

TEACHING *NIGHT* IN THE SECONDARY CLASSROOM

by

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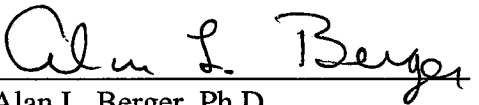
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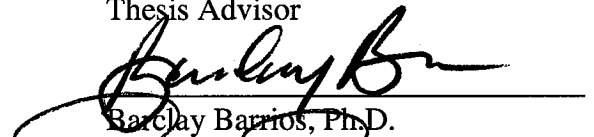
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This thesis was prepared under the direction of the candidate's thesis advisor, Dr. Alan L. Berger, Raddock Family Eminent Scholar Chair of Holocaust Studies, and has been approved by the members of her supervisory committee. It was submitted to the faculty of the Dorothy F. Schmidt College of Arts and Letters and was accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Art.

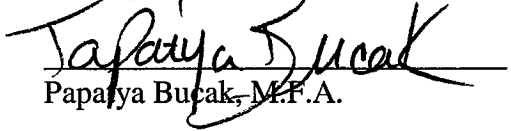
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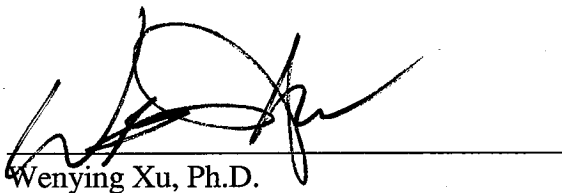
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ABSTRACT

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As a secondary-level educator of literature and writing, I have observed the fundamental need for a sensitive, well-developed curriculum in the art of teaching Eliezer Wiesel's *Night* to high school students. This thesis contextualizes Wiesel's memoir by examining the history of Jewish persecution, the Holocaust itself, and Wiesel's background. Educational strategies and activities that use both literary analysis and creative writing to engender a comprehensive and thorough realization of the history as expressed through the literature are elucidated. Additionally, several ways in which teachers may lead students to examine the effects, implications, and ramifications of Wiesel's legacy are supplied.

DEDICATION

This manuscript is dedicated to Adonai, who makes all things possible; to my family, whose support and encouragement fueled my efforts; and to all victims and survivors of the Holocaust, particularly to Eliezer Wiesel, for expanding my universe of moral obligation.

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INTRODUCTION

The dearth of Holocaust literature in the *Shoah*'s immediate aftermath has been eclipsed by an outpouring of significant, poignant, instructive texts comprised mostly of memoirs, chief among which is Nobel Peace Prize winner Eliezer Wiesel's *Night*. The word *Shoah*, a Biblical word that means "destruction," has been in use since the Middle Ages; in the 1940s it became the standard Hebrew term for the murder of European Jewry (Yad Vashem, "The Holocaust"). In the 1950s the word *Holocaust* became a corresponding term. Wiesel's memoir attests to the Holocaust's unimaginable horrors and investigates the author's theological quest for a believable deity. His text tersely and powerfully depicts an experience so inconceivable that at the time of writing, words seemed inadequate: he "had many things to say," but he "did not have the words to say them" (*Night ix*). Though the author struggled to "leave a legacy of words, of memories, to help prevent history from repeating itself" (vii), *Night*'s canonical status and pervasive popularity in academia exemplify Wiesel's obvious success in recording his ordeal. Many secondary school systems across the United States now require that English instructors teach *Night* as part of their core curricula (xiv).

As a secondary-level educator of literature and writing, I have observed the fundamental need for a sensitive, well-developed curriculum in the art of teaching *Night* to high school students. In order for adolescents to understand fully the historical context in which the Holocaust occurred, teachers must elucidate the economic and political

environment that gave rise to Adolf Hitler. Students need to receive a brief yet careful introduction to the impact of World Wars I and II on the German economy, as well as an overview of the Russian impact on Germany's economic instability. A clear delineation of the factors and circumstances that allowed Hitler to flourish in Germany's weakened and unstable economy will enable students to understand Hitler's appeal to an entire nation. Students often struggle to comprehend why so many people supported the overt racial hatred that Hitler propagated. Chapter One contextualizes Wiesel's memoir by examining Hitler's rise to power and provides summaries and resources elucidating the aforementioned economic and political factors, as well as explanations of how this information should be utilized in the secondary classroom as a pre-reading mini-unit for *Night*.

Educators should introduce students to the unit with anticipatory sets (see Chapter Four, Section One); then, teaching students about anti-Semitism and the Holocaust itself should precede any assigned reading of Wiesel's memoir (Totten and Feinberg 2). Without background knowledge of the persecutors, bystanders (both local and global), concentration and death camps, resistance efforts, and rescuers, students will not fully realize the scale of Wiesel's experience. Although some mature readers might grasp the stark profundity in *Night* without examining the Holocaust itself, most high school students require a sensitive, structured introduction to this historical episode. An overview is supplied in Chapter Two.

After students absorb, discuss, and evaluate the background knowledge, teachers should introduce them to Wiesel's pre-Holocaust life. Chapter Three presents information about his hometown, family life, religious beliefs, and education. Several structures for

teaching these facts are furnished. Additionally, the author's many publications and awards are enumerated in this chapter. It is also important for teachers to familiarize students with Wiesel's own commentary on *Night*, as well as his commentary on his religious beliefs; the tension between Wiesel's faith and his Holocaust experience plays a prominent role in every one of his books, both fiction and non-fiction. Accordingly, this information is provided and contextualized so that a cohesive mini-unit on Wiesel's background is outlined and explicated.

Chapter Four focuses on teaching the actual memoir: anticipatory sets; pre-, during-, and post-reading activities; and strategies for vocabulary development. This fourth and most comprehensive section provides analytical and creative writing exercises that enable students not only to think critically about the text but also to express their observations and analyses in an artistic manner. Before closing this section of the unit, I supply examples of creative writing activities after which students may pattern their own original poems and narratives. Learners will have opportunities to memorialize the Holocaust and its victims through varied artistic media. Finally, I discuss the ways in which teachers may use Wiesel's later two-volume memoir, *All Rivers Run to the Sea* and *The Sea Is Never Full*, in the secondary classroom. This chapter outlines educational strategies and activities that incorporate both literary analysis and creative writing to engender a comprehensive and thorough realization of Holocaust-related expression.

Chapter Five offers an assessment of the Holocaust's—and Wiesel's—historical legacies, an overview of contemporary genocides, and an examination of the ways in which students can expand and impact their “ ‘universe of [moral] obligation’ . . . the name Helen Fein has given to the circle of individuals and groups ‘toward whom

obligations are owed, to whom rules apply, and whose injuries call for [amends]’ ”
(*Facing History* 56).

1. CONTEXTUALIZING THE LITERATURE

English educators at the secondary level regularly teach Elie Wiesel's *Night* in their classrooms as a means of studying the universal themes of good versus evil, faith versus fear, humanity versus inhumanity, and suffering versus survival; although well-intentioned, educators often make the mistake of plunging into teaching Wiesel's text without providing the necessary background knowledge that enables students to fully comprehend the historicity and enormity of his experiences. I was one such teacher: each year I eagerly, and with great passion, undertook the task of teaching *Night* to the sophomores in my World Literature class. I read and re-read the text; ordered books that provided supplemental information; culled vocabulary words and made lists; designed essay prompts, quizzes, and tests; invented projects; and organized my unit, modifying it continually as my students and I continued to discover layers of nuance and depth. After three years, I considered myself somewhat of an expert in regard to teaching *Night*.

In my third year of teaching, Dr. Miriam Klein Kassenoff accepted me into the University of Miami's Holocaust Institute summer program. There, I learned how much I did not know; I discovered that my knowledge regarding Holocaust studies and Holocaust literature was like a tiny grain of sand huddled inconspicuously amid billions of other tiny grains of sand. The Holocaust Institute provided the information and resources necessary to re-enter my classroom truly prepared to transmit Wiesel's experience. The lessons I had previously thought of as adequate were really

cursory. And though curricular time constraints make it difficult for any English educator to thoroughly teach every aspect of the history surrounding a literary work, one must find the time to familiarize students with four critical aspects of pre-Holocaust historicity: Germany's pre-World War II economic conditions, Adolf Hitler's political ascendancy, the Nazi's escalating violence against Jews, and anti-Semitism. Acquainting students with these factors helps them answer for themselves many questions that arise during the unit—questions like, “How did a madman gain control of an entire country?” “Why did so many people follow Hitler?” and “Why did so few people try to help the Jews?”

Although various educational companies, such as Perfection Learning, Center for Learning, and Prestwick, now offer helpful, ready-made lesson plans, tests, and teaching units for *Night*, none thus far offers a wholly comprehensive, inclusive unit that addresses each aspect of the aforementioned pre-Holocaust history.

1.1 Pre-World War II: Germany in the 1920s

Teachers should present information in a way that engages students. Educators frequently employ mini-lectures to disseminate data, but presentations such as multi-genre PowerPoints with pictures and video clips, or student-led presentations of responses to assigned focus questions, do more to capture the ever-wandering attention of high school adolescents than a recitation of teacher-delivered facts. The ensuing information should be conveyed in a dynamic manner.

Germany's World War I defeat engendered intense conflict and hostility among German citizens and soldiers who were shocked not only by their seemingly sudden defeat but also by what they perceived as the vindictive and unfavorable terms of the Treaty of Versailles (*Facing History* 120). Morale was low and tempers were high;

angry, bitter men fought openly in the streets, and few people were satisfied with the Weimar Republic, the new government formed in the aftermath of World War I (*Facing History* 117). Inflation increased dramatically as goods became scarce due to workers' strikes. In 1918 four German marks equaled one United States (U.S.) dollar; five years later in 1923, approximately *four trillion* German marks equaled one U.S. dollar (136). Bankruptcy affected scores of Germans, and people could not afford to keep pace with the swift, unchecked rise in prices. Economic instability and the citizens' general dissatisfaction with the Weimar Republic set the stage for a confident, charismatic leader to emerge.

1.2 Hitler's Rise and Nazi Domination

When World War I began, Adolf Hitler, an Austrian native and one of six children, was a "drifter struggling to find his place in the world" (123); both of his parents died while he was still a teenager, and he left school with "an eighth-grade education and dreams of becoming an artist" (123). His failure to be accepted at Vienna's Academy of Fine Arts embittered him. His discomfort with the many nationalities who resided in Vienna increased his hatred "for the foreign mixture of peoples which had begun to corrode the old site of German culture" (123). The war gave Hitler a sense of purpose and direction, but after Germany's surrender, Hitler was one of many German war veterans who felt adrift and unfocused.

In the 1920s, rebellious veterans often joined political groups plotting to overthrow the government. The army hired Hitler to spy on one such group, the German Workers' party; instead, he became a member (123). Hitler resolved to enter the political arena. The German Workers' party attracted him because it was an unorganized group

with few members. This enabled him to lead and to systematize the party. The group was renamed the National Socialist German Workers' Party (*Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiter Partei*—NSDAP or Nazi). It was initially just another group of disgruntled citizens, but in less than a year “Hitler was attracting thousands of new members” (*Facing History* 124). Part of his magnetism was that veterans viewed Hitler as a fellow working man, a common man who had fought at the front and who understood, firsthand, the struggles they faced. Hitler’s call for a better Germany, and the intensity of his nationalism, drew people to his Nazi party.

