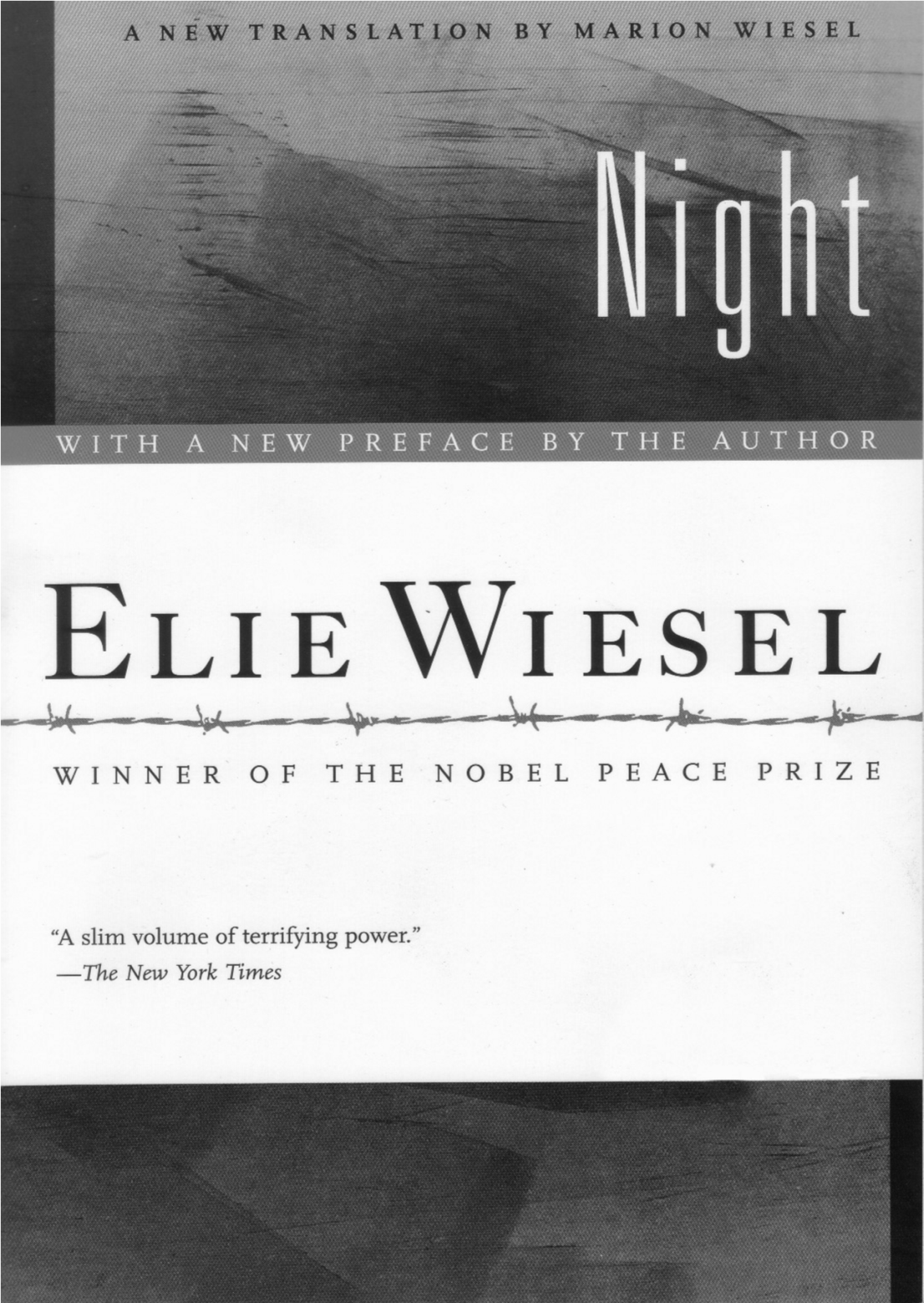
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***Night* by Elie Wiesel**

**A memoir that focuses on the final year of the Holocaust—a year the author spent at Auschwitz, a Nazi death camp.**  
  


**Central Questions for our Novel Study**

As we read the memoir *Night* keep the following questions in your mind:

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

**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.

**Nazi Germany**

* “Nazi” a shortening of the first German word in the NSDAP – the National Socialist German Worker’s Party – ruled Germany from 1933-45 – called the “Third Reich” or “Thousand Year Reich” (Empire)
* Under Adolf Hitler (1889-1945) (fuhrer – leader), the Nazis sought to reclaim what they took to be Germany’s rightful place in Europe after they had been blamed for the start of World War I.
* Their goals: to establish Germany as Europe’s and the world’s premier power by expanding their “living space” through conquest of neighbouring countries.
* Also to establish the Aryan race as the premier race by exterminating other races and minorities.
* Starting in 1939 – Hitler began the process of invading countries and conquering them.  Turning point was the 1941 when Hitler invaded the Soviet Union and declared war on the United States.
* 1945 the Germans surrendered and Hitler committed suicide.

**The Holocaust**

* the term used for the state sponsored persecution and genocide of ethnic, religious and political groups by the Nazis, all toward the goal of establishing the purity of the German people
* over 11 million people died in Nazi camps, including Slavs, disabled, homosexuals, Jehovah’s Witnesses, communists, political dissidents, and especially Jews.
* Over 6 million Jews died in what was called the “Final Solution”

**Literary Analysis**

In *Night*, Elie Wiesel uses a variety of literary techniques in telling his story. The in this booklet ask you to explore these techniques and devices in greater detail.

