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Using Bloom's Taxonomy to Explore Literature

Levels of Understanding

Night
By Elie Wiesel

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Night
By Elie Wiesel

written by Rita Truschel

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PRESTWICK HOUSE, INC.
"Proud to Be on the Teacher's Side"

Introduction to *Levels of Understanding*

FOR MANY STUDENTS, studying literature is like being lost in an alien universe, filled with hidden symbols, structures, and meanings that only a scholar can uncover. Without a teacher's direction, students lack the skills and confidence to evaluate a work of literature on their own, and instead, will frequently turn to resources such as the Internet for guidance. As a result, they assume another writer's views instead of developing their own.

Levels of Understanding breaks down complex questions students will encounter into smaller parts, showing the steps a critical reader should take in order to develop a sound evaluation of a text. Each section of the guide contains five types of questions representative of Bloom's learning domains—starting with the most basic and foundational skill, knowledge and comprehension, and gradually building to the highest skill, evaluation. All the way, reluctant students are provided with the scaffolding they need to advance from one level of understanding to the next.

The five types of questions, again, representative of Blooms domains, are as follows:

- **Comprehension**—will ask the most basic questions to ascertain the students' fundamental understanding of the text: plot facts, character identification, etc.

- **Reader Response**—will ask the students to "respond" to the text by relating it to personal experience or by presenting an opinion on a character or event.

- **Analysis**—will require students to study how various techniques and literary or theatrical devices (diction, symbolism, imagery, metaphors, asides, soliloquies etc.) function in the text. Analysis questions do not ask the student to merely identify or define a literary, theatrical, or rhetorical device.

- **Synthesis**—will bridge the gap between the analysis and evaluation questions, requiring students to look at other scenes in the text and draw conclusions about themes, motifs, or a writer's style. Often, a synthesis question will require the student to draw on prior knowledge—what has been learned in class or through research—and/or information from sources other than the literary title being studied in order to arrive at a satisfactory answer.

- **Evaluation**—will ask the student to make a qualitative judgment on the text and determine whether a particular aspect of it is effective or ineffective.

Other books may list Bloom's taxonomy, define the terms, and offer a general example or two. *Levels of Understanding*, however, provides the teacher with the title-specific questions to allow you to effectively bring Bloom into your classroom.

In addition, unlike other available products that claim to address Bloom's "higher order thinking skills," *Levels of Understanding* does not teach students how to answer questions about a particular text, but instead, helps them develop skills to evaluate literature critically and without guidance. These are skills that will not only help students prepare for standardized tests like the Advanced Placement Language and Literature exams, the SATs, and the ACTs, but will also give students the self-assurance to develop and articulate a personal view—a skill that will be highly advantageous to them in college.

This product, however, is not geared toward upper-level students only, but is a versatile guide that can be used for students of all ability levels—remedial through honors. The teacher may customize the product to fit the class's objectives and goals, determining which questions the students will answer. Additionally, the guide is entirely reproducible, and each major division begins on a new page, so you may use *Levels of Understanding* for the whole work of literature or only a specific section. ❧

How to Use this Unit

Each Levels of Understanding: Using Bloom's Taxonomy to Explore Literature unit is intended to be a deep and rich component of your literature program, whether your goal is to prepare your students for a large-scale assessment like the AP Literature exam or to challenge your students to read carefully and to think deeply about what they have read.

The questions in this guide are designed to be flexible and meet your needs. They can be used as

- homework questions when students read the text independently.

- in-class reading check questions and "bell-ringer" journal entries.

- class discussion questions and prompts.

- focus questions for pre-writing and essay planning.

- review and study questions for assessment.

While the Teacher's Guide contains an answer key, you will find that the higher-order questions (especially synthesis and evaluation) have model answers that represent more than one possible response. It would be inappropriate to penalize a student whose well-reasoned and supportable answer did not match the "correct" answer in the guide.

For this reason, we strongly recommend that you view the questions in this guide as learning activities and not as assessment activities.

Many of your students are likely to find the higher domains new and perhaps intimidating. Others might be alarmed at having to support their reader-response reactions and their evaluations with an accurate comprehension of the text. The questions in this guide should act as both scaffolding and safety net, guiding your students through a new reading and thinking process and allowing them to practice without fear of "failure."

The writing prompts, however, provide rich assessment and evaluation opportunities. Every prompt is designed to invite your students to operate in one of the higher order domains, thus giving students the opportunity to demonstrate their ability, and giving you the opportunity to evaluate their progress.

Whether you use *Levels of Understanding: Using Bloom's Taxonomy to Explore Literature* as the core of your literature curriculum or as a supplement, the guide and writing prompts are designed to help your students attain a deep understanding of the works they read. Ideally, they will gain the type of understanding demanded by Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, and most state standards, including the Common Core State Standards of the Council of Chief State School Officers and the National Governors Association. ❦

Introduction to *Night*

In many ways, *Night* is a document of its author's struggle to maintain his religious faith when confronted with unthinkable evil. Students do not need to have a deep understanding of Judaism to understand *Night* and its message, but a basic knowledge of Jewish history, beliefs, and customs will enhance their understanding of important events depicted in the text. ❧

Genre

Elie Wiesel's account of his family's deportation from their hometown to Nazi concentration camps near the end of World War II has been called a memoir, a novel, and historic testimony, among other things. Wiesel's harrowing tale encompasses aspects of all these genres.

