

Night by Elie Wiesel

"Today anything is allowed. Anything is possible" ~ Eliezer's father

Study Guide

Before Reading—Important Holocaust Q and A

1. The Holocaust took place during the years of _____. The murders actually took place from _____ to _____. They ended when the German military was defeated in May of _____.

2. How many people were murdered? _____

Of that number, _____ were Jewish; more than _____ Jewish communities were totally wiped out. _____ Jewish children were murdered.

3. The first German measures against the Jews can be traced back to _____.

While Reading

4. Describe in detail the characters of Eliezer and Moishe the Beadle. What is the nature of their relationship?

5. Consider Eliezer's feelings for his family, especially his father. What about his father's character or place in the Jewish community of Sighet commands Eliezer's respect or admiration?

6. Early in the narrative, Moishe tells Eliezer, "Man asks and God replies. But we don't understand His replies. We cannot understand them." Is this a paradox? How does Eliezer react to this seemingly unfair assertion? Apply Moishe's statement to the ongoing crisis of faith that Eliezer faces throughout the course of Night.

7. "And then, one day all foreign Jews were expelled from Sighet," writes Wiesel, quite bluntly. "And Moishe the Beadle was a foreigner." Why do you suppose this shocking information is delivered so matter-of-factly? What is the point of Wiesel's abruptness? Also, consider the manner in which Moishe is treated by the Jews of Sighet after he has escaped the Gestapo's capture. Are the people happy to see him? Is he himself even happy to be alive? Explain why

Moishe has returned to the village. Why don't the Jewish townspeople believe the horrible news he brings back to them?

8. Time and again, the people of Sighet doubt the advance of the German army. Why? When the Germans do arrive, and even once they have moved all the Jews into ghettos, the Jewish townspeople still seem to ignore or suppress their fear. "Most people thought that we would remain in the ghetto until the end of the war, until the arrival of the Red Army. Afterward everything would be as before." What might be the reason for the townspeople's widespread denial of the evidence facing them?

9. There are a few instances where we learn of Eliezer and his family missing out on opportunities to escape from the Germans. How did these missed chances influence your reading of the memoir? And how do these unfortunate events fit into your understanding of the Jewish experience of the Holocaust as a whole?

10. Cassandra was a figure in Greek mythology who received the gift of prophecy with the simultaneous curse that no one would ever believe her. Compare Cassandra to Mrs. Schachter. Are there other Cassandras in Night? Who are they?

11. Not long after arriving at Birkenau, Eliezer and his father experience the horrors of the crematory firsthand—and they are nearly killed themselves. "Babies!" Wiesel writes. "Yes, I did see this, with my own eyes...children thrown into the flames." Look back on Eliezer's physical, mental, and emotional reactions to this hellish and inexplicable experience. How does the story of Night change at this point? How does Wiesel himself change?

12. Consider the inscription that appears above the entrance to Auschwitz. What is it supposed to mean? What meaning, if any, does this slogan come to have for Eliezer?

13. Reflecting on the three weeks he spent in Auschwitz, Wiesel admits: "Some of the men spoke of God: His mysterious ways, the sins of the Jewish people, and the redemption to come. As for me, I had ceased to pray. I concurred with Job!" What happens to the man called Job in the Bible? What is his story? Explain why Eliezer feels connected to him.

14. Eliezer witnesses one of the several public hangings he sees in Buna. "For God's sake, where is God?" asks a prisoner who also sees the hanging. Eliezer answers, "This is where—hanging from the gallows..." What does he mean? How could God have been hanged? How have Eliezer's thoughts and feelings changed since he identified with Job while in Auschwitz? Discuss the relationship Wiesel has with God throughout the book.

15. Two of the people Eliezer encounters more than once in the narrative are Akiba Drumer and Juliek. Where and when does Eliezer cross paths with these individuals? Describe their personalities. What are their outstanding traits? Describe the relationships that Eliezer has with them. How do their respective deaths affect him? What does each person mean to him?

16. As the story progresses, we witness scenes in which the Jews have been reduced to acting—and even treating their fellow prisoners—like rabid animals. During an air raid over Buna, a starved man risks being shot by crawling out to a cauldron of soup that stands in the middle of the camp, only to thrust his face into the boiling liquid once he has arrived there safely. Where else do we see examples of human beings committing such insane acts? What leads people to such horrific behavior? Is it fair to say that such beastliness in the death camps is inevitable? Do Eliezer and his father fall prey to such tragedies?

17. In the concluding pages of Night, Eliezer's father is dying a slow, painful death. But his son is there to comfort him, or at least try to. Does Eliezer see his father as a burden by this point, or does he feel only pity and sorrow for him? Compare and contrast the father-son relationship you see at the end of this memoir with the one you saw at the beginning.

18. If Night is a story of one person's journey as well as a history of one horrendous part of WWII, how do the plot and the theme of the book overlap? How does the author blend the personal and the universal aspects of the memoir? In what ways does Wiesel relate not only his own nightmarish memory of the Holocaust but also humanity's?

19. How did Wiesel's remembrance of the Holocaust in Night agree with or differ from what you already knew about the history of this event?

20. Elie Wiesel has written in The New York Times (June 19, 2000) about the difficulties he faced in finding the right words for the painful story he wanted to tell—and had to tell—in Night. "I knew I had to testify about my past but I did not know how to go about it...I felt incapable and perhaps unworthy of fulfilling my task as survivor and messenger. I had things to say but not the words to say them...Words seemed weak and pale...And yet it was necessary to continue." Although Night was originally rejected by every major publishing house in France and the U.S., eventually it was published to universal acclaim. As a story, albeit a true story, how fitting did you find the words, imagery, and overall plotting of Night? Does the author succeed in his self-described goals as a "survivor and messenger" who must "testify" to his readers?