**Genre:** *Night* is not an easy book to classify. 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.

**A Memoir is** an account of one’s memories of certain events or people; not necessarily in chronological order

**Point of View**: *Night* is written in the **first person** as an eyewitness account.  It reflects Wiesel’s belief in giving public expression to one’s memories through personal testimony.

**Literary Terms and Features**

* **Atmosphere:** the overall feeling that surrounds a piece of writing.
* **Conflict**: opposing forces in a literary work that can be either internal or external
* **Irony**: the opposite of what is expected occurs
* **Imagery:** the use of vivid, descriptive language to appeal to the senses.
* **Mood:**  a feeling the writer creates in the reader
* **Motif:**  a recurring theme or idea
* **Point of view**: perspective the author provides for the reader to observe the events
* **Symbolism**: the use of one thing to suggest or represent something else
* **Theme**: a main idea or message in a text
* **Voice**:  the personality of the speaker or the author coming through in a work created through the combination of diction, point of view and tone.
* **Characterization:** is defined by what a person says, does and what others say about them.

**Terminology and 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 as well as terms relevant to the time period and context of the novel.

**Aryan—** non-Jewish Caucasian

**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.

**Beadle**—a caretaker or “man of all work” in a synagogue.

**Caucasian—** relating to a racial group having white skin, especially one of European origi.

**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.

**Death Marches—** The prisoners that were taken from the camps were sent on what became known as "Death Marches". Some of these groups were marched hundreds of miles. The prisoners were given little to no food and little to no shelter. Any prisoner who lagged behind or who tried to escape was shot.

**Gestapo:** Nazi secret police

**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 1) **Job**—a biblical figure who questioned why the just must suffer while the wicked flourish.

**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 cabbala can be found in the *Zohar*, which was compiled in the thirteenth century.

**Kaddish** —a prayer Jews recite in memory of a loved one. The prayer praises and reaffirms a belief in one God.

**Kapo**—a prisoner forced to oversee other prisoners in a concentration camp.

**Maimonides**—a great Jewish scholar who lived in the twelfth century.

**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.

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

**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 6)

**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 8)

**Pentecost**—the Jewish holiday that commemorates the revelation of the Law on Mount Sinai. Called *Shavuot* in Hebrew, it is celebrated about seven weeks after Passover. (page 10)

**Phylacteries (tefilin)**—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 13)

**Rabbi--** a Jewish teacher

**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 63)

**“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.

**Synagogue**—a Jewish house of prayer. (page 1)

**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 1)

**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 1)

**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 65)

***Zohar***—the Book of Splendor; a commentary on the Five Books of Moses and the major work of the cabbala. (page 3)

**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 6)

**Zionist:** a term used to describe anyone who believes Jews should return to their ancient homeland, Israel.

**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 “Fuhrer,” 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 offi- cials turn over the “Final Solution”— their plan to kill all European Jews—to 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-thirdof all the Jews in the world are murderedand 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. |

**Defining Identity**

*(pages 3-22)*

*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.

**Respond to these questions referring to references and examples from the book.**

1. Identify and explain at least three factors that shape Eliezer’s identity.  Consider the following in developing your response. (How Eliezer describes himself, what his family is like, the role Moshe the Beadle plays in Eliezer’s life, the importance of religion etc.).

1. Explain why no one believed Moshe the Beadle.  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?

1. Explain the effectiveness of using the first person point of view to tell this story.

**Initiation to Auschwitz**

*(pages 23–46)*

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.”

1. Explain the effectiveness of Wiesel’s recounting of the first night in the concentration camp when he says, “Never shall I forget that night, the first night in the camp, which has turned my life into one long night.…”

1. Explain how Madame Schächter is like Moshe the Beadle?

1. Using two examples explain how the Germans created terror at Auschwitz. Explain how the Germans systematically strip Eliezer and other prisoners of their identity.

1. 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?

1. Using the novel and the statement below explain how Levi’s responses to his initiation into Auschwitz is similar and different to those of Eliezer?

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 anymore; 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.”

**Identity and Indifference**

*(pages 47–65)*

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)

1. How do the changes in his relationship with his father affect the way Eliezer sees himself as an individual and the way he views his father?

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

1. 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?

1. What does the word *resistance* mean? In the context of Auschwitz identify three examples of resistance that can be seen? For each act of resistance identified, explain who or what are the prisoners resisting?

1. 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?

**Faith and Survival at Auschwitz**

*(pages 66–84)*

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.

1. How has the relationship between Eliezer and his father changed during their time at Auschwitz? What has each come to represent to the other?

1. At the beginning of *Night*, Eliezer describes himself as someone who believes “profoundly.” How have his experiences at Auschwitz affected that faith?

**The Importance of Memory**

*(pages 85–115)*

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.” (page110)

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.

1. 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 gazing back at him. He ends the book by stating, “The look in his eyes, as they stared into mine, has never left me.” Explain the effectiveness of this statement and what it means.

1. 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?

1. Why do you think is it important to Eliezer to remember and to tell you his story?

19. Explain the significance of the title Night.