



# Reading Group Gold

## Night

by Elie Wiesel

### About this Guide

The questions and discussion topics that follow are designed to enhance your reading of Elie Wiesel's *Night*. We hope they will enrich your experience as you explore this poignant and fiercely honest remembrance of the Holocaust.

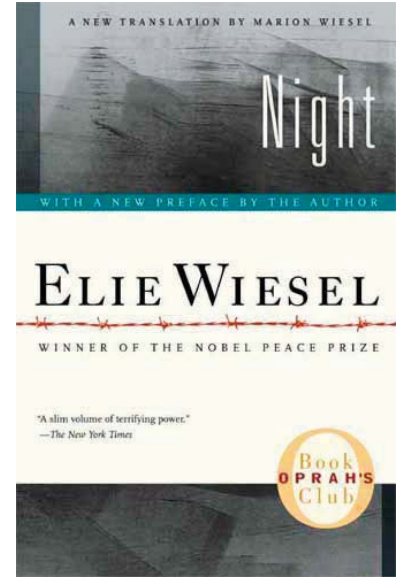
### Introduction

A watershed memoir first published in 1958, Elie Wiesel's *Night* has become widely recognized as a masterpiece. This new edition, translated from the French by Wiesel's wife and frequent translator, Marion Wiesel, presents this seminal work in the language and spirit truest to the author's original intent. A new preface by the author, in addition to the text of his Nobel Prize acceptance speech, provides enduring insight into his vision and legacy.

In eloquent, unflinching scenes, *Night* recalls Wiesel's survival as a teenager in Nazi death camps. Each chapter raises questions that have haunted the world since Hitler's rise: How could such a staggering number of innocents have lost their lives at the command of one regime? What does it take to survive when body, mind, and spirit are brutalized for months, even years? Why does God seem to forsake those who suffer? For anyone seeking a deeper understanding of the Holocaust, or of the nature of humanity itself, *Night* is essential reading.

### Questions for Discussion

1. Compare Wiesel's preface to the memoir itself. Has his perspective shifted in any way over the years?
2. In his Nobel lecture, presented in 1986, Wiesel writes of the power of memory, including the notion that the memory of death can serve as a shield against death. He mentions several sources of injustice that reached a boiling point in the 1980s, such as Apartheid and the suppression of Lech Walesa, as well as fears that are still with us, such as terrorism and the threat of nuclear war. Will twenty-first-century society be marked by remembrance, or by forgetting?
3. How does the author characterize himself in *Night*? What does young Eliezer tell us about the town, community, and home that defined his childhood? How would you describe his storytelling tone?
4. Why doesn't anyone believe Moishe the Beadle? In what way did other citizens around the world share in Sighet's naïveté? Would you have heeded Moishe's warnings, or would his stories have seemed too atrocious to be true? Has modern journalism solved the problem of complacency, or are Cassandras more prevalent than ever?



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5. As Eliezer's family and neighbors are confined to a large ghetto and then expelled to a smaller, ghostlier one whose residents have already been deported, what do you learn about the process by which Hitler implemented doom? How are you affected by the uncertainty endured by Sighet's Jews on their prolonged journey to the concentration camps?
6. With the words "Women to the right!" Eliezer has a final glimpse of his mother and of his sister, Tzipora. His father later wonders whether he should have presented his son as a younger boy, so that Eliezer could have joined the women. What turning point is represented by that moment, when their family is split and the gravity of every choice is made clear?
7. At Birkenau, Eliezer considers ending his life by running into the electric fence. His father tells him to remember Mrs. Schächter, who had become delusional on the train. What might account for the fact that Eliezer and his father were able to keep their wits about them while others slipped into madness?
8. Eliezer observes the now-infamous inscription above the entrance to Auschwitz, equating work with liberty. How does that inscription come to embody the deceit and bitter irony of the Nazi camps? What was the "work" of the prisoners? Were any of the Auschwitz survivors ever liberated emotionally?
9. Eliezer's gold crown makes him a target for spurious bargaining, concluding in a lavatory with Franek, the foreman, and a dentist from Warsaw. Discuss the hierarchies in place at Auschwitz. How was a prisoner's value determined? Which prisoners were chosen for supervisory roles? Which ones were more likely to face bullying, or execution?
10. Eliezer expresses sympathy for Job, the biblical figure who experienced horrendous loss and illness as Satan and God engaged in a debate over Job's faithfulness. After watching the lynching and slow death of a young boy, Eliezer tells himself that God is hanging from the gallows as well. In his Nobel lecture, Wiesel describes the Holocaust as "a universe where God, betrayed by His creatures, covered His face in order not to see." How does Wiesel's understanding of God change throughout the book? How did the prisoners in *Night*, including rabbis, reconcile their agony with their faith?
11. After the surgery on Eliezer's foot, he and his father must face being marched to a more remote camp or staying behind to face possible eleventh-hour execution amid rumors of approaching Red Army troops. Observing that Hitler's deadliness is the only reliable aspect of their lives, Wiesel's father decides that he and his son should leave the camp. The memoir is filled with such crossroads, the painful outcomes of which can be known only in retrospect. How does Wiesel respond to such outcomes? Do you believe these outcomes are driven by destiny, or do they simply reflect the reality of decision-making?
12. In his final scenes with his father, Eliezer must switch roles with him, becoming the provider and comforter, despite advice from others to abandon the dying man. What accounts for the tender, unbreakable bond between Eliezer and his father long after other men in their camp begin fending for themselves? How does their bond compare to those in your family?
13. What is the significance of the book's final image, Wiesel's face, reflected in a mirror? He writes that a corpse gazed back at him, with a look that has never left him. What aspects of him died during his ordeal? What aspects were born in their place? What do you make of his observation that among the men liberated with him, not one sought revenge?



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14. Wiesel faced constant rejection when he first tried to publish *Night*; numerous major publishing houses in France and the United States closed their doors to him. His memoir is now a classic that has inspired many other historians and Holocaust survivors to write important contributions to this genre of remembrance. What is unique about Wiesel's story? How does his approach compare to that of other memoirists whose work you have read?

## About the Author

Elie Wiesel, the author of some forty books, is Andrew W. Mellon Professor in the Humanities at Boston University. He and his family live in New York City. He has dedicated his life to speaking out against hatred and bigotry, and he was instrumental in the creation of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Mr. Wiesel was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1986.