After teachers share this information with students—whether by lecture, PowerPoint presentation, research activity, or some combination thereof—they should ask students to write about (1) the times at which they, or someone they know, have felt out of place, ostracized, or unfocused, and (2) the circumstance(s) or person(s) that helped alleviate those feelings. A “Quick Write” activity, wherein students write for a brief period of time, no more than ten minutes, on a focused topic allows students to connect personally with the lesson. Both small-group and whole-class discussions are opportunities for students to share their responses to the Quick Write prompt. A good discussion will explore the universality of one’s feelings of inadequacy and the healthy ways in which one may channel the inevitable anger and angst that result from such feelings.

A subsequent lesson should address an important fact: In November of 1923, three years after Hitler channeled his acrimony into politics and commandeered the Nazi party, he and his cohorts invaded a Munich beer hall where he fired one shot at the ceiling and “declared that . . . the national government had been deposed” (137). Hitler

was placed on trial. The judge ruled that Hitler and his supporters were “guided in their intentions by a purely patriotic spirit and the noblest of selfless intentions” (*Facing History* 137). Instead of revoking their citizenship privileges, the judge sentenced them to five years in prison, the minimum term possible. Because Hitler was not a German citizen, he should have been deported since he was an alien convicted of scheming against the government; “the law required his deportation, but the judge chose not to follow the law . . . Hitler and his comrades served just nine months of their prison term. The rest was suspended” (137-138). During his prison term, Hitler wrote *Mein Kampf*, or *My Struggle*, a book that espoused his anti-Semitic views, which paralleled the anti-Semitic literature he had read prior to World War I (138).

At this point in the pre-reading lesson, teachers should ask students to consider and respond to the following discussion topic or Quick Write prompt: Describe a time when you have observed one person’s decision negatively affecting an entire group of people. Responses may include someone who chose to drive drunk and who then had an accident wherein others were injured, or killed. Answers may also include an authority figure (parent, teacher, coach, or principal) who instituted an unfair rule that negatively affected his or her subordinates. Instead of a Quick Write, teachers might have students pair up with a partner, or form small groups of three to four, and discuss their responses. After giving them enough time to respond in writing or to discuss their views, a teacher-led whole-class discussion should take place with an emphasis on the judge in Hitler’s case and the ways in which his decision negatively affected an entire nation. This think-pair-share technique allows each student to actively participate in the discussion. Teachers should also guide students to the realization that one’s choices often have far-

reaching ramifications.

The next component of pre-Holocaust history should include an overview of Hitler's appointment to chancellor. In order to run for Germany's presidential office in 1932, Hitler finally became a German citizen (*Facing History* 147). Although his election bid failed, the Nazi party had gained popularity as an "attractive alternative to democracy and communism" (147). Germany's economic depression was so dire and Hitler's popularity was so pervasive that President Paul von Hindenburg—re-elected at the age of eighty-four—and his advisers made a risky decision:

They had little popular support. So in January of 1933, they decided to make a deal with Hitler. *He* had the popularity they lacked and *they* had the power he needed. . . . Hindenburg's advisers convinced themselves that they could control Hitler. They also believed he would be less 'wild' once he was in power. And they were certain that he too would fail to end the depression. And *when* he failed, *they* would step in to save the nation. Surprisingly, many Communists also supported the move. Unlike the conservatives, *they* did not expect Hitler to become more responsible. Instead they believed he would ruin Germany—a good thing from their point of view. Then the real revolution could begin and they would be able to take over. Hitler fooled them all. (152)

Hitler made changes in the government within weeks of taking office. Within a year, he had replaced the Weimar Republic with a "totalitarian government" (154). He accomplished this agenda by steadily instituting small changes over a period of time; "he moved gradually, with one seemingly small compromise leading to another and yet

another. By the time many were aware of the danger, they were also isolated and alone” (*Facing History* 154).

Students’ awareness of the circumstances through which Hitler rose to power will help them understand how someone with so poisonous an ideology gained control of a nation. Supplementary lessons that include video clips of Hitler’s speeches and his audiences’ fevered, cult-like reactions should be introduced if time allows. Visual and auditory learners will benefit from these additions. Mini-projects, sometimes a useful alternative to the mini-lecture, may be assigned as a means of involving kinesthetic-tactical learners who would collate and present the aforementioned background knowledge with supplemental video clips. Many contemporary students are highly proficient in the use of technology, and they eagerly embrace projects that allow them to showcase their talents.

1.3 Increasing Violence Against Jews

Most pre-fabricated Holocaust literary units for the English classroom include a reference to *Kristallnacht*, or Crystal Night (“night of the broken glass”), when Nazi soldiers enacted a pogrom against Germany’s Jewish citizens and residents—smashing store windows and looting shops and synagogues. Approximately thirty thousand Jews were arrested and sent to prison camps (Berger, Interview). But the events, increasingly hostile in nature, that led up to *Kristallnacht* are not typically mentioned. Students need to know that at the outset of Hitler’s reign, Jews were not imprisoned, tortured, and murdered. Just as Hitler’s political platforms gradually increased in scope and intensity until one day a totalitarian society was born, so his crimes against Jews grew increasingly violent and extreme until one day, escape was no longer possible.

In 1938, Hitler began his legalized persecution of Jews by requiring them to “Aryanize” their businesses: “all Jewish-owned companies [had to be sold to Aryans] usually at a fraction of their value” (*Facing History* 263). Next, the Nazis rounded up Jews who were supposedly criminals—including people who had been “convicted” solely of traffic tickets—and sent them “to a concentration camp at Buchenwald, a town near Weimar, Germany” (263). Hitler then required all Jews to have “a Jewish first name, by January 1, 1939. . . . If the name chosen was not on a list of approved [names], the Nazis would add ‘Israel’ to the man’s name and ‘Sarah’ to the woman’s” (263). Hitler wanted Jews to be readily identifiable, if not by appearance, then by name, in order to more readily separate them from the rest of society.

After losing their businesses and identities, Jews were stripped of their homes, possessions, and freedoms as they were forced to live in ghettos guarded by Nazi soldiers (292). Often, large families were crammed into tiny living quarters where food was scarce. Inhabitants had to abide by curfews; Hitler’s Nazi guards would violently beat, or murder, any Jew caught violating curfew. Fear and hunger haunted those trapped in the ghettos, but hope remained that someday, the war would end and liberation would be granted. Although life in the ghettos was difficult and cruel, for many Jews, abject despair did not set in until they were sent to concentration camps where the Nazis perpetrated vicious acts of evil. These camps were the next phase in Hitler’s plan to enact genocide—what he termed the “Final Solution” (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, *Teaching* 19). Historian Raul Hilberg, in his book *Destruction of the European Jewry*, discusses three stages of Hitler’s plan: expropriation, ghettoization, and extermination (Berger, Interview). Familiarizing learners with Hilberg’s terms and the

concepts they represent helps students to compartmentalize the different periods of persecution that the Jews underwent. Ultimately, students need to know that “[t]he Nazi purpose was to obliterate the [Jew], not merely punish or defeat him: to nullify his spirit, grind up his bones, disperse his ashes, until he literally vanished from the face of the earth” (*Facing History* 323).

When students realize that the Holocaust did not occur overnight, that it was a gradual process of increasing restrictions and brutality, they are better able to understand why concerned German citizens—many of them Jews—did not immediately flee Germany and Hitler’s regime. If time permits, students should research and trace Hitler’s mounting level of violence against the Jews. Software programs like Word and Excel allow students to make precise charts in a variety of formats that will concretely graph Hitler’s efforts to eradicate the Jews. Relatively inexpensive construction paper, rulers, and markers also accomplish the same purpose. Dates, incidents, and locales may all be inputted to create sobering visual exhibits for this portion of instruction.

Teaching an effective unit on *Night* necessitates an overview of Germany’s pre-war economic instability, Hitler’s rise to power, and the methodical steps he took to intensify maltreatment of the Jews. Contextualizing *Night* in this manner will enrich students’ reading comprehension of the steps leading down the genocidal path and enable them to perceive the somber historicity beneath the surface of the text’s somewhat stark prose. Wiesel relates his Holocaust experience in an almost austere manner that mirrors the harsh barrenness of his life in concentration camps; accordingly, he does not dwell on the details of Germany’s pre-war history. Teachers should provide students with that information, ensuring a holistic understanding of crucial historical elements.

2. THE HOLOCAUST

The word *holocaust* is Greek in origin and “originally meant a sacrifice totally burned by fire” (Bachrach). Although the word may also describe “the slaughter of human beings on a large scale,” the capital-*H* Holocaust specifically refers to the wide-scale obliteration of six million Jews, “as well as the persecution and murder of millions of other innocent people by Nazi Germany and its supporters between 1933 and 1945” (Bachrach). In the Holocaust, Jews were literally burned to ashes in crematoria located in various death camps: Auschwitz, Maidanek, Treblinka, Sobibor, Belzec, and others. Sadly, this besieged race of people experienced both the original and the contemporary meaning of the word *Holocaust*.

In addition to the Jews, the Roma and Sinti (pejoratively called Gypsies), the mentally and physically handicapped, the infirm, the elderly, homosexuals, and other people of all nationalities, ethnicities, and religions that were considered inferior were targeted for extermination. The Nazis imprisoned and killed individuals and groups classified as “undesirable and enemies of the state”—Jehovah’s Witnesses and political opponents, for example (Bachrach 20). Additionally, some allied prisoners, Americans included, were also murdered.

Essential guiding questions for teaching *Night* may include the following: How could the Holocaust happen? How were victims oppressed? Was there resistance? What constitutes resistance? How did religious victims reconcile their faith with their

circumstances? What does the Holocaust reveal about man's capacity for evil? Why should we remember? These kinds of focused questions help both teachers and students to organize their thoughts and the information being presented.

2.1 Persecutors

Nazi and *Schutzstaffel* (S.S.) soldiers were the primary persecutors of Jews; S.S. was the commonly used abbreviation for the German term *Schutzstaffel*, which means "defense echelon" or "elite guard." However, many police officers and everyday citizens joined in the harassment and brutality: "Not all Nazis were German, and not all Germans were Nazis" (Berger, Interview). The Germans began with strategies such as forced emigration and imprisonment, and then they moved on to mass murder after the German army invaded the Soviet Union: "Mobile killing units . . . marched their victims to open fields and ravines on the outskirts of conquered towns and cities. There they shot them and dumped the bodies into mass graves" (Bachrach 42).

