other prisoners even though he feels like an outsider because he has begun to question God. After the service, he and his father share a rare moment of understanding. Yet seconds later, the moment is gone. He looks into his father's face and sees "Nothing. Not the shadow of an expression. Defeat." But a few days later, he, his father, and the others in the camp hotly debate whether to fast on Yom Kippur, the holiest day in the Jewish year—the Day of Atonement.

Not long after Yom Kippur, another "selection" is announced and this time Eliezer's father is chosen. Preparing for the end, he gives his son his inheritance—a knife and a spoon. Eliezer spends the entire day fearing his father has been taken away. However, when he returns that night, his father is still there. He somehow made it through the final "selection." Those who did not are seemingly forgotten in the terrible days that follow—days when the prisoners receive "more blows than food." By January, Eliezer is in the camp hospital with an infected foot. While he is there, the prisoners learn that the camp will soon be evacuated. For the first time in months, Eliezer and his father have a choice to make: they can leave with others or stay behind. They decide to leave. They are marched with the other prisoners through the icy countryside in the dead of winter to yet another unknown camp.

Teaching Focus

The To Discuss activities continue to focus on the Central Question by considering two important aspects of Eliezer's identity: his religion and his relationship with his family. The To Practice activities and the structured writing activity foster perspective taking.

To Read

You may wish to have individual students read the fourth section (pages 66–84) aloud to the class as a whole or have pairs of students read to one another. Alternately, you might read the first three pages aloud to the class and then have them silently read the remainder of this section on their own.

To Discuss

After the students have completed the reading, discuss their questions or comments before directing the discussion to themes stressed in this part of the book: identity, dehumanization, and the relationship between father and son.

Consider how Eliezer struggles with his faith.

- On Rosh Hashanah, Eliezer says, “My eyes had opened and I was alone, terribly alone in a world without God, without man. Without love or mercy. I was nothing but ashes now....” (page 68) Eliezer is describing himself at a religious service attended by ten thousand men, including his own father. What do you think he means when he says that he is alone? In what sense is he alone?
- Why does Eliezer direct his anger toward God rather than the Germans? What does his anger suggest about the depths of his faith?
- At the beginning of *Night*, Eliezer describes himself as someone who believes “profoundly.” How have his experiences at Auschwitz affected that faith?

Discuss Eliezer’s relationship with his father.

- Why does Eliezer describe himself as “afraid” of having to wish his father a happy New Year?
- Describe the encounter between father and son after the services. Why does Eliezer say that the two of them “had never understood one another so clearly”?
- How does Eliezer respond when he fears his father has been “selected”? When he discovers that he has indeed been “selected”? When he learns his father has avoided the “final selection”?
- Why did his father give him the spoon and the knife as his inheritance? What is the significance of such a gift in Auschwitz?
- How has the relationship between Eliezer and his father changed during their time at Auschwitz? What has each come to represent to the other?

Consider how Eliezer and his father make a decision that will decide their fate.

- What choices are open to Eliezer and his father when the camp is evacuated?

- How is the decision to leave made? Who makes the choice?
- Is it the “right” choice? Or is it an example of a “choiceless choice”?
- How does the decision help us understand why many survivors attribute their survival to luck?

To Practice

Partner Activity: *Redefining “Free Words” for an Unfree World*

Primo Levi, a Holocaust survivor who was also at Auschwitz, writes that his experiences in the camp altered the very meaning of everyday words:

Just as our hunger is not that feeling of missing a meal, so our way of being cold has need of a new word. We say “hunger,” we say “tiredness,” “fear,” “pain,” we say “winter” and they are different things. They are free words, created and used by free men who lived in comfort and suffering in their homes. If the [camps] had lasted longer, a new, harsh language would have been born; and only this language could express what it means to toil the whole day in the wind with the temperature below freezing, and wearing only a shirt, underpants, cloth jacket and trousers, and in one’s body nothing but weakness, hunger, and knowledge of the end drawing near.*

* Primo Levi, *Survival at Auschwitz*, translated by S. Woolf (Collier Books, 1993), 123.