First and foremost, he wrote as a witness to the persecution that killed six million European Jews during the regime of German dictator Adolf Hitler. He wrote to grapple with how the God of devout Jews could permit such torment. Wiesel is not a dispassionate reporter. Citing the vast numbers of perpetrators and casualties, Wiesel asserts that the Jewish catastrophe can never be fully explained or even known. His approach in *Night* hews to the mystic piety of the Jewish Hasidic sect of his mother and maternal grandfather. He gives great meaning to silence to represent what he considers an indescribable mystery.
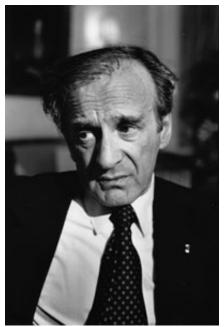
Wiesel is dedicated to remembering the persecuted with reverence and shielding them from culpability, denial, or oblivion. "And I do love them, the Jews of my town, the Jews of the ghetto," Wiesel writes in his memoir *All Rivers Run to the Sea*. "That's why I glorify them in my writings—and I make no secret of it."

Memoir is a form of autobiography, typically focused on meaningful incidents in a person's life. Memoir relies on

Elie Wiesel (1987)

the author's memories, feelings, and interpretations of these incidents. However, because the author selects the incidents included in the memoir, a memoir cannot always be taken as the absolute objective truth about a person's life. Memoirs, by their very nature, are subject to the author's biases, and the author may present events differently from the way in which they actually occurred. Authors will often structure their memoirs to create specific emotional effects on their audience. When reading a memoir, one must be wary of accepting uncritically the author's presentation of events. This is not to imply that the events in question did not occur. Still, readers must consider the possibility that the author is manipulating these events and their presentation for artistic effect.

Night's complex development of characters, action, and themes has led some to argue that the work is a novel, albeit one based in historical fact. Further complicating the issue, *Night* was developed from a manuscript titled *Un di Velt Hot Geshvign*, a manuscript that was over 800 pages long and written in Yiddish. This manuscript was translated into French and heavily edited to create *La Nuit*, a work of less than 200 pages. *La Nuit* was further edited and translated into English to create *Night*. ❧

A Brief Summary of Jewish History

The Jewish religion is nearly four thousand years old. Its fundamental belief is that there is only one God, an essentially mysterious being who is the creator of all things. According to Judaism, human beings are the culmination of creation. Thus, people have the ability to achieve the ideal purposes that God has established for them. By contrast, other ancient people believed in the existence of many gods with distinct attributes and that humans prospered or suffered according to the gods' caprices.

Jewish monotheism originated in the Middle East with the patriarch Abraham, who lived circa 1900 BCE., in what is now Iraq, near the city of Ur. Abraham and his family migrated to the area along the Mediterranean Sea that comprises modern-day Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, and Israel.

Levels of Understanding:
*Using Bloom's Taxonomy of Learning Domains
to explore Elie Wiesel's Night*

Writing Prompts

Chapter One: *Analysis, Synthesis, Evaluation*

In a well-written essay, evaluate the effectiveness of Chapter One in establishing *Night*'s themes, characterizations, and subject matter. Avoid plot summary.

Chapter Two: *Analysis, Synthesis, Evaluation*

Just as the Jews of Sighet ignored the warnings given by Moishe the Beadle in Chapter One, they disbelieve the ravings of the seemingly mad Mrs. Schachter in Chapter Two. In a well-written essay, explain what these incidents contribute to the meaning of the work as a whole. Avoid plot summary.

Chapter Three: *Analysis, Synthesis*

Throughout *Night*, Elie Wiesel uses images of nighttime and darkness to develop symbolic meaning. In a well-supported essay, analyze the imagery the author uses to describe night and explain how this imagery develops the overall meaning of the work. Avoid plot summary.

Chapter Four: *Analysis, Synthesis, Evaluation*

Throughout Chapter Four, prisoners negotiate with those in positions of authority. In a well-written essay, analyze the structure of this chapter in terms of its portrayal of acts of negotiation, and explain the effect or effects of this structure on the meaning of the work as a whole. Do not summarize the plot.

Chapter Five: *Analysis, Synthesis*

Night can be read as the story of a young man's struggle to maintain his belief in a loving God in the face of unspeakable evil. The first few pages of Chapter Five depict how the protagonist's religious beliefs have been affected by his experiences. In a well-written essay, explain how the literary techniques the author uses in Chapter Five convey the changes in the protagonist's understanding of his religion. Support your argument with evidence from this and previous chapters, but avoid mere plot summary.