Historian Christopher Browning asked, "What kind of person massacres civilians? Slaughters old people? Murders babies?" (*Facing History* 313). In an attempt to find answers to those questions, Browning studied interrogation reports from Reserve Police Battalion 101, a coalition initially formed from city policemen and county sheriffs. He found that the battalion was comprised of "working and lower-middle-class" men who were not well-educated people (313). Browning also noted that "few of them were Nazis and none was openly antisemitic" (313). The prevailing political climate and overhanging specter of fear created a sort of peer-pressure to which these men succumbed. Some were afraid to appear cowardly in front of their comrades; others feared the consequences of failing to follow orders (315). Most of the men interviewed said that "[e]ven twenty-five

years later they could not hide the horror of endlessly shooting Jews at point-blank range” (*Facing History* 315).

In addition, many ordinary citizens who had once amiably lived next to and interacted with Jews became hostile neighbors and antagonistic co-workers who harangued their former Jewish friends and turned them in to the Nazis (*The Last Days*). It is possible that these people may have harbored a latent dislike for Jews, which surfaced during Hitler’s reign. Fortunately, enough intelligent, independent thinkers remained to help some Jewish families escape Hitler’s persecution. These German citizens hid their Jewish friends from the Nazis and also helped them to obtain documents that would secure their passage to safe countries. Although persecutors were prolific in Hitler’s Nazi Germany, a moral minority of Jewish sympathizers did exist and did provide aid in whatever ways they could. These sympathizers, when caught, suffered the same fate as the Jews they tried to help. Supplementary reading for students that will elucidate this topic should include *The Hiding Place* by Corrie ten Boom; *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl* by Anne Frank; and *When Light Pierced the Darkness: Christian Rescue of Jews in Nazi-occupied Poland* by Nechama Tec.

2.2 Concentration Camps and Killing Centers

Hitler appropriated pre-existing prisons and built camps to house his victims. “While millions [in these camps] were murdered outright through the use of gas chambers and other methods of extermination, thousands of others died from disease, starvation, and slave labor” (Schumacher 10). Some camps, such as Auschwitz-Birkenau, Belzec, Maidanek, Sobibor, Treblinka, Chelmno, and Stutthof were set up as “killing centers” that housed gas chambers and crematoria (10); these seven camps were located

in Poland.

Other camps, like Dachau, Buchenwald, Bergen-Belsen, Ravensbruck, Theresienstadt, Flossenburg, Natzweiler, Mittelbau, Gross-Rosen, and Sachsenhausen were scattered throughout France, Germany, and Czechoslovakia. Prisoners at these camps were forced to labor on behalf of the Germans until they died from starvation, disease, or violence. The Nazis endeavored to “exterminate the prisoners through work,” in addition to murdering them outright (Berger, Interview). Daily verbal and physical abuses, denigration, and humiliation were repeatedly heaped on camp inmates. One could be beaten for simply looking at a Nazi guard or for daring to ask a question.

Wiesel powerfully depicts his camp experience in *Night*; the majority of the text centers on this period of his life. Students often struggle to reconcile the horror of Wiesel’s experience with their notions of humanity. His firsthand account bears witness to the horror of the concentration camp experience, and students must be led carefully through this portion of the text with sensitive, thoughtful discussions that will allow them to fully process the information. There are many clinical descriptions of the different camps available in textbooks and on the Internet, but none so moves the human spirit like the memoir account. Supplementary reading might include portions of other memoirs such as Primo Levi’s *Survival in Auschwitz* and Gerda Weissman Klein’s *All But My Life*.

2.3 Resistance

People often mistakenly believe that the Jews submitted passively to their circumstances without ever attempting to fight back or escape. Nothing could be further from the truth. In ghettos and in concentration camps, in myriad ways, Jews subversively—and sometimes overtly—struck back at the Nazis. Literature from the

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum describes two obstacles to resistance: the Germans' superior armament and their "tactic of collective responsibility" (*Resistance* 5). Although the Germans' arsenal of weapons and armed power far outclassed the rudimentary weapons with which the Jews had to battle, these unarmed civilians, who had limited access to military hardware, still managed to fight back. Unfortunately, when the Jews resisted persecution, the Germans retaliated by using the tactic of collective responsibility, which "held entire families and communities responsible for individual acts of armed and unarmed resistance" (5). For example, one "entire ghetto population [in Dolhyhnov, Lithuania] was killed after two young boys escaped and refused to return" (5). In Poland, 120 Jews were shot and killed after a Jewish man shot a German police officer (5). In this manner, the Germans were able to prevent many potential acts of resistance because few Jews wanted innocent parties to suffer on their behalf.

Another obstacle to resistance included the speed and secrecy that the Nazis used to implement deportations and mass murders; their reliance on deception kept many Jews unaware of the imminent horrors:

Millions of victims, rounded up either prior to mass shootings . . . or for deportation to Nazi killing centers where they were gassed, often did not know where they were being sent. Rumors of death camps were widespread, but Nazi deception and the human tendency to deny bad news in the face of possible harm or death took over as most Jews could not believe the stories. There was no precedence for such a monstrous action as the planned annihilation of a whole people as official government policy. The German or collaborating police forces generally ordered their

victims to pack some of their belongings, thus reinforcing the belief among victims that they were being ‘resettled’ in labor camps. (*Resistance* 7)

Because the Jews could not have conceived of Hitler’s genocidal plan for them—or his willingness to completely disregard what they assumed were the constraints of humanity—they were often unprepared to react or resist in meaningful ways.

When they could resist, however, they did so wholeheartedly. Most ghettos were guarded by police officers and surrounded by barbed-wire fences or brick walls. Jews were separated from Jews in other ghettos and denied contact with the outside world. Tightly sealed ghettos, like the one in Warsaw, were “isolated and walled in but permitted greater opportunities for movement in and out through underground sewers and breaks in the walls” (9). Underground newspapers and radios, as well as acts of sabotage (such as damaging machinery, stealing documents, and setting fires), all helped to boost morale within the ghettos. These isolated Jews also set up schools within the ghettos, taught their children, continued to study, and engaged in formal prayer times.

The most well-known uprising took place in the Warsaw Ghetto. Inhabitants amassed arms that were smuggled in through underground couriers and, in April of 1943, these Jewish fighters fired on German troops and held them off for twenty-eight days (18). This effort, though ultimately unsuccessful from a military point of view, instilled hope in other Jews and inspired them to resist. “The Warsaw Ghetto uprising assumed a significance beyond the revolt itself” (20). Resistance in the ghettos was widespread, and “at least 60 ghettos had attempted revolts, mass escapes, or the formation of armed underground movements” (17). The largest ghetto resistance organizations were situated

in Kovno, Vilna, Minsk, and Bialystok, all located in German-occupied territories of eastern Poland, Lithuania, and Belorussia (*Resistance* 17).

Resistance in Nazi camps occurred in much the same way as that of the ghettos: secret political meetings, efforts to lessen inmates' suffering, efforts to inform the outside world, and even armed conflict were all tactics that the imprisoned Jews employed. Jews at Treblinka, after learning about the Warsaw Ghetto uprising, stole arms from a warehouse, killed the guards on duty, destroyed the extermination area, set the camp on fire, and helped remaining prisoners escape to the forest (26). Several inmates, including resistance leaders, were killed, but as many as "200 prisoners escaped to the neighboring forest, and perhaps [twenty] of those men survived German efforts to recapture them" (26). Similar revolts took place in Sobibor and Auschwitz-Birkenau (27).

Students are frequently surprised by the extent and scope of Jewish resistance; few are aware of the victims' efforts to challenge their captors. This portion of pre-reading instruction is critical in preventing students from thinking that the Jews stood by passively as their lives were stolen from them. Teachers should, at the very least, prepare an overview of the different types of resistance, including concrete examples such as the Warsaw Ghetto uprising and the revolts in Treblinka and Auschwitz. Alternatively, teachers could assign different research topics to small groups and have them present their findings to the class in a creative format. Suggested topics are as follows: unarmed resistance in the ghettos, armed resistance in the ghettos, unarmed resistance in the camps, armed resistance in the camps, partisan activities, spiritual resistance, and resistance in Nazi Germany. Topics may be combined for smaller classes. *Resistance During the Holocaust*, a concise and informative booklet published by the United States

Holocaust Memorial Museum, is a valuable resource for both teachers and students.

2.4 Bystanders

Individuals, communities, businesses, towns, cities, and most nations stood by and watched as the Nazis sent millions of people to their deaths. Some did so out of fear, some out of apathy, and some out of malice. After a while, it became impossible for anyone to remain ignorant of what the Germans were doing. Primo Levi, a Holocaust survivor and author, concludes that German citizens who said they did not know simply did not want to know (*Facing History* 364). “Those who knew did not talk; those who did not know did not ask questions; those who did ask questions received no answers. In this way the typical German citizen won and defended his ignorance” (364). However, numerous clues confronted Germans on a daily basis. In addition to the obvious harassment of Jews and the many pogroms, railroad employees could not have failed to notice the transportation of Jews and other victims to the concentration camps. Bank owners requested proof of death before they allowed finance ministers to seize victims’ pensions (365); surely the flood of these seizures signaled that something was amiss. Building contracts for gas chambers and crematoria were required, and workers were necessary to build such monstrosities (365). Soldiers sent reports home in letters and would have discussed their assignments when they returned home on leave (Berger, Interview). All of these people had to be aware that something evil was occurring.

Many non-hostile Aryan citizens chose to look the other way when they observed their Jewish neighbors being subjected to curfews, beaten mercilessly, robbed of their livelihoods, and removed from their homes. As mentioned previously, Aryan business owners bought Jewish businesses at a fraction of their cost; the new owners chose to

overlook the inequity of these transactions.

A little-known fact about the Holocaust is that one of America's most powerful corporations, International Business Machines (IBM), did more than just stand by; it took a conscious and active business role in Hitler's attempts to eradicate the Jews (Black 23). IBM's technology, which allowed for advanced numbering and sophisticated computations of data heretofore unthinkable, appealed to Hitler's desire to catalogue, record, and tabulate his genocidal activities. Nazi Germany offered IBM, a company run by Thomas J. Watson, a man who was known to compromise his morals, "the opportunity to cater to government control, supervision, surveillance, and regimentation on a plane never before known in human history . . . in business terms, that was account growth" (46). IBM did not consider this business partnership to be a moral predicament: "Supplying the Nazis with the technology they needed was not even debated" (47). IBM's tasks for Germany focused solely on "racial politics, Aryan domination, and Jewish identification and persecution" (47). IBM chose to act as a bystander when it ignored Hitler's goals in order to profit from his madness.

In addition to businesses, entire towns sometimes engaged in the type of passivity that allowed the Nazis to commit wholesale murder. When Hitler's soldiers commandeered Hartheim Castle in Mauthausen, a town in Austria, they "renovated" the structure (*Facing History* 370). The castle was originally a home for mentally handicapped children. After the renovations were completed, the children were returned to the castle, and transports arrived two to three times a day, bringing hundreds of new residents (370). Not long after the transports arrived, "enormous clouds of smoke streamed out of a certain chimney and spread a penetrating stench" (370). The

townspeople also noticed bits of human remains and tufts of hair that floated out of the chimney, “littering parts of the vicinity” (*Facing History* 371). Despite their observations, the townspeople of Mauthausen did nothing to expose or hinder the Nazis’ grotesque activities. “Silence equaled acquiescence” (Berger, Interview).