Have students work in pairs to find examples throughout the book of “free words” or phrases that lost or changed their meaning at Auschwitz. Possibilities in this section include such words or phrases as *Happy New Year*, *selection*, *faith*, *loneliness*, *inheritance*, and *terrible*. After partners have identified the words and phrases, have them choose one word and write a paragraph comparing the way it is defined in their own world with its meaning at Auschwitz. Then bring the class together and invite students to share their paragraphs. Discuss how the exercise helps us understand why Levi and others believe that “our language lacks words to express this offense, the demolition of a man.” How does the exercise help us see the world from another’s perspective?

Whole Class Activity: *A Visit to a Holocaust Memorial*

As students read about the closing of Auschwitz in the final months of the war, you and your students may want to visit a Holocaust memorial in your area or the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C.

The following activity is based on a visit to the New England Holocaust Memorial in Boston, Massachusetts. You can develop similar activities for other Holocaust memorials or as a part of a visit to the Holocaust Museum. (Facing History and Ourselves has developed a study guide to prepare students for a visit to the New England Holocaust Memorial.)

The New England Holocaust Memorial consists of six glass towers, each representing one of the six main death camps. Etched in each tower are quotations from Holocaust survivors and witnesses. The quotations for Auschwitz are as follows:

Some Catholics, including Father Amyot, invited me to join them in prayer. Seven or eight of us gathered, secretly of course, in the shed used as a lavatory. In prayer, we laid before God our suffering, our rags, our filth, our fatigue, our exposure, our hunger, and our misery.

—Aime Bonifas, Holocaust Survivor

I remember stooping down and picking up a piece of something black near the crematorium. I realized it was a bone. I was going to throw it down again, and I thought, my God, this may be all that's left of someone. So I wrapped it up and carried it with me. A couple of days later, I dug it out of my pocket and buried it.

—George Kaiser, American Soldier

The New England Holocaust Memorial also contains a large black granite panel that bears a legendary quotation by Martin Niemöller, a Lutheran minister:

THEY CAME FIRST for the Communists,
and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Communist.

THEN THEY CAME for the Jews,
and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Jew.

THEN THEY CAME for the trade unionists,
and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a trade unionist.

THEN THEY CAME for the Catholics,
and I didn't speak up because I was a Protestant.

THEN THEY CAME for me,
and by that time no one was left to speak up.

Whether or not you visit a memorial, ask students to consider why these three quotations might have been chosen. How does each add to our understanding of Auschwitz and other death camps? Of why people allowed the Holocaust to happen? Of how we might keep such things from happening again?

To Express

Writing Activity: *Expressing a Point of View*

The committee that created the New England Holocaust Memorial chose two quotations for each of the six main death camps. If they had asked you to choose a quotation from *Night* for the tower that represents Auschwitz-Birkenau, what quotation would you have selected? In answering, ask students to not only identify the quotation they would choose but also explain why they chose it.

Journal Suggestions

- Write your responses to this section of the book. You might also list questions and comments on this part of the book.
- Add to your timeline. Is it becoming easier or more difficult to place events in chronological order?
- *Night* is written in short, simple sentences. Critics call this kind of writing “controlled.” That means that every word has been carefully chosen for a precise meaning. How do you explain the decision to write in a “controlled” or measured way to describe experiences that are beyond control?

Related Readings and Viewings

You may wish to explore the themes and subthemes in this section using poetry, documentaries, and related readings.

- Show students *Remembering the Past: Sonia Weitz’s History*, available from Facing History and Ourselves. In it, the poet and author of *I Promised I Would Tell* recalls her childhood and her experiences at five concentration camps. She also explains why she has chosen to bear witness through her writings. How does her story add to our understanding of the Holocaust? What does it suggest about the importance of not only remembering but also finding one’s voice? (Copies of her book are also available from Facing History.)
- Obtain *Childhood Memories*, a video montage from Facing History and Ourselves, and show students Excerpt 8 in which Zezette L. describes the year she spent at Auschwitz. She was just thirteen years old. How is the loneliness she describes like the loneliness Eliezer experienced? What differences seem most striking?

