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Sample MonkeyNotes

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Night

by

Elie Wiesel

1958



MonkeyNotes Study Guide Edited by Diane Sauder

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KEY LITERARY ELEMENTS

SETTINGS

Note: *The sections in the original text are not numbered. The numbers have been added for convenience in discussing the book.*

Night is set during the Second World War. The first section of the novel begins in Sighet, a small town in Transylvania (Romania) and ends in a train which stops in Kaschau (Czechoslovakia). The second section of the book continues in the train as the deportees head towards Auschwitz, the Death Camp. In the third section, the setting shifts to Birkenau, which is the selection and disposal center for the prisoners. Elie and his.....

LIST OF CHARACTERS

Major Characters

Eliezer Wiesel (Elie) – the narrator, protagonist, and main character. Since he is a Jewish teenager living in Romania during Hitler's occupation and reign, he is persecuted and imprisoned by the Nazis. The book is really a telling of his experiences during the war.

Shlomo Wiesel (also translated as Chlomo) – Elie's father. He is a considerate and religious man and shopkeeper who is respected by the villagers. He is arrested along with his son and imprisoned in a concentration camp, where he dies.

Minor Characters

Moshe the Beadle – a poor and lonely religious man. He tells terrifying tales about the condition of the Jews in concentration camps, which Elie and the villagers find hard to believe.

Mrs. Wiesel – **Elie's mother**. She is a loving person who cares for her family and who.....

Many additional characters are identified in the complete study guide.

CONFLICT

Since *Night* is the autobiographical account of Elie Wiesel during World War II, it does not follow the traditional pattern of fictional plot development. The book can, however, be viewed as having a protagonist and antagonist.

Protagonist: The narrator, main character, and protagonist of the book is Eliezer Wiesel (Elie). In the beginning, he is a young Jewish teenager living in Romania during Hitler's reign. A religious and studious young man, he possesses a strong sense of tradition and faith. Once he and his father are arrested by.....

Antagonists: The antagonists in the book are Hitler and his anti-Semitic Nazi regime, who persecute and kill Jews. Included amongst the antagonists are the Hungarian Policemen, the.....

Climax: The climax occurs approximately halfway through the book, in the fifth section, when Elie loses his faith in God, which has been so important to him throughout life. He is so horrified over the torture that he has witnessed and endured, he questions if God exists and refuses to pray to.....

Outcome: The book ends as a tragedy. Besides being horribly tortured himself, Elie also endures horrendous emotional torture. He loses his faith in God; he also loses his father, mother, and younger sister. Even though he survives the concentration camp and is rescued by Allied forces, Elie is.....

SHORT PLOT / CHAPTER SUMMARY (Synopsis)

The story begins in 1941, when Elie was twelve years old and living in Sighet with his family. In spite of his youth, the Jewish Elie was eager to study the Talmud and Cabbala. His father, however, thinks Elie is too young for such advanced subjects and refuses to find him a teacher. As a result, Elie turns to Moshe the Beadle for guidance.

One day Moshe is arrested by the Nazis. When he returns, he tells the villagers about how he has miraculously escaped from his torturers. He also tells them shocking stories about the atrocities committed against the Jews by Hitler's regime. When Elie and the other villagers do not believe his stories, thinking he has gone mad, Moshe weeps and tells his story again.

As time passes, the Nazis treat the Jews worse and worse. First they shift the Jewish people to live in ghettos; then they arrest them and transport them to Birkenau, the reception center that leads to Auschwitz. Elie, his parents, and his sisters are arrested by the Nazis and sent by cattle car to Birkenau. During the journey, Elie, his family, and the other Jews suffer from the inhuman conditions they must endure; they are also driven to distraction by the hysterical screams of Madame Schachter, who has hallucinations of fire and furnace.

When Elie and his family arrive at the concentration camp, they see flames rising out of an oven, which is actually a crematorium for the prisoners. They are repulsed by the stench of burning flesh. Then Elie and his father are separated from his mother and sisters. In the men's camp, Elie fights to protect his father and is repeatedly tortured himself. Gradually he begins to lose faith in God because of the atrocities he must witness and endure. On the eve of Rosh Hashanah, a Jewish Holy Day, Elie refuses to pray.

In the camp, a regular process of selection takes place to separate the physically fit prisoners from the unfit or sick ones. The abler men are given a chance to work and live, while the weaker ones are sent to the furnaces to be killed. Both Elie and his father survive the selection process; but they know.....

MOOD

Throughout the book, the mood is intensely gloomy to the point of total tragedy. The journeys on the cattle wagons are dehumanizing, and life at the concentration camps is hideous. The prisoners are starved, tortured, and often murdered. They never know if they will be alive the next day or the.....