People outside of Europe also acted as bystanders. America, in May of 1939, closed her eyes and ears to the cry for help that carried its way across the North Atlantic Ocean. Nine hundred thirty-seven Jewish men, women, and children were headed from Germany to Cuba, seeking asylum, aboard a ship named the *St. Louis*. They had paid a large amount of money to secure their entry into the country. However, President Federico Laredo Bru changed his mind as the ship drew near, and he refused to grant the Jews permission to land in Cuba. The ship’s captain did not panic because Miami Beach, Florida was not far off; in fact, the ship came so close that the refugees were able to see Miami’s city lights (*Facing History* 276). The captain expected the American government to grant asylum to his passengers. Two passengers were less hopeful about their chance of being accepted, and they tried to commit suicide. The Jews would rather kill themselves than return to Germany. Rumors of a mass suicide pact reached the ship’s captain, and when Americans heard about this, they “demanded that their government accept the passengers” (276). The American government, led by President Franklin D. Roosevelt, ignored all pleas for help, and the *St. Louis* was sent back to Germany.

The Nazis turned the incident into propaganda. They claimed that it demonstrated that the Jews were universally disliked and distrusted. On June 10, Belgium responded with an announcement that it would accept two hundred passengers. Two days later, the Netherlands promised to take

194. Britain and France took in the rest. The United States remained silent.
(*Facing History* 276)

In 1942, the United States, Britain, and the Soviet Union officially acknowledged the violation of human rights being undertaken by the Germans; the Allies “issued joint declarations” that charged the Nazis with attempts to “exterminate the Jewish people in Europe” (404). Although the Allies had finally recognized Germany’s atrocities, they did nothing to stop the Nazis (404).

Students should be made aware that bystanders play a more significant role in society than people tend to realize. They are witnesses who can exert powerful influences by promoting values of caring; conversely, they can also, by their passivity, promote compliance with perpetrators. Small-group and whole-class discussions should center on the power bystanders hold to combat or enable evil. At this point in the unit, an effective activity to use with learners is the “fishbowl” discussion (Milner and Milner 40). I center my fishbowl discussion around a commonly known quote by English philosopher Edmund Burke who once said, “The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.” Teachers should display Burke’s quote, or disseminate it to the class, and choose four or five students who will form an inner circle inside a larger circle. Most students love to volunteer for the inner-circle role.

The small group within the inner circle should discuss the following questions, and the outside circle of students should silently take notes: What is your definition of a bystander? Where in school or in society have you personally observed or experienced the effects a bystander has, positive or negative, on an incident or situation? Why do you think some bystanders choose to act and others choose not to get involved? Do you think

passive bystanders deserve disdain or understanding? Why or why not? In what ways did “good men doing nothing” in Hitler’s Germany allow evil to triumph? Where in our current society, local or national, do you see similar things happening?

The teacher should guide these questions, keep the inner circle on task, and monitor for comprehension. One option to give students is to allow those inside the “bowl” to tag students from the outer circle to replace them. The inner-circle conversation, because it is directed to peers and not the teacher, becomes more authentic (Milner and Milner 40). Following the fishbowl discussion, a whole-class discussion or a writing activity may be used to assess students’ listening skills and to gauge their mindsets in regard to the topic of bystanders. This post-fishbowl reaction prompt should ask students to agree or disagree with at least two of the issues discussed, and learners must thoroughly support their responses, whether aloud or in writing. When choosing the whole-class discussion instead of the reaction paper, keep a class roster nearby and mark the number and quality of responses for each student. A plus sign may be used for high-quality responses, a checkmark for fair-quality responses, and a minus sign for poor-quality responses. Assign a point weight to each sign and average the symbols.

Most teachers can tell by just looking at the type and amount of symbols placed next to a student’s name what his or her discussion grade should be. When using minus signs, be sure to jot down keywords that serve as reminders of why the student’s response was considered poor; this enables the instructor to explain a low score to a concerned student. Although the fishbowl activity works especially well with this topic, it may be used with any subject matter or issue.

2.5 Rescuers

Regardless of the danger, some people chose to help the Jews:

[D]espite the indifference of most Europeans and the collaboration of others in the murder of Jews during the Holocaust, individuals in every European country . . . risked their lives to help Jews. . . . Rescuers came from every religious background: Protestant and Catholic, Eastern Orthodox and Muslim. Some European churches, orphanages, and families provided hiding places for Jews. . . . In France, Belgium, and Italy, underground networks run by Catholic clergy and lay Catholics saved thousands of Jews. (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, “Rescue”)

In Germany, anyone caught sheltering a Jew faced imprisonment; in Poland, those caught helping Jews were killed. Even so, in Poland, which had the highest yield of victims, about two percent of the Christian population chose to help the Jews (*Facing History* 380). In Holland, which had the second highest yield of victims, some Dutch citizens and Christians like Corrie ten Boom and her family determined to help in whatever ways possible. Denmark, occupied by Germany, “was the site of the most famous and complete rescue operation in Axis-controlled Europe” (“Rescue”). There, the Danish resistance secretly transported approximately 7,200 Jews in small fishing boats to Sweden, a neutral country (“Rescue”).

French Christians in Le Chambon-sur-Lignon, a small rural town in south-central France, “turned their community into a hiding place for Jews from all over Europe” (*Facing History* 385). Although many churches and people that were nominatively called “Christian” participated in persecuting the Jews and fostered anti-Semitism, Christians

who recognized and embraced Christianity’s Jewish roots—and who held fast to the Bible’s teachings rather than to man-made church doctrines that conflicted with the message of love and kindness that Jesus propagated—risked their lives to save Jews. Their efforts should be acknowledged, despite the otherwise large percentage of ostensible Christians who either did nothing to help or who actively participated in the persecution.

Additionally, several powerful individuals used their authority and influence to rescue Jews. Raoul Wallenberg, a Swedish diplomat; Carl Lutz, a Swiss diplomat; and Giorgio Perlasca, who pretended to be a Spanish diplomat, “provided tens of thousands of Jews in 1944 with certification that they were under the ‘protection’ of neutral powers” (“Rescue”). Oskar Schindler, a German industrialist made famous by Stephen Spielberg’s movie *Schindler’s List*, used his business to shelter eleven hundred Jews that he asserted were his workers (*Facing History* 392).

Dr. Alan L. Berger’s perceptive exposition of Schindler’s lifestyle, decisions, and actions, elucidated in his article “Oskar Schindler: The Moral Complexity of Rescue,” provides teachers with the type of information that enriches a secondary English classroom—especially an honors-level course. A focused discussion with students on Schindler’s motives creates an opportunity to teach them about two different modes of altruism: *normative* altruism, which is “supported by society,” and *autonomous* altruism, which is “neither reinforced nor otherwise rewarded by society” (Berger, “Oskar Schindler” 135). An effective think-pair-share activity to implement at this point in the unit involves the following: Share the details of Schindler’s life that Dr. Berger presents in his article; then, outline the “post-Holocaust theory of altruism” using Perry London’s

observations of the three traits rescuers shared, as well as Nechama Tec's distinctions between normative and autonomous altruism (Berger, "Oskar Schindler" 135). London states that rescuers had adventurous spirits, moral identification with a principled parent, and social marginality (135). Place students in pairs and ask them to classify Schindler's behavior into one of Tec's two categories of altruism. They must support their conclusions with at least two reasons. After giving students enough time to process their thoughts and formalize their responses, place them in a circle and facilitate a whole-class discussion. Position students who choose normative altruism on one side of the circle and those who choose autonomous altruism on the other side. Allow students to debate their responses. When the discussion ends, share Dr. Berger's conclusions with the class: He asserts that "Schindler's activities . . . exemplify autonomous altruism" (135).

Whatever their altruistic motives, Berger states that those who rescued Jews were "flickering candles of moral light in the murderous dark" (122). These witnesses to Hitler's attempts at genocide chose to become involved. They did not just seize opportune moments when such prospects arose; they "actively created, sought, or recognized them where others did not" (*Facing History* 382). However, "reflecting on the deeds of the righteous, one is simultaneously aware of the hundreds of millions who were not like them: Gentiles who committed spiritual treason by either actively or passively cooperating in the murder of European Jewry" (Berger, "Oskar Schindler" 122). Remind students that a bystander's passivity is just as deleterious as active participation in wrongdoing.

2.6 Judgment

When the war ended, international trials held in Nuremberg, Germany were

convened to administer justice to war criminals. John Fried, a legal consultant to the Tribunals, stated that “[t]he awesome, unprecedented nature of the Nazi war crimes demanded a response from the victorious Allies after World War II. That response, embodying the shock and outrage of mankind, was expressed in the Nuremberg Tribunals, in which the Nazi leadership was tried for its crimes” (*Facing History* 419). One of the dilemmas judges faced was deciding who should be held responsible and tried: the people who gave orders, the people who carried out those orders, or the people who allowed the Holocaust to happen? At the Nuremberg Tribunals, twenty-four Nazis—labeled as “leaders, organizers, instigators, and accomplices”—were indicted for Conspiracy, Crimes Against Peace, War Crimes, and Crimes Against Humanity (423). The Nazis kept numerous detailed records that served as evidence against them, and the prosecution used these records as evidence. “Of the men actually brought to trial, five were military leaders and the rest were prominent government or party officials” (426). Some high-ranking Nazi leaders, such as Hitler and Joseph Goebbels, killed themselves rather than face judgment after the war; others, like Adolf Eichmann, somehow evaded capture, and some—with help from the so-called “hot line” operated by the Vatican—fled Germany for the “welcoming embrace of dictatorial figures in Argentina, Syria, and Egypt” (Berger, Interview).

With the exception of three men, the judges convicted all of the remaining indicted Nazis; twelve were sentenced to death (*Facing History* 428). The rest were imprisoned. However, within five to seven years, most who were imprisoned were released by John J. McCoy, high commissioner for the U.S. zone of Berlin, because those Nazis were industrialists; industrialists were needed to make Germany a strong ally

against Russia in the Cold War (Berger, Interview).

3. ELIEZER WIESEL

3.1 Hometown and Family Life

Elie Wiesel grew up in Sighet, a town in northern Romania. Sighet had been a sanctuary for Jews since 1640 when Ukrainian refugees fled there to escape pogroms and persecutions in their own country (Wiesel, *All Rivers* 4). Wiesel's father, a well-respected figure in the community, "was famous for his intelligence, his perspicacity and his kindness" (6). In "Childhood," the first chapter of *All Rivers Run to the Sea*, Wiesel discusses his distant relationship with the father he revered, as well as his boyhood shyness and illnesses. In contrast, by his own admission Wiesel was overly attached to his mother (11); he sought comfort and security in his mother's love and longed for a closer relationship with his father. Wiesel and his three sisters enjoyed a close family relationship: Hilda and Bea were his elder sisters, and Tsiporah was the youngest in the family. After being transported to Auschwitz at the age of fifteen, Wiesel never saw his mother or Tsiporah again.