The Importance of Memory

(pages 85–115)

Overview

After leaving Buna, Eliezer, his father, and the other prisoners march forty-two miles through the ice and snow to Gleiwitz. Many die along the way. When the tired, cold, and hungry survivors reach their destination, they are packed into a darkened barracks. Unable to sleep, Eliezer spends the night listening to the sound of a violin playing to an audience of dead and dying men. The violinist is Juliek, a fellow prisoner from Buna. The next morning, he too is dead.

Three days later, the prisoners, still without food or drink, face yet another “selection.” And once again, Eliezer’s father is “selected.” When Eliezer rushes to his side, he causes such confusion that the two end up on the train to yet another camp. Conditions on this transport are so horrific that the SS order the living to throw the dead from the train. When a few men approach Eliezer’s father, Eliezer is quick to protect him. As the journey continues, the situation in the open cars becomes more and more desperate. By now it has been ten days since the starved men have eaten.

When the train finally reaches Buchenwald, a concentration camp in Germany, only twelve prisoners in Eliezer’s car are still alive. Among them is Eliezer’s father, although he is very weak. Stricken with dysentery, he can no longer take care of himself. Eliezer desperately tries to protect him even though a fellow prisoner advises, “In this place, there is no such thing as father, brother, friend. Each of us lives and dies alone.” (page 110)

The next day Eliezer’s father is dead. Eliezer is unable to cry and even admits that in “the recesses of his weakened conscience” he now feels free. Three months later, as the war is drawing to a close, the Germans decide to evacuate the camp and kill off the remaining prisoners. Before they can act, the camp resistance movement drives the Germans out of Buchenwald. That evening the Americans arrive. The book ends with Eliezer in the hospital, a victim of food poisoning. After hovering between life and death for two weeks, he looks into a mirror, the first he has seen in a year. A corpse gazes back at him.

Teaching Focus

The activities that accompany this reading return to the Central Question. They all focus on the ways memory and identity are linked. They also consider the importance of telling one’s story to the world.

To Read

You may wish to have individual students read the fifth section (pages 85–115) aloud to the class as a whole or have pairs of students read to one another. Alternately, you might read the first three pages aloud to the class and then have them silently read the remainder of this section on their own.

To Discuss

After completing the final section, encourage students to share their questions and concerns before directing the discussion to the questions that follow. They reflect the Central Question by emphasizing identity, memory, and the importance of witnessing.

Consider how prisoners struggle to maintain their identity under extraordinary conditions.

- After the forced march, the prisoners are crammed into a barracks. That night Juliek plays a fragment of a Beethoven concerto on the violin he has managed to keep the entire time he was at Auschwitz. What do you think prompts Juliek to play that evening? What does the music mean to Eliezer? To the other prisoners who hear the sounds? To Juliek?
- In this section of the book, Eliezer tells of three fathers and three sons. He speaks of Rabbi Eliahou and his son, of the father whose son killed him for a piece of bread, and finally of his own father and himself. What words does Eliezer use to describe his response to each of the first two stories? How do these stories affect the way he reacts to his father's illness? To his father's death?
- What does Eliezer mean when he writes that he feels free after his father's death? Is he free of responsibility? Or is he free to go under, to drift into death?
- Eliezer later states, "Since my father's death, nothing mattered to me anymore." What does he mean by these words? What do they suggest about his struggle to maintain his identity?

Think about what it means to describe one's image as a "corpse contemplating me."

- In the next to the last sentence in the book, Eliezer says that when he looks in a mirror after liberation, he sees a corpse contemplating
-

him. He ends the book by stating, “The look in his eyes as he gazed at me has never left me.” What does that sentence mean?

- Why is it important to Eliezer to remember? To tell you his story?
- How has he tried to keep you from responding to his story the way he and his father once responded to the one told by Moshe the Beadle? How successful has he been?

Discuss why Wiesel titled his autobiographical story “*Night*.”

- What did the word *night* mean to you before you read the book? How has the meaning of the word changed for you? How did it change for the author?
- Each night is the end of one day and the start of another. What does that suggest about the need to bear witness? To not only tell the story but also have the story be heard and acknowledged?

Independent Writing Activity: *Reader Responses*

Reproducible 1 provides students with a way of expressing their understanding of the book. The questions encourage students critical thinking about the story and personal responses to its themes. The questions may also be used to assess students’ ability to compare and contrast this book with other books or experiences. After students have completed their answers to the questions, you may want to focus a class discussion on their responses.