THEMES

Major Theme

The major theme of the book is the horror that results from extreme prejudice. Because Hitler hated Jewish people, he caused them to be imprisoned, tortured, and murdered. The book records the horrendous experiences of Elie Wiesel, the Jewish author, during Hitler's reign of terror. He is arrested, imprisoned in.....

Minor Theme

The importance of religious faith is a minor theme of the book. From an early age, Elie Wiesel has a tremendous love for religion, wanting to study the Cabbala and Talmud. When he is first imprisoned, it is his faith that helps him survive. Like most of the Jews, he prays regularly for an end to the persecution and.....

BACKGROUND INFORMATION - BIOGRAPHY

Elie Wiesel is probably the best known author of Jewish holocaust literature. He was born into an Orthodox Jewish family in Sighet, Romania on September 30, 1928. Named Eliezer, he was the third of four children of Shlomo Wiesel, a respected grocer, and his wife, Sarah. As a child, Elie was serious and scholarly. Fascinated with the Jewish religion, he studied the Cabbala and the Talmud.

Elie was twelve years old when the German army occupied Sighet in 1941. The soldiers immediately began to close down Jewish

shops, offices, and synagogues. Soon news spread of Jewish people being arrested and sent to concentration camps. In 1944, Elie, his father, his mother, and his older sisters were arrested and deported to Auschwitz, a concentration camp in Poland. There Elie was tattooed with the number A-7713 and subjected to torture and witnessed the horrible deaths of many of his fellow Jews. After a few months, he and his father were transferred to Buna and then Buchenwald; during the journey to Buchenwald, his father grew gravely ill and.....

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The holocaust, one of the darkest periods in history, really began in January of 1933 when Adolf Hitler became Chancellor of Germany. Believing that Aryans were superior to all others, he wanted to purge Germany of inferior races, especially the Jews. By March, Hitler had established himself as Dictator, had established his police organization known as the Gestapo, had withdrawn Germany from the League of Nations, and had established the first Nazi concentration camp at Dachau, Germany. During the spring and summer, persecution of the Jews intensified, and all Jewish government workers and university professors were fired. By July, Hitler had outlawed freedom of the press, labor unions, and all political parties except for the Nazis. In 1934, Hitler gave himself the title of Fuehrer and ordered the Gestapo to shoot or kill anyone who opposed his rule. In 1935, Hitler revoked German citizenship for all Jews and outlawed their marriage to Gentiles. In 1936, Hitler sent Nazi troops to occupy the Rhineland, next to France; it was in direct opposition to the Treaty of Versailles. He also allied himself with Italy and Japan. In 1938, the Nazis seized Austria.

Throughout the 1930s, the persecution of the Jews continued. Jewish businesses were seized, synagogues were closed, property was stolen, children were banned from attending public schools, and families were forced from their homes. The Jews were usually made to move into ghetto areas. With the opening of the Buchenwald prison camp in the summer of 1937, the arrests of Jews increased. By the start of 1939, Hitler had announced that his intention was to annihilate the Jewish race. He also continued his aggressive pursuit of more territory, capturing Czechoslovakia. Then in September of 1939, Hitler invaded Poland, causing the.....

SECTION SUMMARIES WITH NOTES

SECTION 1

Summary

In 1941, Elie Wiesel, a twelve-year-old Jewish boy, lives in Sighet, Romania, with his parents. He has two older sisters, Hilda and Beatrice (Bea), and one younger sister, Tzipora, who is only seven years old.

Even though he is a youth, Elie is very religious and is interested in studying the Talmud and the Cabbala. He asks his father to find him an appropriate teacher, but he feels that his son is too young to undertake such advanced studies. Since his father does not help him in pursuing his religious studies, Elie approaches Moshe the Beadle for guidance. Moshe, a poor, lowly, and lonely worker in the synagogue, agrees to help the young Elie. After evening services, he talks to Elie about God and religion.

One day Hungarian police arrest Moshe, along with other foreigners; Elie is crushed to have lost his tutor. When the prisoners are taken away, no one in the village knows where they are going or if they will be seen again. Moshe, however, reappears in the village after about three months. He tells the villagers about his miraculous escape. He had been shot in the leg, and the soldiers assumed he was dead; before they discover he is breathing, he manages to escape.

Moshe also tells the villagers appalling stories about how the Jews are being tortured and killed. He explains how the deportees are boarded onto horribly crowded trucks and taken to concentration camps. He tells how babies are tossed into the air and used as shooting targets and how mass numbers of Jews are killed by machine gun fire. These tales are so shocking that Elie and the other villagers do not believe them; they simply think that Moshe has gone mad during his absence. Moshe weeps and tells his stories again.