In this first chapter of *All Rivers Run to the Sea*, a book students should be highly encouraged to read after finishing *Night*, Wiesel introduces people who profoundly influenced his worldview: his paternal grandmother, Moshe the beadle, his teachers, and Kalman—his Kabbalist master of mysticism. Bookish and sickly as a child, Wiesel took to his studies with great fervor and was a voracious reader, a habit that later contributed to his abundant literary contributions and his fascination with Jewish mysticism. For

Wiesel, Judaism was a comprehensive way of life, not just a meaningless exercise in ritualism.

3.2 Religious Background

Raised in an observant Jewish home, Wiesel learned early the tenets of his faith. As he matured, his thirst for spiritual knowledge and experiences led him to concentrated studies with a master of the “Kabala” (*All Rivers* 33). When asked why he prayed, Wiesel thought to himself, “Why did I pray? Strange question. Why did I live? Why did I breathe?” (*Night* 4). Moishe the Beadle, the man Wiesel chose to help him study the Kabbala, engaged him in spiritual discussions that deepened Wiesel’s God-consciousness. This pre-Holocaust journey of religious studies and mystical explorations, coupled with his family’s devout Judaic observances, engendered a resolute belief in Divinity and enabled him to emerge from experiencing the *Shoah’s* unimaginable atrocities with a wounded faith rather than an absence of faith—unlike many other Holocaust survivors for whom the existence of God and evil cannot be reconciled.

As a child, Wiesel “believed profoundly” and requested that his father obtain a “master to guide [him] in [his] study of the cabbala” (*Night* 1). He equated “study with adventure” and was fascinated by the scope of knowledge available in books and ancient texts (*All Rivers* 10). He assiduously examined Jewish history, religious commentaries, and God’s relationship to His chosen people. In fact, after his bar mitzvah, Wiesel became “so obsessed with God that [he] forgot His creation . . . [he] sought Him everywhere, the better to love Him, to enjoy His gifts, to share His suffering” (33). This intense focus on God and the desire to draw continuously near to Him helped form a sturdy foundation of faith that persisted in spite of later trials.

In addition to his formal religious studies, Wiesel pursued many aspects of mysticism. Not content to concentrate on “messianic enlightenment” (*All Rivers* 33), he explored the occult. Wiesel states:

I began reading Hebrew, Aramaic, and Hungarian works on the irrational in all its diversity. Astrology, magic, morphology, hypnotism, graphology, parapsychology, alchemy. In short, I became entranced by what lay beyond reality. With a little luck, I thought, I would learn how to turn dust into gold, danger into security, harmless gestures into acts of war against war. I was fascinated by the mystical experiences, or alleged mystical experiences, recounted in these books yellowed by the centuries. (*All Rivers* 34)

Although these mystical pursuits and encounters drove two of Wiesel’s young friends to madness (38), he persisted in his studies. During his death camp experiences, when invocations and incantations failed to invoke divine intervention, Wiesel abandoned his faith in occultist mysticism (34); however, despite what he perceived as God’s apparent failure to deliver his children from the Holocaust, Wiesel “never renounced [his] faith in God” (84). It is significant that the author maintained this belief, even though he was confronted with radical counter-testimony to his faith on a daily basis. This faith in God, instilled in his youth, refused to die. Its tenacity is owed, in part, to the grounding Wiesel received in religious studies before the Nazis interrupted his life and destroyed the remainder of his adolescence. Wiesel’s previous immersion in Judaic studies and precepts sparked a resolute flame that continued to flicker when his life became a series of dim shadows. Having “encountered” God in his studies, the author retained—sometimes in

opposition to his inclination and circumstances—his faith in the Almighty. This faith, however, is not a traditional faith in the God of the Torah; rather, Wiesel searches for a God who can co-exist with Hitler’s death camps (Berger, Interview).

For ten years, Wiesel remained silent before bearing witness to his Holocaust experience; in *Night*, he testifies to inconceivable violence. “The memoir, he claims, is both the end and the beginning of everything” (Berger, “Faith” 46). Shortly after arriving at Birkenau, the “reception center for Auschwitz” (*Night* 26), Wiesel stood in shock and disbelief as he observed live babies thrown into a fire (30). This incident, irreconcilable with what he believed about God, engendered his first internal protest against the Divine: “For the first time, I felt revolt rise up in me. Why should I bless His name? The Eternal, Lord of the Universe, the All-Powerful and Terrible, was silent” (31). This blow to the author’s religious convictions could have easily, and understandably, destroyed his faith, but it did not. As he walked, contemplating suicide, towards the fiery pit into which the babies were flung, a prayer rose from his heart: “[I]n spite of myself, the words formed themselves and issued in a whisper from my lips: *Yitgadal veyitkadach shme, raba. . . .* May His name be blessed and magnified” (31). Although he states early in *Night* that the flames “consumed [his] faith forever” (32), he continually acknowledges God’s existence and sovereignty throughout the text.

One example of this acknowledgment occurs when Wiesel hid the fact that he wore new shoes and protected the shoes from being stolen because of the mud-covering that camouflaged them. He says, “I thanked God, in an improvised prayer, for having created mud in His infinite and wonderful universe” (35). This prayer arises after he declares his faith consumed by the flames. What accounts for Wiesel’s contradictory

statements? How does he reconcile his doubts with his religious background? His faith crisis is not resolved in *Night*, yet neither does he discard his basic belief in a God that is real. At first, Wiesel acknowledges his crisis of faith by recognizing that, like Job, he believes in God's existence but not in God's justice (*Night* 42). In this confession, there is another beginning and another end.

As he experiences the "death" of his childhood *perception* of the Lord, the author struggles to reconcile his reality with his spiritual training. This conflict permeates every novel Wiesel writes. However, he never completely disconnects from God. Wiesel's admiration of, and closeness to, his maternal grandfather, Reb Dodye Feig, heavily influenced his love for God. He describes his grandfather as "the embodiment of Hasidic creative force and fervor . . . a cultured and erudite man, an avid reader of the Bible and of the Rashi and Ramban commentaries, and especially of the work of Rabbi Hayyim ben Attar" (*All Rivers* 41). Reb Feig enthralled Wiesel with songs of Jewish legends, and, the author reveals, "He allowed me—obliged me—to love life, to assume it as a Jew, to celebrate it for the Jewish people" (41). Wiesel learned as a child to rejoice and delight in the spiritual aspects of his heritage.

One of the many iniquities that provoked a faith crisis occurred when he was forced, along with other prisoners in Auschwitz, to watch as two men and a child were hanged. Because the child weighed too little to hasten a quick death, Wiesel "had to look him full in the face" as the boy "struggled between life and death, dying in slow agony" for over thirty minutes (*Night* 62). Upon hearing a fellow prisoner ask the question "Where is God now?" (62), Wiesel "heard a voice within [himself] answer him: Where is He? Here He is—He is hanging here on this gallows" (62). From that passage, one may

infer that Wiesel renounces his faith and considers God to be dead, but the author continues to question God and pray to Him long after repeated denials are proffered. Soon after declaring that God is hanging on the gallows, Wiesel asks, “What are you, my God? . . . What does your greatness mean, Lord of the universe, in the face of all this weakness?” (*Night* 63). In and of itself, the questioning acknowledges God’s existence; if Wiesel truly believed that there were no God, what would be the point of asking Him anything?

Just as Wiesel’s questions point to his fundamental belief, his anger at God further evidences his wounded faith. Though he inwardly rebels against worshipping the Lord and hurls accusations at God (65), these indictments underscore a faith that is, paradoxically, angry precisely because it exists: If the author did not perceive the Almighty to be omnipotent, he would have no cause to be enraged. If he had no faith in One greater than himself, his anger at God would have no object.

In the camp, on the Day of Atonement, Wiesel chose not to fast as a way of shaking his fist in God’s face. He states, “I no longer accepted God’s silence. As I swallowed my bowl of soup, I saw in the gesture an act of rebellion and protest against Him” (66). Despite Wiesel’s protests and denials, some vestige of the faith imbued in his childhood remains an essential part of himself, as confirmed by his questioning of God and the blame he assigns to God. Implicit in this blame is the underlying belief that God exists and could have intervened to rescue His chosen people from the Holocaust.

The systematic torture and murder of approximately six million Jews exacted a substantial toll on others’ faith and even contributed to the surrender of one’s will to live. Akiba Drumer, for example, a formerly devout man and fellow prisoner, lost the struggle

with his faith and succumbed to the weakness that plagued him:

He was not the only one to lose his faith during those selection days. . . .

Poor Akiba Drumer, if he could have gone on believing in God, if he could have seen a proof of God in this Calvary, he would not have been taken by the selection. But as soon as he felt the first cracks forming in his faith, he had lost his reason for struggling and had begun to die. When the selection came, he was condemned in advance, offering his own neck to the executioner. (*Night* 73)

Wiesel also states that Akiba Drumer “was not alone in having lost his faith” (76); a Polish rabbi who prayed constantly and who could recite entire pages from the Talmud said, one day, “It’s over. God is no longer with us” (76). Dr. Alan L. Berger, in an interview with Wiesel, comments, “And you did not lose faith there, unlike Akiba Drumer whom you write about in *Night*” (“Interview” 20). Wiesel responds by saying that, ultimately, Drumer did not lose faith because “he asked for Kaddish” (20).

In *Night*, the author further addresses his spiritual conflict after he relates the distressing circumstances surrounding a rabbi whose son deserts him. The prisoners were forced to run for more than forty-two miles in freezing weather and subhuman conditions; upon stopping, a rabbi asked Wiesel if he had seen his son whom he had lost in the crowd. Wiesel replied that he had not seen the rabbi’s son, but after the rabbi departed, Wiesel remembered a dismaying fact: “[the rabbi’s son] had wanted to get rid of his father! He had felt that his father was growing weak, he had believed that the end was near and had sought this separation in order to get rid of the burden, to free himself from an encumbrance which could lessen his own chances of survival” (*Night* 87). This

ironic reversal of the *Akidah*—the binding of Isaac that occurs in the book of Genesis—exemplifies one aspect of the father-son thematic construct that threads its way through *Night*.

Wiesel, horrified by the rabbi's son's abandonment of his father, prayed involuntarily "to the God in whom [he] no longer believed" (*Night* 87); he asked for the fortitude to avoid a similarly disgraceful and inhumane decision in terms of his own father. This apparent contradiction—praying to a God in whom he no longer believes—is ubiquitous throughout *Night*. The tension between Wiesel's pre-Holocaust commitment to God and his subsequent doubts is always mitigated by an instance or moment of prayer, questioning, or accusation. All three forms of communication with God belie the true condition of Wiesel's faith: he has always harbored an indomitable belief in the Almighty, despite what may be construed as protests from within.