1. *Night* focuses on a single year in Eliezer’s life. Identify some of the internal and external conflicts he faced that year.
2. In the next to the last sentence in the book, Eliezer says that when he looked in a mirror after liberation, he saw a corpse contemplating him. He ends the book by stating, “The look in his eyes as he gazed at me has never left me.” What does he mean by that statement?
3. How did the relationship between Eliezer and his father change in the course of the year on which the book focuses? How do you account for that change?
4. What is the meaning of the title, *Night*?
5. Explain what Eliezer’s story means to you.
6. Why do you think Wiesel tells his story from the first person perspective? If *Night* were written in the third person, would it be more or less believable? Why do you think Elie Wiesel begins *Night* with the story of

Moshe the Beadle? What lessons does the narrator seem to learn from Moshe's experiences in telling his own story?

To Practice

Whole Class Discussion: *It Touches Us All*

After liberation, a number of American soldiers entered Buchenwald and other concentration camps. Many would never forget the things they saw there. Show students *Reflections of Dr. Leon Bass* or Excerpt 6 of *Challenge of Memory* (Facing History and Ourselves). Both videos feature Leon Bass, an African American who served in a segregated unit during World War II. In each video, he discusses the way Buchenwald changed his view of the world.

Bass never talked about what he witnessed at Buchenwald until 1968. At the time, he was the principal of a high school in Philadelphia. One day he overheard a Holocaust survivor tell her story to students who could not believe her. Bass rushed into the classroom and told the students that the woman was telling the truth—he had seen it for himself at Buchenwald. That day Bass realized how important it was for him, as well as for the survivors, to tell the story. Since then he has spoken to students all over the country not only about his experiences in Germany but also about the fight for social justice in the United States. As he told one group in Boston, “Someone has to stand up, somebody has to dare to be a Daniel and walk into the den and say, ‘This evil cannot continue.’”

The following questions can be used to discuss the video:

- How do Bass's experiences at Buchenwald help him understand that “suffering is universal. It is not just relegated to me and mine. It touches us all”?
- What does Bass mean when he says that what touches one of us touches us all? Why does what happened then matter now?
- How did Bass become a witness to history? Why does he feel it is important to speak out about that history?
- Whenever Bass speaks, he describes the injustices he experienced during the years of segregation. He also tells about what it was like to be a soldier in a segregated unit. Why must these stories also be told?

To Express

Journal Suggestions

- Write your responses to this section of the book. You might also list questions and comments on this part of the book.
- Complete your timeline. How long a time period does the book cover?
- Compare and contrast your earlier pictures of Eliezer with the way he describes himself at the end of the book. How do your pictures and descriptions help you understand the changes he refers to?

Final Writing Activity: *Witness to History*

Writing assignment: Write a story about an experience that affected you deeply and ought to be known by others.

Writing Genre: Autobiographical story

Plan the Story

Explain to students that they now have the opportunity to write their own stories. Ask students to think about the stories they shared with their partners. Is this the story they want to write about? In listening to other students' stories, did they think of other stories and experiences that they would rather write about? Encourage students to find a story that is important to them and which ought to be known by others. Distribute Reproducible 2 and encourage students to think about the following questions:

- What happened?
- Why did it happen?
- What were your thoughts about the story at the time it happened?
- What are your thoughts about the story now?
- How does your story relate to the way you see yourself? To the way you see others?
- What lessons does your story teach others?

First Draft

Have students use their story plans to write a first draft. Next have students read the first drafts of their stories aloud to themselves to find out if they left out any words or important information. Then, have students

read the first drafts of their stories again to make sure that they have answered all the questions. As part of the first draft process, students should feel free to change words and move sentences to make their writing clearer and more interesting.

Writer's Conference

After students hand in their first drafts, use the following questions to provide feedback on their writing or distribute Reproducible 3.

- Are the details of the story clear? Can I tell what happened? Who it happened to? Where it happened? When it happened?
- Do the people in the story seem real? Are the events believable?
- Is it clear why this story is important?
- What lesson does the story teach? Why is it important to learn that lesson?

