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Response Journal

Reflections: A Student Response Journal



Night
Eila Wiesel



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Elie Wiesel



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ISBN 978-1-60389-605-4

Item No. 301924

To The Student

Although we may read a novel, play, or work of non-fiction for enjoyment, each time we read one, we are building and practicing important basic reading skills. In our ever-more complex society, in which reading has become more and more crucial for success, this, in itself, is an important reason to spend time reading for enjoyment.

Some readers, however, are able to go beyond basic reading techniques and are able to practice higher thinking skills by reflecting on what they have read and how what they read affects them. It is this act of reflection—that is, stopping to think about what you are reading—that this journal is attempting to encourage.

To aid you, we have included writing prompts for each section; however, if you find something that you wish to respond to in the book more compelling than our prompts, you should write about that. We hope you enjoy reading this book and that the act of responding to what you have read increases this enjoyment.

Keep in mind that there are no right or wrong answers to these prompts, and there is no one direction in which you must go.

Chapter 1

1. Moishe is a poor handyman at the shtibl, or house of prayer. He has been called Moishe the Beadle for so long that his actual surname is unknown. Write a paragraph discussing the nickname of someone you know or a character from a book or movie. How did this person get the nickname, and, in your opinion, is it well suited? Why or why not?
2. Eliezer explains that the underprivileged people in his hometown are assisted but ostracized by the townspeople. Eliezer lives in a small town in Transylvania, but his observation may be applicable to other parts of the world. In your opinion, is this statement a fair depiction of how the poor and homeless are treated in American society? Compose an editorial expressing your opinion on the subject, and be sure to support your position with examples.
3. Eliezer's father is a highly respected member of the community, whose advice is often sought. Think of a person you admire for his or her intelligence or skill. The individual may be someone that you do not know personally, such as a political leader or celebrity. Pretend that you are entering this person in a contest titled "Role Model of the Year." Write a brief submission essay describing the traits that you admire in this person and how he or she has influenced you. Supply at least two reasons you believe this individual should receive the award.
4. Eliezer wishes to study Kabbalah, and he asks his father to find an instructor. His father, however, refuses because of Eliezer's young age. Choose one of the following questions to complete:
 - A. Do you agree or disagree with Eliezer's father? Do you believe that Eliezer is old enough to make his own decisions, or should he heed his father's spiritual guidance? Write a letter to Eliezer's father voicing your opinion on the matter.
 - B. Have you or someone you know ever been denied something because of age? What did you want, who prevented you, and how did you feel? Describe the situation in the form of a one-page journal entry.

Night

8. The people in Sighet refuse to believe that Hitler can or will exterminate the Jewish race; their lives continue as usual, despite news of German victories. Recall a time when a character from a book or movie was in denial like the people of Sighet. Complete the following conversation by describing the character to a friend:

Friend: I can't believe that no one is leaving town. If I heard that the Germans were coming, I'd be out of there, especially after what Moishe said. They must be in complete denial.

You: Yeah, they remind me of this other character in...

9. The Germans arrive in Sighet and lodge in the townspeople's homes. Despite their grim uniforms, the soldiers appear to be polite and nonthreatening. How would you react if an army of an enemy nation suddenly arrived in your town, and some began living in your home? Pretend that you are living in Sighet when the Germans arrive. Compose an editorial for the local newspaper voicing your opinion of the situation. The piece should not exceed one page.
10. The Jewish people are forced into ghettos that are enclosed with barbed wire fences. Yet, despite their imprisonment, the people regard their situation in a positive light. Eliezer writes, "The ghetto was ruled by neither German nor Jew; it was ruled by delusion." Write a short paragraph explaining this statement to a student in your class who doesn't understand what the sentence means.
11. News arrives that the ghettos are being liquidated and that all residents are being transported. People have less than twenty-four hours to prepare to leave their homes and travel to an unknown location for an indeterminate amount of time. Reflect on how you would feel in this predicament. Imagine that you are a resident of the ghetto, and compose a poem about what is occurring. For instance, the poem may express feelings or depict events that are taking place. You may choose any format for the poem; the final work should contain at least six lines.

Response Journal

41. The Russian army is approaching, so the camp is to be evacuated, and the prisoners sent into Germany. Because of his injured foot, Eliezer must decide whether to travel or remain behind and risk execution; his primary concern, however, is staying with his father. Respond to one of the following prompts:
- A. From Eliezer's perspective, decide whether to stay in camp or evacuate. Write a letter to your father informing him of your choice. Indicate whether or not you expect him to remain with you. Be sure to give reasons for your decision. Remember that, if you are separated, this is also a farewell letter.
 - B. From the father's perspective, decide whether to stay in camp or evacuate. Write a letter to Eliezer informing him of your choice. Indicate whether or not you expect him to remain with you. Be sure to give your reasons for your decision. Remember that, if you are separated, this is also a farewell letter.
42. Eliezer has a great deal of pain in his infected foot and goes to the infirmary, where he worries that his foot will have to be amputated. Why do you suppose the Nazis would even have an infirmary in the camp, let alone a doctor? Supply a few reasons in a well-written paragraph.
43. A few prisoners are instructed to mop the floor of the block before the camp is evacuated. When asked why, the Blockälteste replies, "Let them know that here lived men and not pigs." Answer the following questions in complete sentences:
- A. In your opinion, how is this statement ironic?
 - B. What do you think the prisoners think when they hear the Blockälteste's comment?
 - C. What does this statement suggest about the Germans' way of thinking?

Chapter 7

50. The prisoners endure days of train travel without food; their only nourishment is water from melted snow. One day, while going through a town, a German worker throws a piece of bread into the train car. A near-riot follows, which the citizen watches “with great interest.” In a paragraph, describe the image that this scenario creates in your mind.
51. Years after the war, Eliezer comments on an experience in which he witnesses a woman throw coins to desperate children in the same manner as the Germans had thrown food onto the trains. When Eliezer implores the woman to stop, she comments, “I like to give charity....” What message is Eliezer trying to impart in telling this story? Write an editorial for a local newspaper in which you interpret Eliezer’s social commentary, and state whether or not you agree. Try to give an example from current events or history to support your view.
52. Eliezer witnesses a son kill his father for a morsel of bread before the son is killed for the same morsel. Eliezer ends the account with the statement, “I was sixteen.” How does his age affect the story? Create a brief diary entry written from Eliezer’s perspective on the day of the incident. Include his thoughts and feelings as he witnesses the fight. Next, write a second diary entry written by Eliezer twenty years after that day. Imagine how that event has altered his perspective of life, and try to convey it in your writing.
53. Out of the hundred or so people who began the train journey, only twelve were left alive. What might have sustained those twelve that the eighty-eight others lacked? Write a short memorial for these specific victims from Wiesel’s perspective.