In attempting to make sense of the incomprehensible, Wiesel's questions, memoirs, and novels lead him repeatedly to the same issues: Where is God in suffering? What is God's role in the evil that man perpetrates upon man? Why does God not intervene? Nowhere does Wiesel conclude that God does not exist. Rather, he struggles to define and understand God's apparent silence. This quest for answers stems from the author's early religious training. In *Night*, Moishe the Beadle tells Wiesel that "[m]an comes closer to God through the questions he asks Him. . . . Therein lies true dialogue. Man asks and God replies. But we don't understand His replies. We cannot understand them. Because they dwell in the depths of our souls and remain there until we die" (5). Taught to revere God, to study assiduously, and to raise himself up to God by asking questions of Him, Wiesel's religious background contributes heavily to the sustenance of

his faith. His early passion for God was woven so tightly into his being that no matter how it was ripped from him, dangling strands remained to be re-knit in new ways. This revision of his belief system still allows for God, but it forgoes a comprehensible resolution of God's role in suffering.

Wiesel briefly discusses the idea of God and suffering in *All Rivers Run to the Sea*; he explores the suggestion that God suffers along with man when hardship and tragedy occur (104). In the probing, concise manner that typifies the author's works, he examines the dynamics and interplay of God's relationship to man in the context of affliction. In his effort to understand God's ways, Wiesel explains, "it is not our place to make decisions for God. He alone has discretion in the thousands of ways of joining His suffering to ours. We can neither solicit nor reject them, but we can only seek to be worthy of them, even without understanding. Where God is concerned, all is mystery" (104). These statements, written thirty-five years after *Night*, demonstrate the progress of the author's post-Holocaust faith journey. Wiesel moves from a justifiably angry and bewildered spiritual state to an uneasy acceptance of God's sovereignty, despite the continuing dearth of answers to the "question mark" in history that is the Holocaust (105). He states, "Nothing justifies Auschwitz. Were the Lord Himself to offer me a justification, I think I would reject it. Treblinka erases all justifications and answers. The barbed-wire kingdom will forever remain an immense question mark on the scale of both humanity and its Creator" (105). Though Wiesel discards the notion that reason can possibly be applied to the Holocaust, he does not reject God along with the idea that an explanation for such evil could exist.

The difficult task of retaining belief in God while distrusting or questioning God's

apparent decisions has long been a recurrent theme in Jewish history. “Paradox is part of mysticism, and Wiesel embraces paradox” (Berger, Interview). Wiesel joins a considerable group of Biblical characters and historical notables who have struggled with similar issues related to God’s role in both personal history and the world at large. Job, for example, suffered seemingly inexplicable catastrophes. Those around him offered various theories for his troubles, and his wife advised him to “curse God and die” (Job 2:9); nevertheless, he managed to grieve his losses without renouncing his faith in God. “Like Job, [Wiesel] does not doubt God’s existence; rather, he is obsessed with God’s silence” (Berger, “The Storyteller” 71).

Although the subject of faith is often controversial and incendiary, teachers should not ignore this important aspect of Wiesel’s life. A sensitive and careful overview of the role religion plays throughout his experience is fundamental to helping students read beneath the lines. One topic that teachers should ask students to trace while reading *Night* is Wiesel’s spiritual journey. Learners should annotate instances in the text where the author’s faith either grows or atrophies, and the class should discuss the possible reasons for this ebb and flow.

3.3 Publications and Awards

Wiesel has authored more than forty texts; a detailed list of his works may be found in the Hill and Wang edition of *Night*, translated by his wife, Marion. He has published fiction and non-fiction literature. His non-fiction texts, memoirs in particular, are the most prominent of his works.

In 1986, Wiesel won the Nobel Peace Prize for his message of peace and his practical efforts to that effect. He is also the recipient of the *Prix Medicis* and the *Prix du*

Livre Inter awards (both French literary honors), as well as the Grand Prize in Literature from the city of Paris where *Night* was originally published. In his acceptance speech for the Nobel Peace Prize, Wiesel reiterates his purpose to serve as a voice for the oppressed and swears “never to be silent whenever and wherever human beings must endure suffering and humiliation” (*Night* 118). He further states, “When human lives are endangered, when human dignity is in jeopardy, national borders and sensitivities become irrelevant. Wherever men and women are persecuted because of their race, religion, or political views, that place must—at that moment—become the center of the universe” (118-119). Wiesel has spent his life as a journalist and an author fighting tyranny through the medium of words. In doing so, he has touched the lives and enlightened the minds of millions. Introducing students to the background information about Wiesel found in sections 3.1 through 3.3 will enable them to better understand his memoir.

4. TEACHING *NIGHT*

Night should be introduced via anticipatory sets—engaging, thought-provoking activities and lessons that introduce learners to the forthcoming material. Then, the literature should be contextualized so that students receive the necessary background information in order to fully understand the circumstances described in *Night* (see Chapter One). Once the background information has been frontloaded, teachers should begin preparing students to read the actual text. Pre-reading activities will help learners mentally prepare for a close reading, and vocabulary development, which aids in comprehension and expands students’ verbal repertoire, should be implemented. Instruction that takes place during the actual reading of the text should focus on analytical practices that engender reflective insights and behaviors. Finally, post-reading activities should allow both students and teachers to assess and evaluate content knowledge.

4.1 Anticipatory Sets

On the first day of my unit, I do not mention anything about the Holocaust to my sophomore students. I want them to make inferences and draw connections between the following children’s book activity and their prior knowledge. Short children’s books and stories may sometimes be used effectively in secondary classrooms to introduce themes and topics in a low-key atmosphere that alleviates academic pressure. Eve Bunting’s *Terrible Things*, an allegory for the Holocaust, is a children’s book that alludes to important themes students will analyze while reading *Night*. I read aloud *Terrible Things*

to my students, and while I am reading, they fill in a two-column notes chart that requires them to identify basic literary elements. The chart has four rows and, of course, two columns. The “Table” function in any Word processing software may be used to create the chart. In the left-hand column I label the four rows accordingly: Setting, Characters, Plot, and Theme. While I read aloud *Terrible Things*, students must fill in each row in the right-hand column with the appropriate information.

The allegory is set in a forest clearing, and the characters are woodland creatures. Birds, squirrels, rabbits, porcupines, frogs, and fish all live together in harmony until one day the “Terrible Things” arrive at the clearing (Bunting). The Terrible Things, colossal beings identified only as menacing, dark shadows, forcibly remove a different forest creature each time they come to the clearing. The remaining creatures, who stand by while their friends are abducted, feel only a sense of relief that the Terrible Things did not come for them. When a young forest resident named “Little Rabbit” asks why the Terrible Things want to take away all the forest creatures, “Big Rabbit” sternly cautions him not to question the persecution of the other animals: “We mustn’t ask . . . the Terrible Things don’t need a reason. Just be glad it wasn’t us they wanted” (Bunting).

Eventually, however, there is no one left in the clearing except for the rabbits. Little Rabbit suggests that they move from the clearing before the Terrible Things return, but Big Rabbit says, “We are the White Rabbits. It couldn’t happen to us” (Bunting). Despite Big Rabbit’s confidence, the Terrible Things do return and take away the White Rabbits. Little Rabbit, however, who hides behind some rocks, escapes. He thinks to himself, “If only we creatures had stuck together, it could have been different” (Bunting). The allegory ends with Little Rabbit resolving to leave the clearing and to tell other forest

creatures about the Terrible Things.

As I read, students jot down details about setting in the setting box, the different types of forest creatures in the character box, and major events in the plot box. After I finish reading, I give students five to ten minutes to reflect on themes: What is (are) the author's message(s) to the reader? What observation about people, society, life, and the world in general does the author make through the literature? I walk around to each desk, spot-checking to ascertain who has completed the task and who needs assistance. We then discuss the story via the notes. I collect the notes and grade them using a check-plus, check, and check-minus system. At least one student usually makes the connection between the allegory and the Holocaust, but if no one does, I do not mention it until after the second anticipatory set because by then, everyone in the room will be able to make concrete connections.

The obvious parallels between the Holocaust and *Terrible Things* include differences among characters just as there are differences among people, a threatening entity that removes inhabitants from homes to which they never return, bystanders who remain silent while their neighbors are persecuted, dissenting voices that are silenced, and a survivor's desire to warn the world. These parallels should be discussed in detail after the activity that follows. I do not force connections at this point in the unit; they will come naturally to students after the next anticipatory set. I have enough time in my forty-eight minute class time block to complete both sets, but shorter classes may split the two activities into two (or one and a half) instructional days.

After I facilitate a whole-class discussion of *Terrible Things*, I ask students to take out a single sheet of paper, rip it in half, give the extra half to a classmate, and jot down

the emotions they feel while watching a four-minute PowerPoint set to a song entitled “Never Again” by Wu Tang Clan. I created the PowerPoint by typing the song’s lyrics into forty-four different slides; each slide is accompanied by images from the Holocaust that directly relate to the lyrics. The combination of music and pictures is a powerful medium, and students are deeply moved by the presentation. PowerPoint presentations are simple to create, and the song “Never Again” may be bought online from most electronic music stores (iTunes is popular and simple to use). The song’s lyrics may also be found online, in addition to free uncopyrighted images of the Holocaust.

The song, performed by a Jewish rapper, expresses sadness and resolve. The song’s title parallels an important section of *Night* wherein the author employs a type of ritual incantation. Wiesel states, “Never shall I forget that night . . . Never shall I forget that smoke . . . Never shall I forget the small faces of children whose bodies I saw transformed to smoke under a silent sky . . . Never shall I forget those flames that consumed my faith forever . . . Never shall I forget those things . . . Never” (*Night* 34). This use of anaphora, the repetition of a word or phrase at the beginning of successive sentences, underscores Wiesel’s prevailing emotions.

When the PowerPoint ends, I give students a few minutes to process their emotions, and I ask volunteers to share how they feel. They respond most often with “sad” and “angry.” Students then discuss why they feel that way. By this time, someone in the room will make the connections between *Terrible Things* and the Holocaust. If no one does, simply ask, “What does the children’s story have in common with the song?” Probe until learners notice the parallels. Introducing a K-W-L chart would be useful: it allows the teacher to assess the extent of students’ prior knowledge about the Holocaust.

The K-W-L chart requires students to make three columns, to head each column with the letters in the aforementioned order, and to write down what they *know*, what they *want* to know, and what they have *learned*. Students will not complete the *L* column until the end of the unit. The chart is a self-tracking tool that helps learners practice metacognition. Having completed one or both anticipatory sets, students are now ready for pre-reading lessons.

4.2 Pre-reading Activities

I present a second PowerPoint that contains an overview of the history of Jewish persecution in different countries throughout the centuries and that outlines the unit we have begun. Sharing my unit outline with students lets them know what to expect in the coming weeks and the order in which the information will be taught. Then, I introduce students to “concept vocabulary” by placing them in groups of three to four and directing them to review nine terms that are specific to our Holocaust study: Nazi, Third Reich, Final Solution, Aryan race, concentration camp, genocide, ghetto, propaganda, and scapegoat. Using a two-column notes chart with nine rows (words on the left side, blank space on the right side), I require students to review the terms with their group members, to draw from their collective knowledge, and—as best they can—to define each term in the blank space to the right of each word. After I spot-check the papers for completion and after we discuss students’ self-generated definitions, I disseminate the same handout with the *official* definitions of the nine words printed in the right-hand column. Students are able to see immediately how accurate their suppositions were—or how erroneous. A whole-class discussion of the proper definitions ensues.