Peer Response

You may also want to give students the opportunity to obtain feedback from their partners. Have partners read their first drafts to each other. Explain that the purpose of the peer response process is to help writers see their work from a reader's point of view. Encourage students to give their partners positive feedback, telling them what they liked best about the story. They should also let their partners know what parts of the story were confusing or what parts they would like to know more about.

Revise

Ask students to write a second draft in which they incorporate your editing suggestions as well as the comments of their partner.

Proofread

After students have finished their second drafts, help them proofread their work. You may want to devise a proofreading checklist for your students. Choose several grammar or punctuation points for students to look for. As students become more proficient, add other items to the list. After students prepare a final copy of their work, encourage them to illustrate and design a cover for their stories.

Related Readings and Viewings

You may wish to explore the themes and subthemes in this section using poetry, documentaries, and related readings.

- Share with students the poem "Shema" by Primo Levi, which is reprinted on page 359 of the *Facing History and Ourselves Resource Book*. The word *shema* means to hear or listen. It also refers to the

opening word of a prayer religious Jews recite three times a day: “Hear O Israel. The Lord is our God. The Lord is One.” As the prayer continues, Jews are commanded to keep these words in their hearts and teach them to their children. Levi paraphrases parts of the prayer. What does he want kept in people’s hearts? Taught to their children? Why do you think he calls his poem “Shema”?

- Read “Survivors and Memory” in the *Facing History and Ourselves Resource Book*. In this reading, two survivors stress the importance of telling their story. How does each approach her past? How does her past define her present? Her plans for the future?
- Show students the video *You Are Free* (Direct Cinema, twenty minutes, available from Facing History and Ourselves). It is a documentary about the liberation of the concentration camps at the close of World War II. It includes interviews with American soldiers, including Leon Bass, and Holocaust survivors, as well as photographs taken as the war was ending. How does the film help us understand why Leon Bass feels that it is important for veterans like himself to bear witness?
- Show the last forty minutes of the film *Survivors of the Holocaust* (TBS, sixty minutes, available from Facing History and Ourselves). What do these survivors want us to remember and why? What do they want us to learn from their stories about the dangers of racism and antisemitism in the world today?

To Participate

Community Service Activity: *Sharing Stories*

As a culminating activity, students might collect their stories into a bound volume so that they can share these stories with students in other classes or at nearby middle or elementary schools. Encourage students to discuss their stories with their readers.

Leon Bass often tells students that he has not come to tell them a “horror story” even though the story he tells is horrible. “History cannot be swept under the rug. It shouldn’t be and you must not permit it to be.” As an alternative activity, students might begin to collect stories from other witnesses to history. They might begin with their own parents or grandparents. Or they might visit a senior citizen center or a library to uncover other stories that have been “swept under the rug.” Discuss ways to share these stories with others.

Elie Wiesel's Acceptance Speech for the Nobel Peace Prize

The following are excerpts from the prepared text of the acceptance speech by Elie Wiesel, the winner of the 1986 Nobel Peace Prize, at a ceremony in Oslo.*

It is with a profound sense of humility that I accept the honor you have chosen to bestow upon me. I know: your choice transcends me. This both frightens and pleases me.

It frightens me because I wonder: do I have the right to represent the multitudes who have perished? Do I have the right to accept this great honor on their behalf? I do not. That would be presumptuous. No one may speak for the dead, no one may interpret their mutilated dreams and visions.

It pleases me because I may say that this honor belongs to all the survivors and their children, and through us, to the Jewish people with whose destiny I have always identified.

I remember: it happened yesterday or eternities ago. A young Jewish boy discovered the kingdom of night. I remember his bewilderment. I remember his anguish. It all happened so fast. The ghetto. The deportation. The sealed cattle car. The fiery altar upon which the history of our people and the future of mankind were meant to be sacrificed.

I remember: he asked his father: "Can this be true? This is the 20th century, not the Middle Ages. Who would allow such crimes to be committed? How could the world remain silent?"

And now the boy is turning to me: "Tell me," he asks. "What have you done with my future? What have you done with your life?"

And I tell him that I have tried. That I have tried to keep memory alive, that I have tried to fight those who would forget. Because if we forget who the guilty are, we are accomplices.