Chapter Six: *Analysis*

One of the subjects Elie Wiesel explores in *Night* is how the Jewish prisoners are affected by the dehumanizing treatment to which they are subjected by their Nazi captors. Read Chapter 6 carefully, paying special attention to diction and imagery that helps reveal this dehumanization. Then, in a well-written essay, explain how this diction and imagery conveys the effects of dehumanization on the Jewish prisoners. Avoid plot summary.

Chapter Seven: *Reader Response, Analysis, Synthesis*

Author Elie Wiesel has said, "The opposite of love is not hate, it's indifference. The opposite of art is not ugliness, it's indifference. The opposite of faith is not heresy, it's indifference. And the opposite of life is not death, it's indifference." In a well-written essay, explain how this sentiment is conveyed in Chapter Seven of *Night*. Provide textual evidence for your claims, but avoid mere plot summary.

Chapter Eight: *Reader Response, Analysis, Synthesis*

In Chapter Six, the author relates an anecdote about Rabbi Eliahu and his son. In Chapter Eight, the author writes, "Just like Rabbi Eliahu's son, I had not passed the test." In a well-written essay, explain what this "test" is and determine whether Eliezer has or has not passed. Support your arguments with evidence from the text, but avoid plot summary.

Chapter Nine: *Analysis, Synthesis*

In the "Preface to the New Translation" of *Night*, Elie Wiesel writes:

For the survivor who chooses to testify, it is clear: his duty is to bear witness for the dead and for the living. He has no right to deprive future generations of a past that belongs to our collective memory. To forget would be not only dangerous but offensive; to forget the dead would be akin to killing them a second time.

Night concludes with this passage: "From the depths of the mirror, a corpse was contemplating me. The look in his eyes as he gazed at me has never left me." In a well-written essay, analyze this imagery and explain how it exemplifies the message Wiesel conveys in the quoted passage from the Preface.

Full Text: *Analysis, Synthesis, Evaluation*

Some critical studies on *Night* question its genre, asking whether the work should be classified as a memoir or a novel. In a thoughtful, well-supported essay, analyze the textual structure of *Night* and argue the extent to which it fits into either of these genres.

Levels of Understanding:
*Using Bloom's Taxonomy of Learning Domains
to explore Elie Wiesel's*

Night

CHAPTER ONE

Comprehension

1. What is Moishe the Beadle's job in the town of Sighet, Romania? What do the townspeople think of him?

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2. What are Eliezer's boyhood attitudes about his religion and his family?

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3. In what ways is Eliezer's opinion of Moishe different from what others in town think of him?

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4. Is the rumor that foreign-born Jews were sent to work in the Galicia region of Poland true? How do you know?

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5. As the war continues, what action does Eliezer ask his father to take on behalf of the Wiesel family? What is his father's response to Eliezer's request?

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6. Why is Eliezer's father informed that residents of the Jewish ghetto will be deported?

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Night
CHAPTER THREE

Comprehension

1. How are Eliezer and his mother and sister separated?

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2. Describe the veteran Auschwitz inmates' attitude toward the newly arrived deportees.

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3. Why does Eliezer identify himself as an 18-year-old farmer?

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4. What does Eliezer decide to do as the Jewish men walk toward the Auschwitz crematoria? What circumstance alters his decision?

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5. The narrator says that the word "chimney" was "the only word that had a real meaning in this place." Explain its denotation and connotation.

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6. Explain the process at Auschwitz that transforms men into compliant prison inmates.

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Night
Chapter Five

Comprehension

1. In what ways does Eliezer rebel against Jewish tradition?

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2. What is the basis of Eliezer's accusation against God?

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3. What do the "veterans" say about how present-day Buna compares to Buna as it was two years ago?

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4. What advice do prisoners follow in order to pass the selection process?

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5. What happens to Akiba Drumer?

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6. Why is the infirmary dangerous?

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7. What causes the evacuation of prisoners from the concentration camp? How do you know?

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Night
CHAPTER SEVEN

Comprehension

1. How does Eliezer protect his father?

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2. What techniques do the prisoners use to survive the journey by train?

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3. What determines the fate of Meir Katz?

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4. How many men start the journey in the cattle car? How many arrive at Buchenwald?

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Reader Response

1. The author details two instances in which people give freely to others: The German laborers and passersby who throw pieces of bread into the train, and the Parisian lady who throws coins to the people of Aden. Why do you think these people "give charity?" Explain your answer.

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Night
CHAPTER NINE

Comprehension

1. How much time passes between Eliezer's father's death and the resumption of the narrative? How does the narrator explain this gap in the narrative?

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2. What happens on April 5, 1945? What does the *Lagerkommandant* tell the prisoners the next day?

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3. What happens on April 10, 1945?

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4. What happens on April 11, 1945?

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5. What happens to Eliezer once he is freed?

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Reader Response

1. Based on what you know about Eliezer's experiences so far, what are likely reasons the narrator does not describe his life at Buchenwald?

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