This activity introduces learners to key terms and concepts in a manner that

causes them to interact intellectually with each other and with the ideas these words represent. Kinesthetic-tactual learners, as well as social learners, benefit greatly from this type of cooperative group activity. It is important to remember that placing high school students in groups without assigning them specific roles and responsibilities is a recipe for chaos. In this particular activity, I assign a *facilitator*, the group leader who is responsible for keeping members on task; a *scribe*, the student with good penmanship who writes the agreed-upon definitions on the chart; an *artist*, the person who draws a pictorial representation of the word; and, for groups with four people, an *editor*—who must make sure the definitions are grammatically correct. The teacher must also circulate among groups in order to redirect students' focus whenever they veer off task. Effective educators do not sit at their desks for extended periods of time while students are in groups. They are teenagers: they will take advantage of the lack of close supervision, and they will not complete the task in a thorough, timely manner.

Next, I distribute a timeline of major Holocaust events and a map that shows where the camps were located. This information may be found in *Voices of the Holocaust*, a resource published by Perfection Learning. Visual learners will benefit from seeing the Holocaust timeline in graph form and from seeing the proximity of countries and camps to each other.

After reviewing the timeline and map, I set aside the next two to three class periods to share Steven Spielberg's documentary entitled *The Last Days*. This film is one hour and twenty-eight minutes long. The amount of class periods needed to show it depends on the amount of time in each class period. Different schools follow different schedules. If I had time in my unit for only one pre-reading activity, this powerful,

poignant film would be it. Spielberg's cameras follow five Holocaust survivors as they revisit their memories and, in some cases, the places from which they emigrated after the war. Spielberg juxtaposes the interviews with film footage from the concentration camps, and the effect evokes students' tears. As they see "walking skeletons" (*The Last Days*), and as they listen to firsthand accounts of loss, suffering, and survival, they are visibly moved.

While watching the documentary, students are required to take notes on each of the five survivors being interviewed because I quiz my learners after they finish watching the film. I warn students that they need to take thorough and accurate notes, but I do not tell them why. I collect the notes immediately after the film ends each day, and I return them the next day for the subsequent viewing. Students are then allowed to use their notes for an open-notes quiz that I created based on the documentary. Doing well on the quiz rewards those who took thorough notes, and those who did not pay attention experience the consequence of a poor grade. I collect the notes right after the film is shown each day so that students who did not pay attention are unable to copy the notes from more diligent classmates.

In addition to the aforementioned pre-reading activities, Center for Learning has several interesting pre-reading lessons in its unit for *Night* that I sometimes use. I recommend that teachers invest in units from Perfection Learning, Center for Learning, and Prestwick House; these companies provide excellent supplementary materials. Each of the companies may be found online, and Prestwick House allows instantaneous downloads of their units in PDF format.

The last portion of the pre-reading section of my unit consists of contextualizing

the literature (see Chapter One) and teaching students about the Holocaust (see Chapter Two). This segment is comprised of documentary film footage (most school libraries have an assortment from which to choose) and assigned readings from *Facing History and Ourselves*. This invaluable resource about the Holocaust and human behaviors contains reading selections that inform and enlighten students. Although it is difficult to narrow the 195 reading selections down to a manageable few, it is impossible to assign and teach all of them during the nine-week unit. In addition to reading *Night* itself, students will be writing analytical papers, defining vocabulary words, preparing projects, writing creative pieces, and practicing grammar. Therefore, I choose thirty-one selections that focus on what I most want students to know, and I narrow the field from there according to my time constraints. Before reading *Night*, the selections I share with students are as follows: “Inflation Batters the Weimar Republic,” “Hitler,” “Hitler in Power,” “Defining a Jew,” “The Night of the Pogrom,” and “The Failure to Help.” Each of these readings, along with—and shared after—the anticipatory sets, the cooperative group activities, the timeline/map handouts, and *The Last Days*, prepares the soil of students’ minds and hearts to receive the universal truths in Wiesel’s narrative.

4.3 Vocabulary Development

The primary reason for teaching vocabulary in the context of literature is so that students understand the denotations and connotations of words contained in the text while they are reading it. This, of course, deepens their understanding of the literature. One cannot truly comprehend the nuances of a text unless one understands what is being said. When I teach *Night*, I deviate from my standard Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) vocabulary preparation, assigned weekly, in order to make room for words found

specifically in *Night*. I divide the words into five lists (one list per week), and I create a master list with all of the words on one page. I then distribute the master list to students *before* they begin reading *Night*. Each word has, next to it in parentheses, the page number on which it is found in the text.

Students are responsible for typing each word, the sentence in which the word is used, and two or three synonyms that define the word. There are no more than twenty words in each of the five lists. I collect the vocabulary homework every week and give students crossword puzzles made from each list for reinforcement; the puzzles may be used, alternatively, as vocabulary tests. Several free puzzle makers may be found online. I prefer, however, to assess students' mastery of the words by requiring them to use at least ten each week in a short writing response to a question about Wiesel's text. For this assessment, I provide the writing prompt and the list, *sans* definitions. They are free to choose any ten words from the list in order to respond to the prompt. Alternatively, I assess students' comprehension by using fill-in-the-blank sentence tests; a word bank is provided. My master list is included here with the appropriate page numbers from the 2006 edition translated by Marion Wiesel.

List One: Hasidic (3), penury (3), render (3), waif (3), Kabbalah (4), fraught (4), annihilate (8), disperse (8), billet (9), sublime (10), prominent (11), edict (11), Shavvot (12), anecdote (12), antechamber (13), rouse (14), jest (15), console (15), rescind (15), ritual (15).

List Two: relic (15), phylacteries (16), convoy (16), surreal (17), conflagration (21), notable (21), flit (23), intolerable (23), constraint (23), inhibition (23), hermetically (24), indifferent (28), wield (29), tumult (30), imperative (30), invective (30), petrified

(31), revolt (31), sage (31), monocle (31).

List Three: elude (32), infernal (33), nocturnal (34), vigor (35), intersperse (35), lucidity (36), void (36), colossus (37), wither (37), harangue (38), graven (38), remorse (39), compulsory (41), prevail (42), veritable (44), epidemic (47), altruistic (48), pittance (48), conscientious (48), evoke (50).

List Four: sanctity (50), emigrate (50), meek (51), defiance (53), reminisce (54), imprudent (54), untenable (56), credible (60), dissipate (60), solemn (61), manacle (62), lament (68), reprieve (70), notorious (71), plod (75), invective (77), snigger (77), dysentery (78), delude (80), garb (83).

List Five: automaton (85), emaciated (85), parched (87), famished (87), transcend (87), resolve (88), plaintive (89), deprivation (90), commotion (90), avail (90), apathy (92), implore (100), maul (101), vitality (101), riveted (109), etch (112), contemplate (115).

4.4 Activities During Reading: Analysis

When students begin reading *Night*, I introduce them to the “SIFT” method of literary analysis (The College Board 17). “SIFT-ing” requires students to find and analyze *symbols, imagery, figurative language, tone, and theme* in any given literary text—poetry or prose. This highly effective strategy helps even the most basic reader to better understand and appreciate the literature. It gives students tools to help them deconstruct the text and articulate its nuances. I pre-teach (or re-teach) these elements via a PowerPoint presentation that I created using information and examples found in *The AP Vertical Teams Guide for English*. This resource offers important and helpful strategies for every level of English (grades nine through twelve) in the secondary school system. I

post all of my PowerPoints online in the handout format (three to six slides per page) so that students have unlimited access to their class notes. My school uses an online learning host called Web CT, but teachers whose schools do not have a web-based learning host may create their own web sites at MyTeacherPages.com. For a nominal annual fee, this site creates and hosts web pages for teachers.

Because of the myriad academic activities and lessons that I must implement concurrently while teaching *Night* within my nine-week Holocaust literature unit, time does not permit me to have students undertake a close, line-by-line reading of Wiesel's entire narrative. I do, however, require students to execute a close reading, using the SIFT strategy, of the section on page 34 (2006 edition) that begins with "Never shall I forget that night . . ." and that ends with "Never" (*Night* 34). Students must first scan and annotate each line for symbols. Then, they repeat the process for imagery, figurative language, and tone. After we thoroughly discuss their analyses, and after I guide them to elements they missed or correct elements they identified improperly, they must generate a "theme" statement that epitomizes this portion of the text. I remind them not to confuse theme—which should be stated in a complete sentence—with topic, which may be stated in one or more key words. What, I ask, is the author's message to the reader in this section? What is Wiesel saying about mankind, society, or the universe? What universal truth(s), if any, is (are) being expressed? This SIFT exercise, which allows me to model close reading and also allows students to practice close reading, strengthens learners' analytical skills and cultivates independent readers who do not need to be spoon fed information.

Students are also guided through the reading process by formal study questions

(SQs). I use the study questions provided by Perfection Learning. After informing students that answering the SQs will help them prepare for my end-of-unit exam, I tell them that the questions are optional, not mandatory. I offer extra credit to students who choose to complete the SQs and submit them to me at the end of the unit; responses must be typed. Some students like to use the SQs as a guide for what to annotate while reading (in addition to SIFT-ing the text, which is required). I collect students' books at the end of the unit and grade learners on their use of annotation. Simply underlining or highlighting the text is unacceptable. Students must state *why* they underlined or highlighted a particular section. Gist (summary) statements and key words are encouraged. I also encourage them to annotate their personal responses in the text.

At the very beginning of the school year, I require my students to read "How to Mark a Book" by Mortimer J. Adler. This essay familiarizes them with my annotation expectations for the school year. My high-achieving students often submit texts that are practically works of color-coded SIFT art. For example, they use green for symbols, red for imagery, blue for figurative language, and so on. Their key words and gist statements correspond in color to the underlining or highlighting they choose to do.

During the reading process, I return to *Voices of the Holocaust* and supplement the SIFT method, the annotation requirement, and the study questions with selections from this resource. First, I share Amos Neufeld's poem entitled "Family Album" with students. Neufeld includes an informal portrait of his family having dinner at home, and his poem springs directly from the picture. He reflects on his family's pre-Holocaust gathering and says, "They smile / not knowing this is the last time they will be gathered happily together, / that nothing guards their world, / that sky will be all that remains"

(*Voices* 28).

After students SIFT the poem and we discuss it, I require them to write an original poem of their own; they have one week to complete this task. They must choose a family-oriented picture and scan it into a blank document page on which they will type the original poem. I do not require any specific amount of people to be in the photo, and I allow students to consider pets as “family members.” I also allow students who are technologically challenged to tape the picture (or a copy of the picture) neatly to their printed poem instead of scanning it into a word processing program. The poem must, like Neufeld’s, be emblematic of the picture, and it must convey the same tone. The photo must spark the poem. I am always impressed by the poignancy and maturity evident in the poems that emanate from this assignment.