And then I explain to him how naive we were, that the world did know and remained silent. And that is why I swore never to be silent when and wherever human beings endure suffering and humiliation. We must always take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented.

Sometimes we must interfere. When human lives are endangered, when human dignity is in jeopardy, national borders and sensitivities become irrelevant. Whenever men or women are persecuted because of their race, religion or political views, that must—at that moment—become the center of the universe....

Yes, I have faith. Faith in God and even in His creation. Without it no action would be possible. And action is the only remedy to indifference: the most insidious danger of all. Isn't this the meaning of Alfred Nobel's legacy? Wasn't his fear of war a shield against war?

There is much to be done, there is much that can be done. One person...of integrity can make a difference, a difference between life and death. As long as one dissident is in prison, our freedom will not be true. As long as one child is hungry, our lives will be filled with anguish and shame.

What all these victims need above all is to know that they are not alone; that we are not forgetting them, that when their voices are stilled we shall lend them ours, that while their freedom depends on ours, the quality of our freedom depends on theirs.

This is what I say to the young Jewish boy wondering what I have done with his years. It is in his name that I speak to you and I express to you my deepest gratitude. No one is as capable of gratitude as one who has emerged from the kingdom of night.

We know that every moment is a moment of grace, every hour an offering; not to share them would mean to betray them. Our lives no longer belong to us alone; they belong to all those who need us desperately.

Thank you Chairman Aarvik. Thank you, members of the Nobel Committee. Thank you, people of Norway, for declaring on this singular occasion that our survival has meaning for mankind.

*from *The New York Times*, December 11, 1986.

Timeline of the Holocaust

Entries in *italics* refer to events described or alluded to in *Night*.

- 1933** The Nazi party takes power in Germany. Adolf Hitler becomes chancellor, or prime minister, of Germany. Nazis “temporarily” suspend civil liberties for all citizens. They are never restored.
The Nazis set up the first concentration camp at Dachau. The first inmates are two hundred Communists.
Books contrary to Nazi beliefs are burned in public.
- 1934** Hitler combines the positions of chancellor and president to become “Führer,” or leader, of Germany.
- 1935** Jews in Germany are deprived of citizenship and other fundamental rights. The Nazis intensify persecution of political dissidents and others considered “racially inferior” including “Gypsies,” Jehovah’s Witnesses, and homosexuals. Many are sent to concentration camps.
- 1936** The Olympic games are held in Germany; signs barring Jews from public places are removed until the event is over.
- 1938** German troops annex Austria.
On Kristallnacht (the “Night of Broken Glass”), Nazi gangs physically attack Jews throughout Germany and Austria.
- 1939** In March, Germany takes over a neighboring nation, Czechoslovakia.
On September 1, Germany invades Poland.
World War II begins in Europe.
- Hitler orders the systematic murder of the mentally and physically disabled in Germany and Austria.
Polish Jews are ordered to register and relocate. They are also required to wear armbands or yellow stars.
- 1940** Nazis begin deporting German Jews to Poland.
Jews are forced into ghettos.
Germany conquers one nation after another in Western Europe including the Netherlands, Denmark, Norway, Belgium, Luxembourg, and France.
With Germany’s backing, Hungary annexes parts of Romania, including Sighet and other towns in northern Transylvania.
- 1941** Germany attacks the Soviet Union.
Jews throughout Europe are forced into ghettos and internment camps.
Mobile killing units begin the systematic slaughter of Jews. In two days, one of those units was responsible for the murder of 33,771 Ukrainian Jews at Babi Yar—the largest single massacre of the Holocaust.
Hungary deports 17,000 foreign and “stateless” Jews. Several thousand are used as slave laborers. The Nazis massacre the rest.
The first death camp at Chelmno in Poland begins operations.
Germany, as an ally of Japan, declares war on the United States immediately after the bombing of Pearl Harbor.
- 1942** At the Wannsee Conference, Nazi officials turn over the “Final Solution”—their plan to kill all European Jews—to

Timeline of the Holocaust (continued)

the bureaucracy.

