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**Literature**  
Teaching Unit

Chapter-by-Chapter Study Guide



My Name is Asher Lev

by Chaim Potok

- Learning objectives
- Study Guide with short-answer questions
- Background information
- Vocabulary in context
- Multiple-choice test
- Essay questions
- Literary terms



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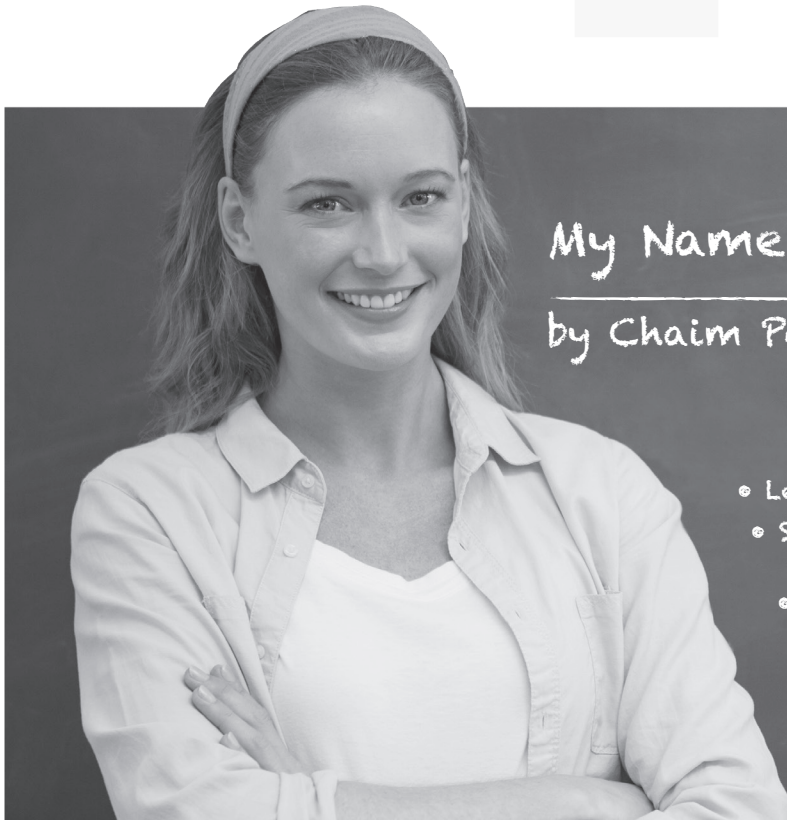
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# Literature Teaching Unit

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## Objectives

By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to:

1. define and use vocabulary words from the novel.
2. discuss the blessings and burdens of having an amazing talent.
3. discuss the problems that result when one's own dream conflicts with the dreams of one's family.
4. discuss the nature of art as presented in the novel.
5. discuss Asher's ongoing struggle between his art and his faith.
6. discuss the use of cold and dark as motifs in the novel.
7. discuss the use of travel as a motif in the novel.
8. discuss the use of water as a motif in the novel.
9. discuss the use of dreams as a motif in the novel.
10. analyze the author's use of diction to create a distinct voice and create meaning in the text.
11. identify and discuss examples of imagery within the text.
12. identify and discuss examples of irony within the text.
13. identify and discuss examples of personification within the text.
14. discuss the author's use of symbolism.
15. discuss the author's use of foreshadowing.
16. distinguish between internal and external conflict and discuss the way Asher's desire to paint is both an internal and external conflict.
17. compare and contrast the reactions to Asher's crucifixions, including his parents', the Rebbe's, and the art world's.
18. compare and contrast Asher's mother and father, with specific reference to the ways they respond to Asher's gift and his desire to pursue painting as a career.

### Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Why does Asher hold on to his Jewish faith?
2. Discuss Potok's use of imagery in the novel.
3. Discuss Potok's use of irony in the novel.
4. Discuss Potok's use of symbolism in the novel.
5. How is Rivkeh Lev affected by the death of her brother?
6. Why does Rivkeh Lev spend so much time waiting at windows?
7. Discuss the role of the Rebbe in the Ladover community and specifically in Asher's life.
8. Analyze the use of travel as a motif in the novel.
9. Analyze the use of water as a motif in the novel.
10. Analyze the use of dreams as a motif in the novel.
11. Discuss the relationship between Asher and Jacob Kahn.
12. Discuss the impact of Yudel Krinsky on Asher.
13. Analyze the following characters
  - Asher Lev
  - Rivkeh Lev
  - Aryeh Lev
14. Discuss the concepts of "aesthetic blindness" and "moral blindness" and the characters to which these terms apply.
15. Discuss the ways in which Asher's desire to paint is both an internal and external conflict.
16. Analyze Potok's choice of setting. Do you think the setting is important to the story?
17. Discuss Potok's use of structure. How is the plot affected by the fact that the novel is circular?
18. In the book Rivkeh Lev gives her son, it says that an artist must "[free] himself from his family, his nation, his race." Do you agree with this statement?

**BOOK ONE**

**Chapter One**

VOCABULARY

acrid – sharp-smelling  
affluent – wealthy  
apostate – someone who no longer believes  
blasphemous – mocking God or something thought to be sacred  
brooding – deep in thought  
cloying – very sweet smell  
dejected – defeated  
erratic – making irregular movements  
fetid – smelling of decay  
frenetically – frantically  
futile – pointless  
immutable – permanent  
morosely – in a depressed state  
notorious – well-known  
nuances – slight differences  
periphery – the outer edge  
perplexity – confusion  
pious – religiously devoted  
protruded – stuck out  
sallow – pale  
specterlike – like a ghost  
theologians – religious scholars  
tonalities – variations  
traitor – someone who betrays a group to whom allegiance is sworn  
tremulously – with fear

1. Describe Potok’s use of contrast in introducing Asher’s gift.

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## Chapter Five

### VOCABULARY

**arabesques** – elaborate decorations  
**conjugations** – lists of the different tenses of verbs  
**conscious** – aware  
**defiled** – dirtied  
**desecrated** – made impure  
**menacingly** – threateningly  
**preliminaries** – introductions; small-talk  
**resonant** – echoing  
**rivulets** – small streams of liquid  
**sardonic** – malicious  
**stagnant** – lifeless, still

1. Characterize Asher’s mental state at this point in the novel.

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2. What does Asher’s drawing in his Chumash foreshadow?

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3. Describe the conversation between the mashpia and Asher.

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**BOOK THREE**

**Chapter Ten**

VOCABULARY

**circumspect – indirect**

1. Discuss the significance of Asher’s realization that his prayers sometime “seemed more appropriate to this beach than to the synagogue on [his] street.”  
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2. Discuss Potok’s diction in the following sentence: “I painted my father eating an indistinct meal at an indistinct table near a window overlooking vague gabled buildings and blurred lights.” How does this sentence add to our understanding of Asher’s relationship with his father?  
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3. What does Asher do that causes Kahn to accuse him of cowardice?  
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4. What function does Kahn’s three-day illness serve?  
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5. Discuss the symbolism in the sand sculpture Asher creates.  
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