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| Calendar placeholder – will be updated for the printed-out copy when we return to school ☺ | | | | | | |
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Night – by Elie Weisel

*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 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.

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| **Reading** | **Pages** | **Themes** |
| Part One | 3-22 | Identity |
| Part Two | 23-46 | Barriers to knowing, dehumanization, and relationship between father and son |
| Part Three | 47-65 | dehumanization and identity |
| Part Four | 66 -84 | identity, dehumanization, and the relationship between father and son |
| Part Five | 85 -115 | identity, memory, and the importance of witnessing |
| Please note: The book is not divided into five parts; *I* have divided it into five parts to organize our reading and discussions. There are no “Part” labels – use the **page numbers** to guide you. | | |

**Assignments**:

[Placeholder – will be updated for the printed copy]

**R E A D I N G P A R T 1   
Defining Identity**

**A. Explore the factors that shape Eliezer’s identity.**

1. How does Eliezer describe himself?
2. What is his family like? Who in his family does he seem most attached? Who would he like to be closer?
3. What role does Moshe the Beadle play in Eliezer’s life?
4. How important is religion to the way Eliezer defines his identity?

**B. Consider why no one believed Moshe the Beadle.**

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

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

1. What do the Jews of Sighet know about the outside world in 1941? How do they respond to what they know?
2. Why do you think they refuse to believe Moshe when he returns to Sighet?
3. Do you think people really believe that Moshe is lying to them?
4. What is the difference between saying that someone is lying and saying that you cannot believe what he or she is saying?
5. 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 two?
6. 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?

**D. Discuss the way the author tells his story.**

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

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**R E A D I N G P A R T 2**

**Initiation to Auschwitz**

**A. Explore the relationship between knowing, madness, and belief.**

1. Why does Madame Schächter scream? Why does she later become silent and withdrawn?
2. How do people react the first time she screams? How do they respond when her screams continue?
3. 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?
4. How do the “veteran” prisoners respond when they discover the newcomers have never heard of Auschwitz?

**B. Consider how the Germans created terror at Auschwitz.**

1. How do the Germans orchestrate the arrival of newcomers to the camp?
2. Why don’t they tell the new arrivals what to expect?
3. 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?
4. Why does much of this section of the book seem to take place at night?

**C. Explore the relationship between Eliezer and his father.**

1. Eliezer tells the reader, “Eight words spoken quietly, indifferently, without emotion. Eight short, simple words.” 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?
2. 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?
3. What advice does Eliezer’s cousin from Antwerp give his father?
4. 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?

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

1. 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?
2. 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.”
3. How are Levi’s responses to his initiation into Auschwitz similar to those of Eliezer? What differences seem most striking?
4. Wiesel, in recounting the first night in the concentration camp says, “Never shall I forget that night, the first night in the camp, which has turned my life into one long night.…” What does it mean for a life to be turned into “one long night”?

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**R E A D I N G P A R T 3**

**Identity and Indifference**

**A. Consider the relationship between Eliezer and his father.**

1. Give examples of the ways Eliezer’s relationship with his father is changing. What is prompting those changes?
2. What does Eliezer mean when he refers to his father as “his weak point”? Why has he come to view love as a weakness?
3. 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?

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

1. 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”?
2. 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?
3. Why do you think Eliezer and the other prisoners respond so emotionally to the hanging of the child?
4. 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?
5. When the young boy is hanged, a prisoner asks, “Where is God now?” Eliezer thinks to himself, “He is hanging here on this gallows.” What does this statement mean? Is it a statement of despair? Anger? Or hope?

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

1. 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?
2. 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
3. In each act of resistance that you identified, who or what are the prisoners resisting?

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

1. How does Wiesel try to help us understand why it is so difficult to judge those who “tried to play the executioner’s game”?
2. 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?

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**R E A D I N G P A R T 4**

**Faith and Survival at Auschwitz**

**A. Consider how Eliezer struggles with his faith.**

1. On Rosh Hashanah, Eliezer says, “I was alone—terribly alone in a world without God and without man. Without love or mercy. I had ceased to be anything but ashes.…” (page 65) 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?
2. Why does Eliezer direct his anger toward God rather than the Germans? What does his anger suggest about the depths of his faith?
3. At the beginning of *Night*, Eliezer describes himself as someone who believes “profoundly.” How have his experiences at Auschwitz affected that faith?

**B. Discuss Eliezer’s relationship with his father.**

1. Why does Eliezer describe himself as “afraid” of having to wish his father a happy New Year?
2. 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”?
3. 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”?
4. Why did his father give him the spoon and the knife as his inheritance? What is the significance of such a gift in Auschwitz?
5. How has the relationship between Eliezer and his father changed during their time at Auschwitz? What has each come to represent to the other?

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

1. What choices are open to Eliezer and his father when the camp is evacuated?
2. How is the decision to leave made? Who makes the choice?
3. Is it the “right” choice? Or is it an example of a “choiceless choice”?
4. How does the decision help us understand why many survivors attribute their survival to luck?

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**R E A D I N G P A R T 5**

**The Importance of Memory**

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

1. 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?
2. 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?
3. 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?
4. Eliezer later states, “After my father’s death, nothing could touch me anymore.” What does he mean by these words? What do they suggest about his struggle to maintain his identity?

**B. Think about what it means to describe one’s image as a “corpse gazing back at me.”**

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.” What does that sentence mean?
2. Why is it important to Eliezer to remember? To tell you his story?
3. 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?

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

1. 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?
2. 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?

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