Five more death camps begin operation in Poland: Majdanek, Sobibor, Treblinka, Belzec, and Auschwitz-Birkenau.

March: About 20 to 25 percent of the Jews who would die in the Holocaust have already perished.

The ghettos of Eastern Europe are emptied as thousands of Jews are shipped to death camps.

The United States, Britain, and the Soviet Union acknowledge that Germans were systematically murdering the Jews of Europe.

1943 February: About 80 to 85 percent of the Jews who would die in the Holocaust have already perished.

April: Jews in Poland's Warsaw Ghetto strike back as the Nazis begin new rounds of deportations. It takes nearly a month for the Nazis to put down the uprising.

1944 March: Hitler occupies Hungary; by June, the Germans are deporting twelve thousand Hungarian Jews a day to Auschwitz.

1945 January: As the Russian army pushes west, the Nazis begin to evacuate death camps, including Auschwitz.

April: American forces liberate the prisoners in Buchenwald.

May: World War II ends in Europe with Hitler's defeat.

The Holocaust is over; about one-third of all the Jews in the world are murdered and the survivors are homeless.

1946 An International Military Tribunal created by Britain, France, the United States, and the Soviet Union tries Nazi leaders for war crimes and crimes against humanity in Nuremberg.

A Guide to Jewish References in *Night*

Elie Wiesel grew up in a traditional Jewish community. Throughout *Night*, there are references to ideas, practices, and events important to that community. Brief definitions of those terms are provided. The page numbers refer to pages in the Bantam paperback edition of *Night*.

Beadle—a caretaker or “man of all work” in a synagogue. (page 3)

Kabbalah—Jewish mysticism. Followers believe that every aspect of the Torah has hidden meanings that link the spiritual world to everyday life. The teachings of the kabbalah can be found in the *Zohar*, which was compiled in the thirteenth century. (page 4)

Hasidism—a Jewish reform movement inspired by the cabbala that spread through Eastern Europe in the 1700s. For Hasidic Jews, the divine presence is everywhere, in everything. They therefore try to live a life of total dedication to God. The word *hasidic* is an adjective used to describe followers of Hasidism or some aspect of their practices and beliefs. (page 3)

Job—a biblical figure who questioned why the just must suffer while the wicked flourish. (page 45)

Kaddish—a prayer Jews recite in memory of a loved one. The prayer praises and reaffirms a belief in one God. (page 33)

Maimonides—a great Jewish scholar who lived in the twelfth century. (page 4)

Messiah—the savior and deliverer of the Jewish people. Jews believe the Messiah is yet to come; Christians believe that Jesus was the Messiah. (page 45)

Palestine—territory assigned to the British in 1920 by the terms of the post-World War I treaty with Turkey, the former ruler of the area. British control ended in 1948 when the territory was divided into the State of Israel and the Kingdom of Jordan. Palestine is the ancient homeland of the Jewish people. (page 9)

Passover—a Jewish holiday that is celebrated for eight days each spring to recall the Exodus of the Jewish people from Egypt where they were held in slavery. (page 10)

Phylacteries (te lin)—two small leather boxes containing four excerpts from the Bible. One box is strapped to an arm and the other to the forehead during weekday morning prayers. Tefilin help religious Jews focus their entire being on God as they recite their weekday morning prayers. (page 16)

A Guide to Jewish References in *Night* (continued)

Rosh Hashanah—the Jewish New Year. The holiday, which falls in September or October, marks the beginning of a ten-day period of divine judgment—a time when Jews believe God calls them to account for their actions. These days are marked by repentance, regret, and resolutions to make amends to one another as well to God. The period ends on Yom Kippur. (page 66)

Shavuot—the Jewish holiday that commemorates the revelation of the Law on Mount Sinai. It is celebrated about seven weeks after Passover. (page 12)

Synagogue—a Jewish house of prayer. (page 3)

Talmud—from a word that means study or learning. A collection of rabbinical teachings and commentaries on the Torah, the Five Books of Moses. (page 3)

Temple, The—a reference to the Temple in Jerusalem, which the Romans destroyed in 70 A.D. It was the center of Jewish worship in ancient times. Today Jews recall its destruction in their daily prayers. (page 3)

Yom Kippur—the Jewish Day of Atonement, a fast day devoted to prayer. It marks the end of the ten most solemn days in the Jewish calendar, which begins with Rosh Hashanah. (page 69)

Zohar—the Book of Splendor; a commentary on the Five Books of Moses and the major work of the kabbalah. (page 5)

Zionism—the belief that Jews must once more become a nation with a land of their own in Palestine. A commitment to Zionism led a number of European Jews to settle in Palestine in the early 1900s. (page 8)

Reader Responses

Name _____ Date _____

Writing Assignment:

Read over the following questions and write your responses on a separate sheet of paper.