Another reading selection that I cull from *Voices of the Holocaust* is “Address Unknown” by Kressman Taylor, a fictional correspondence that uses irony to show the deteriorating relationship between a Jewish businessman in California and his Aryan business associate, and friend, in Germany. This clever story contains a surprise ending and introduces students to fiction’s epistolary format. Subsequent to discussing the story’s irony and the author’s structure, I ask students to write a short epistolary tale, using only two characters and no fewer than three letters from each correspondent. “Address Unknown” serves as the model for this assignment. Successful learning takes place when teachers provide students with concrete examples and models of every assignment.

Other pieces that I choose from *Voices of the Holocaust* for this portion of my unit include an oral history entitled “A Survivor Remembers” by Berek Latarus; an

historical account entitled “Rescue in Denmark” by Harold Flender; and an essay entitled “The White Rose: Long Live Freedom” by Jacob G. Hornberger. Students read the selections and respond, in writing, to questions I have generated based on the content of each piece. I teach three additional selections from this resource at the end of my unit (see section 4.5).

4.5 Post-reading Activities: Synthesis and Evaluation

The first post-reading assignment that I give students is called a “found poem.” Students must choose sentences or phrases from different sections of *Night* and organize them in such a way that a poem is created. The poem’s lines are “found” in the text rather than generated from each student’s original thoughts, hence the name “found poem.” The challenge lies in choosing random sections of the text that flow smoothly to create a somewhat lyrical piece of poetry. I remind students that poems do not have to rhyme. The poem below, written by Yasser O. Navarrete, one of my former sophomore students, is a wonderful example of what students can do with this assignment. Every word is taken directly from *Night*:

All Jews outside! Hurry!

The heat was intense; children cried for water.

A hot summer sun...

All Jews outside! Hurry!

Lying down was out of the question.

“Look at the fire! Flames, flames everywhere...”

All Jews outside! Hurry!

Men to the left! Women to the right!

Poor devils, you're going to the crematory.

All Jews outside! Hurry!

Everyone outside! Form fives!

"Work is liberty."

All Jews outside! Hurry!

And the evacuation began.

Afterward, they were going to blow up the camp.

All Jews outside! Hurry!

At about six o'clock in the evening,

the first American tank stood at the gates of Buchenwald.

All Jews outside! Hurry!

When this poem was submitted to me, I asked a few talented students to perform a dramatic reading; the effect on my class was mesmerizing. One student played the role of narrator, another student played the role of the Nazi guard shouting commands, and a third student, who played the role of liberator, delivered the very last line, the refrain, in a soft, hope-filled voice that was completely different from the manner in which the "Nazi" had delivered it. The performance was deeply moving.

Next, I incorporate a more demanding creative writing assignment into my instructional time. I provide students with photocopies made of two simple black-and-white sketches drawn by artist Si Lewen. I obtained the sketches from *Can It Happen Again? Chronicles of the Holocaust*, edited by Roselle K. Chartock and Jack Spencer. The drawings in this source are reproduced from Lewen's book entitled *A Journey*. The first sketch shows a shadowy figure in a long coat walking through a forest of tall, thin,

bare trees (*Can It Happen Again?* 380). It is impossible to tell whether the figure is male or female, young or old, Jew or Nazi. The second sketch displays a figure hunched over on his or her hands and knees, crawling on an indiscernible surface (381). The figure appears to be bleeding and in pain. Students must write a 500-word minimum fictional narrative, in first or third person, based on one of the two sketches. They must choose the perspective of persecutor, victim, or rescuer.

I grade this creative writing assignment according to the “Six Traits” writing rubric: Ideas, Organization, Voice, Sentence Fluency, Word Choice, and Conventions. An excellent model of this rubric may be found at the web site address that follows: <http://educationnorthwest.org/resource/464>. Up to six points may be awarded in each category for a total of thirty-six points, which would equal one hundred percent (A+). I weight my gradebook categories so that writing assignments, no matter how many points they are worth, weigh more than any other category, such as homework, participation, quizzes, or tests. Alternatively, a simple formula converts a student’s raw score into a percentage of one hundred: Multiply the raw score by 100, and then divide that number by the total number of points possible. For example, the final grade for a student who received a total score of thirty out of thirty-six points would be eighty-three percent (B).

This assignment requires students to synthesize all the information they have received and processed about persecutors, victims, and rescuers in order to appropriate the voice of such a character and to create a believable piece of fiction, using significant details. In order to model this assignment, I review, via my classroom projector, one or two sample stories that previous students have permitted me to share. When I created and assigned this activity for the first time, I wrote the story myself to provide a model for my

students. However, they feel more empowered when they review student samples from within their own age group and ability levels. The stories that result from this assignment are often piercing, insightful, and realistic.

For my analytical section of post-reading activities, I assign a formal essay and a cooperative-group activity called the Jigsaw. To write the essay, students may choose one of several topics that I collate from my own ideas, from Center for Learning, and from Prestwick House. Learners are required to write a 500-word minimum analytical composition about some aspect of *Night*. In the Jigsaw strategy,

The teacher assigns students a task in an original home group. . . . Once the task is complete in that group, individual discussants move to a different sharing group so that each new group (sometimes called an interchange group) has someone familiar with the learning achieved in the home groups. The great strength of this process is that each group member is responsible for transmitting the learning of its home group. (Milner and Milner 39)

The interchange groups are also called “expert” groups because each student in these clusters is the expert transmitting information from his or her home group. I base my five home groups on the following topics in *Night*: acts of kindness, acts of brutality, Wiesel’s physical journey, Wiesel’s spiritual journey, and types of relationships—father/son ones in particular. I do not place more than four students in a group. If I have a large class, I assign additional topics to keep the groups small. My students spend one class period (about forty minutes once they are situated) in their home groups, discussing their assigned topics, one topic per group. They must collect textual evidence for their

findings. The next day, they spend the class period in their expert groups, sharing their home-group conclusions and the textual evidence that supports them. I assess this activity by collecting a two-column notes chart wherein students have to write each group's conclusions on the left side and the supporting evidence on the right side. The chart is disseminated when students initially form their home groups.

The final project that I assign is a two-part activity: students must (1) create another original poem and (2) choose one of two poster-board options. The poem must be based on any one of the thematic topics elucidated in *Night*—such as death, suffering, faith, racism, or survival—and it must be accompanied on the page by an artistic background or border. The visual elements may be drawn by hand or technologically inserted via clip art or photos. I decorate my classroom with these poems after I grade them.

Choices for the two poster-board options are as follows: Option A requires students to trace the changes in Elie Wiesel by creating a pictorial and textual collage that illustrates his pre- and post-Holocaust life; they must display and cite ten quotes that represent “before” and ten quotes that represent “after.” They must also clearly delineate “before” and “after” sections on the poster board in a creative way (day versus night, sunshine versus rain, etcetera). Option B requires students to create a large, accurate European map with each location mentioned in the book (towns, cities, and camps) labeled clearly. For option B, students must visually trace, in chronological order, Wiesel's journey through these various places, using descriptive quotes from the text to explain each location's significance. In the past, some of my more creative students have traced Wiesel's physical journey throughout the Holocaust by drawing tiny footprints.

Each location must also be accompanied by a quote that illustrates Wiesel's spiritual mindset at that juncture in the narrative. The Jigsaw activity that precedes this project helps students to complete this task.

The posters, once graded, are hung in my classroom along with the poems. The displayed poems and collages serve as sobering reminders of our Holocaust study. I assign these types of creative projects and writing assignments in addition to standardized methods of evaluation so that non-traditional learners have the opportunity to express their ideas and conclusions in the form of authentic alternative assessments.

4.6 Wiesel's Other Memoirs

If time permits, or if students are highly motivated learners, Wiesel's two-volume autobiography, *All Rivers Run to the Sea* and *The Sea Is Never Full*, may be read after students finish *Night*. "These two volumes—in which Wiesel bears witness to his continuing testimony and whose titles are taken from the biblical book of Ecclesiastes—cover a wide range of topics. In addition to revisiting the question of God's justice, they introduce another important aspect of Wiesel's writings, the role of witness as author" (Berger, "Faith" 46). The first volume by itself is an excellent companion to *Night*. If *Night* is the skeleton, *All Rivers Run to the Sea* is the flesh on the bones. In this informative tome, Wiesel recalls "in intimate detail the experiences that shaped his life—from the small Carpathian village where he was born to the horrors of Auschwitz and Buchenwald to his discovery of his calling a writer and 'Messenger to Mankind' " (*All Rivers* 435). The second volume discusses Wiesel's reflections on issues like human rights, learning and teaching, becoming a speaker, encounters with world leaders, and the Gulf War. As with *Night*, both volumes are thought provoking and instructive.

CHAPTER FIVE: CLOSING THE UNIT

In a speech that marked World War II's fortieth anniversary, President Richard von Weizsaecker of West Germany said that "[a]nyone who closes his eyes to the past is blind to the present. . . . Whoever refuses to remember the inhumanity is prone to new risks of infection" (*Facing History* 470). As I close my unit, I remind students of the essential questions with which we began. I place students in a large circle and hold a Socratic seminar on those questions and the reasons why we must never forget the Holocaust.

5.1 Historical Legacies

Many survivors, the number of whom is rapidly diminishing, leave legacies by telling their stories and bearing witness. Others, both survivors and non-Jews, try to preserve physical evidence of the Holocaust. Places like the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, the State Museum of Auschwitz-Birkenau in Poland, and the Yad Vashem Museum in Israel are filled with photographs, artifacts, and testimonies that educate and remind the world of what can happen when no one restrains evil.

5.2 Making a Difference

The first step in causing and maintaining positive change is education. Holocaust studies are now an integral and compulsory part of most secondary school curricula, and teachers have a responsibility to ensure that the information is systematically and

sensitively taught. Education has the power to shatter misconceptions and shape minds—for good or for bad. The Nazis used education as a means of indoctrinating Germany's youth. Today, educators have the support and resources to help them guide students to the truth. One common misconception students have is that Hitler, by himself, was responsible for everything that happened (*Facing History* 489). When students learn “the details of how Hitler came to power—realizing he was not born a Nazi but became one,” they learn that the same thing could happen in our society (490).

Education is linked to memory, and the place where students most frequently learn about the past is in school. Education also combats the ignorant claims that the Holocaust never took place. The last reading selection that I share with my students is from *Voices of the Holocaust* and is entitled “Hitler's Heirs” (136). This article, written about a Neo-Nazi incident that took place in Germany in 1996, shocks students because they are surprised to find that the Nazi mentality still exists in contemporary society. The article examines the factors that lead some people to look to the Nazi philosophy for guidance, and it reinforces the importance of education. By studying the events of genocide in the twentieth century, “we are vividly reminded of the power of the individual to make decisions that affect not only oneself and one's neighbors but also the survival of the entire world” (519).

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