The villagers in Sighet learn more about the war from the London news. They hear about the intense hatred that

Hitler has for all Jews. They then try to console themselves by saying that Hitler cannot possibly stay in power long enough to eliminate every Jew. Elie, however, is concerned about his family's safety. He asks his father to wind up everything in the grocery store that he owns so that the family can immigrate to Palestine. The father argues that he is too old to get settled in a new place. Before Elie can convince him to leave, the German army arrives in Sighet.

With the Nazis in control of the village, many Jewish offices and shops are closed; the synagogue is also shut down. Even though there is great tension in the town, the Jews celebrate Passover. On the seventh day of the festival, many Jewish leaders are arrested. The remaining Jews are ordered to wear a yellow star to indicate their background. They are also banned from restaurants, schools, and trains and must stay in their homes after 6:00 p.m. Then their homes are seized, and they must move to the ghetto. The Wiesels are moved to the largest ghetto in Sighet. Most importantly, more and more Jews are being arrested and sent away to concentration camps.

Early one Sunday morning in May of 1944, a kind police officer warns the Wiesels that they are in danger. Realizing that they are to be deported, they prepare food for the journey. By 8:00 a.m., all Jews are forced to stand outside and await their fate; while they wait, many are struck with billy clubs. By early afternoon, the first train, filled with Sighet Jews, departs for the concentration camp. On Saturday, Elie and his family are arrested and loaded into a crowded cattle car; they are in the last convoy out of Sighet.

Notes

In the first section of the book, Wiesel gives an insight into what he was like as a child living in Sighet, Romania. Serious and intelligent by nature, he wants to know more about his Jewish religion. When his father refuses to find him a tutor, he finds one himself. Each evening after the service in the synagogue, the young Wiesel studies with Moshe the Beadle; he is a lonely and lowly worker in the synagogue. Elie reads every page of the Zohar, "The Book of Brightness," again and again; it is an interpretation of Jewish law, which forms the main text of the Cabbala. Wiesel also spends time in prayer, often weeping. He cries for the destruction of the temple of Jerusalem, which took place in 586 B.C. He cries for the current persecution of the Jews.

Wiesel tells about the arrest and deportation of his tutor, Moshe. He then explains how Moshe returns three months later with tales of Jewish persecution, imprisonment, and murder. At first, no one believes that Jews are subjected to such atrocities. Then, however, the Nazis arrive in Sighet and begin to persecute the Jews. Shops and synagogues are closed, and Jews are forced to wear a yellow "Star of David" to identify them. Soon they are taken from their homes and forced to live in squalid conditions in ghetto areas. Then the deportations to concentration camps begin.

Finally, in 1944, Elie and his family are arrested and forced into an overcrowded cattle car bound for Auschwitz, the death camp.

SECTION 2

Summary

Wiesel describes the cattle car in which he and the other Jews are forced to travel; it is horribly congested and miserable. There is no room to lie down, and they have to take turns to have a place to sit for awhile. They all suffer from thirst, hunger, heat, and exhaustion. When the train stops at Kaschau, in Czechoslovakia, Nazi soldiers demand that the Jews give up their gold, silver, watches, money, and other possessions; if they refuse, they will be shot. A lieutenant announces that if any one of the eighty prisoners is found missing, all the remaining Jews will also be shot.

In the cattle car, there is a lady named Madame Schachter, who is traveling with her ten-year old son. She constantly screams in hysteria and shouts about fire, furnace, and flames. Even though the others try to calm her,

her screeching continues, making conditions in the cattle car even worse. Finally the others tie and gag her so she will be quiet. By the time that the train arrives in Poland, the Jews are half starved and dying of thirst. At the first stop, two men are allowed to leave the car for the purpose of bringing water. They bribe some soldiers with a hidden gold watch to find out what the future holds for the Jews in the cattle car. They are told that they have arrived at Auschwitz. They will be unloaded and separated from their families. Supposedly, the younger, healthier people will work in factories, and the old and invalid will work in the fields. When the men report these findings to the Jews in the cattle car, they all feel encouraged.

The Jews are finally unloaded from the train and taken to Birkenau, the reception center for Auschwitz, the death camp. On the way to the center, they notice flames leaping out of a tall chimney and the stench of burning flesh. Once inside, Elie notices that Madame Schachter is holding her son's hand; it will be the last time, for they are soon to be separated.