1. *Night* focuses on a single year in Eliezer's life. Identify some of the internal and external conflicts he faced that year.
2. In the next to the last sentence in the book, Eliezer says that when he looked in a mirror after liberation, he saw a corpse gazing back at him. He ends the book by stating, "The look in his eyes, as they stared into mine, has never left me." What does he mean by that statement?
3. How did the relationship between Eliezer and his father change in the course of the year on which the book focuses? How do you account for that change?
4. What is the meaning of the title, *Night*?
5. Explain what Eliezer's story means to you.
6. Why do you think Wiesel tells his story from the first person perspective? If *Night* were written in the third person, would it be more or less believable? Why do you think Elie Wiesel begins *Night* with the story of Moshe the Beadle? What lessons does the narrator seem to learn from Moshe's experiences in telling his own story?

Witness to History

Name _____ Date _____

Plan Your Story

When asked why he became a writer, Elie Wiesel responds by speaking of those who did not survive to tell their stories:

I owe them my roots and memory. I am duty-bound to serve as their emissary, transmitting the history of their disappearance, even if it disturbs, even if it brings pain. Not to do so would be to betray them, and thus myself.

- Why does Elie Wiesel feel so strongly that he has an obligation to bear witness? What lesson does he want us to learn from his story?
- Why does Leon Bass feel so strongly that he has an obligation to speak out? What lessons does he want us to learn from the story he tells? How does he relate that story to his own life?
- What stories do you feel strongly about? Review your identity box, your journal, and other writings to find an event you experienced or witnessed, saw on TV, or read about that must be known.
- How is that story important to who you are as a person?
- In what way can you tell that story so that it will not only be believed but also remembered?

First Draft

Write a story about an experience that affected you deeply and ought to be known by others. In writing that story, answer the following questions:

- What happened?
- Why did it happen?
- What were your thoughts about the story at the time it happened?
- What are your thoughts about the story now?
- How does your story relate to the way you see yourself and others?
- What lessons does your story teach others?

Critiquing Your Draft

After you finish your first draft, review your own work. In critiquing a story, it is useful to ask yourself the following:

- Are the details of the story clear? Can I tell what happened? Who it happened to? Where it happened? When it happened?
- How can I make the people in the story seem more real? The events more believable?
- Is it clear why this story is important? How can I make its importance more obvious to the reader?
- What lesson does the story teach? How have I helped the reader understand why it is important to learn that lesson?

Revise your paper and incorporate your suggestions as well as those of your teacher and your partner.



FACING HISTORY AND OURSELVES

Facing History and Ourselves is an international educational and professional development organization whose mission is to engage students of diverse backgrounds in an examination of racism, prejudice and antisemitism in order to promote the development of a more humane and informed citizenry. By studying the historical development and lessons of the Holocaust and other examples of genocide, students make the essential connection between history and the moral choices they confront in their own lives. For more information, contact the Facing History and Ourselves headquarters.

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Dedicated to Literacy, Values, & Prevention

Voices of Love and Freedom (VLF) is a non-profit educational organization that promotes literacy, values, and prevention. VLF is designed to help students in grades K-12 to appreciate literature from around the world; develop their own voices as they learn to read and write; learn to use the values of love and freedom to guide their lives; and live healthy lives free of substance abuse and violence.

Voices of Love and Freedom was founded in 1992 and is a collaboration of Wheelock College, the Judge Baker Children's Center, and the Harvard Graduate School of Education. VLF has been adopted citywide by the Boston Public Schools, is being implemented as a whole school design model in the Memphis City Schools, and is being disseminated nationally. For more information contact:

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