Notes

In this section, Wiesel describes the miserable conditions of the cattle cars in which the Jews must travel. Wiesel's car has eighty people crammed inside; it is so crowded that it is impossible to lay down, and people must take turns sitting. In addition, the Jews are thirsty and hungry. Their misery is heightened by the hysterical behavior and hallucinations of Madame Schachter. Her vision of fire and furnace serve as a premonition of.....

OVERALL ANALYSES

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Elie Wiesel - The book about Elie Wiesel's experiences during the holocaust begins when he is a young boy of twelve. He lives in Sighet, Romania, with his parents and three sisters, two older and one younger than he. A bright and studious child, Elie is curious about the Jewish religion. Wanting to learn about the Talmud and the Cabbala, he turns to Moshe the Beadle, a worker in the synagogue, for guidance and religious instruction.

The Germans, under the guidance of Hitler, seize Romania and occupy Sighet. Elie, like all of the Jews, is made to wear a yellow star to identify him as Jewish. He also watches as Jewish property is seized, and Jewish men are arrested. Moshe the Beadle is one of the first to be arrested and taken away to an unknown location. When he manages to escape and return to Sighet, Moshe tells of the cruelties that are being inflicted on the Jews. No one believes him, including Elie; they think he has gone crazy in his absence.

Soon the persecution of the Jews becomes widespread. Elie and his family are forced to move from their home into the ghetto. They are not allowed to go out after dark or interact with non-Jewish people. Soon large numbers of Jews in Sighet are arrested and deported to concentration camps. Then Elie and.....

Mr. Chlomo Wiesel - Before his imprisonment in the concentration camp, Mr. Chlomo Wiesel lived in Sighet with Elie, his three daughters, and his wife. Although he was a kind man, he rarely showed any emotion to his family. He was, however, a well-respected owner of a grocery store, who faithfully practiced his Jewish faith.

Mr. Wiesel makes a big mistake early in the book. When the persecution and deportation of the Jews begin, Maria, the kind family housekeeper, offers to give the Wiesels shelter and protection in her home, which was located outside of Sighet. Wiesel declines her offer, saying he is too old to change his.....

PLOT STRUCTURE ANALYSIS

Night is an autobiographical book about the experiences of Elie Wiesel before and during the holocaust. For the most part, it is told in chronological order, beginning when Wiesel is a young boy of twelve and ending in 1945, when he is freed from the concentration camp. There are only a few flashbacks and asides that interrupt the forward movement of the plot.

Even though the book is non-fiction, it follows the classic pattern of plot development. The first section is largely expository, introducing the setting and the Wiesel family, particularly Elie, the only son; it also foreshadows the persecution of the Jews that is to follow. When Moshe the Beadle is arrested and manages to escape and return home, he tells the people in Sighet about the atrocities being inflicted on the Jews; but no one believes him.

The real action of the book begins at the end of the first section, when the Wiesels are arrested and sent by cattle car towards Auschwitz, the death camp. There Elie and his father are separated from.....

THEMES - THEME ANALYSIS

Major Theme

The main theme of *Night* is man's inhumanity to his fellow man, as seen in the persecution and torture of the Jews due to Hitler's prejudice against them. In the beginning of the book, the persecution begins when the Germans occupy Sighet. Soon Jews are made to wear yellow stars to identify themselves; in addition, Jewish shops are closed and Jewish homes are seized, forcing the families to live in the ghetto. Then the deportations begin. The Jews are herded into cattle cars and sent to concentration camps, where they are forced to do hard labor, are beaten and tortured, are denied food and water, and are often killed by burning, hanging, shooting, starving, freezing, or beating. Even the babies and small children are thrown into pits of fire since.....

Minor Theme

The importance of religious faith is the minor theme of the novel. From the time of his childhood, Elie was extremely interested in Judaism and studied the Talmud and the Cabbala. He regularly attended services at the synagogue, prayed to his God, and wept over the history of the Jews. His father was also very religious.

In the concentration camps, religion helps the prisoners to endure. They regularly pray to God for.....

OTHER ELEMENTS

The Title of the Novel - **Wiesel's experiences during the holocaust, one of the darkest periods in human history, are like a journey into a night of total blackness. During his stay in the various concentration camps, Wiesel witnesses and endures the worst kind of man's inhumanity to his fellow men, as prisoners are.....**

STUDY QUESTIONS - BOOK REPORT TOPICS

1. Describe Elie Wiesel as a young boy in Sighet. How does he change by the end of the novel?
2. Explain the relationship between Elie and his father, giving specific examples from the book.
3. When does the climax occur and why is it the climax?

There are many vivid descriptions of how the Jews are tortured by the Nazis. Give the two examples that struck you as most vivid.....

END OF SAMPLE MONKEYNOTES EXCERPTS

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