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**Literature**  
Teaching Unit  
*Chapter-by-Chapter Study Guide*



Dawn

by Elie Wiesel

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



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# Literature Teaching Unit

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# Dawn

## Objectives

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

1. identify the main conflict of the novel: Elisha's moral struggle over his impending role as John Dawson's executioner.
2. discuss Elie Wiesel's reasons for writing *Dawn*, and explain the message that he hoped to convey.
3. explain the historical setting of the novel, and describe the political situation in Palestine after the end of World War II.
4. cite Elisha's reasons for joining the resistance movement, and explain how his decision was shaped by the following: his experiences at Buchenwald; the loss of his friends and family; his idealistic desire to help liberate his people; and the tactics of the Movement, including brainwashing, propaganda, and Gad's expert recruiting skills.
5. discuss the Movement's ideology and tactics, and explain the various ways in which its members justify their use of violence and murder.
6. explain how Elisha's belief in destiny plays a major role in his decision to join the Movement.
7. identify aspects of the Jewish faith, and explain how religion plays a role in Elisha's life and in his moral struggle.
8. cite instances in which Elisha questions his faith in God, and explain the various reasons behind his loss of faith.
9. analyze the secondary characters in the novel, describing their personalities, philosophies, and motivations. Explain how they shape, influence, and interact with Elisha.
10. explain the role of apparitions in the novel, and discuss their impact on Elisha's battle with guilt and anxiety regarding his role as executioner.
11. discuss the many ways in which Elisha has lost his innocence, and identify symbols of his lost innocence.
12. explain why Elisha is obsessed with the following two ideas: John Dawson's hunger, and the question of whether Dawson is capable of making Elisha laugh.

# Dawn

## Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. In his preface to *Dawn*, Elie Wiesel explains his reasons for writing the novel and the goals he hoped to achieve. What were his reasons for writing *Dawn*? What universal questions did he want to explore? What message did he want to send to people who advocate terrorism?
2. *Dawn* takes place in Palestine, shortly after the end of World War II. Briefly describe the political situation in Palestine during this time period. Who is in control of the country? Who are the resistance fighters, and what do they want?
3. Identify the type of narration used in the novel. From whose point of view is the story told? What does Wiesel achieve by using this form of narration? For example, what effect does it have on the reader? In what ways might the story have been different if Wiesel used a different type of narration?
4. Gad is able to persuade Elisha to abandon his original plans and join the Movement. How does he accomplish this? Describe the tactics Gad employs the night he comes to Elisha's apartment to recruit him. What does he tell Elisha about the Movement's goals and the history of the Jewish people? What vital thing does he ask Elisha to give him?
5. A central aspect of Elisha's religious beliefs is the idea of destiny. How does his belief in destiny shape the way he views Gad and the Movement? When Gad comes to recruit him, who (or what) does Elisha think Gad is? How does this idea play a role in the way Elisha understands and embraces Gad's words?
6. Describe Elisha's reaction upon hearing that he has been ordered to kill John Dawson. According to Elisha, how will this killing be different from the previous deadly terrorist actions he helped to carry out? How does he explain the distinctions?
7. Discuss the symbolic significance of eyes throughout the novel. Cite at least three examples from the text in which Elisha refers to himself as being "all eyes." Why does Elisha view himself this way? What concept does he see himself as personifying, and why?
8. All of the following appear as motifs in *Dawn*. Cite instances of these motifs, and describe how they help to develop and support some of the novel's major concepts:
  - silence
  - hunger
  - a crying child
  - the dead

# Dawn

## Preface

### Vocabulary

**abolish** – to eliminate  
**albeit** – although  
**bereft** – deprived; lacking  
**blighted** – ruined, destroyed  
**clandestine** – secret, undercover  
**combatant** – a fighter or soldier  
**disarm** – to defuse or neutralize  
**draconian** – harsh; cruel  
**engender** – to cause; bring about  
**ethical** – moral  
**humiliated** – demeaned; embarrassed  
**implicated** – involved; drawn in  
**inevitable** – unavoidable, inescapable  
**kapo** – a concentration camp prisoner who was granted special privileges in exchange for overseeing the other prisoners  
**nullifies** – cancels out; invalidates  
**overburdened** – overloaded  
**relevance** – significance, bearing  
**retaliation** – revenge  
**tribunals** – courts of justice

1. In his preface, Wiesel explains the setting of the story and introduces the reader to the novel's protagonist. What is the setting, and who is the protagonist?

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4. What does Elisha think “for the hundredth time”? How does he seem to feel about this thought? Support your opinion with evidence from the text.

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5. What does Elisha know about the man he is to kill?

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6. Elisha recalls meeting a beggar in the synagogue when he was a young boy. What was mysterious about the beggar, and why did he inspire fear in Elisha?

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7. How did the beggar describe the difference between night and day? What technique did he teach Elisha to help him distinguish between the two?

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8. As the twilight abruptly fades and darkness falls, Elisha uses a simile to describe the city. What is this simile? What type of mood does it seem to produce?

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9. Whose face does Elisha see as he continues to look out the window? Why does the experience seem to frighten him?

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11. Recall what the beggar had said about the nature of night: “At night everything is more intense, more true. The echo of words...takes on a new and deeper meaning.” How can the beggar’s description be applied to the scene in which Gad recruits Elisha? How did Gad’s words throughout the night take on an intensity and depth of meaning for Elisha? Cite examples from the text to support your answer.

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12. How does Gad describe the dawn of Palestine, and how does it differ from that of Paris, according to him? What is he implying with his comparison?

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13. Elisha had two premonitions the night Gad recruited him. Both of them involve imagery of Gad and Elisha traveling a road together. Cite these two instances of foreshadowing.

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14. Why do you think Elisha accepted Gad’s offer, despite his premonitions?

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15. Who is Ilana? Elisha says that she is a part of “the Legend.” What does he mean by this?

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16. How does Elisha describe his relationship with Gad and Ilana? How does he feel about Gad and Ilana being in love? Do you think Elisha may be idealizing their love, as another part of the Legend? Explain your opinion.

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8. At one point during the conversation, Elisha states that, while death has only eyes, “God, on the other hand, has no eyes at all.” What might Elisha mean by this?

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9. What does Elisha claim about a condemned man’s appetite? Why does he insist that the “condemned man’s traditional last meal is a joke”?

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10. Identify the literary term that is demonstrated in the following line: “Death sealed off every exit, and everywhere there were eyes.” What does the line reveal about Elisha’s state of mind?

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11. How does Ilana appear to transform into Catherine in Elisha’s mind? After reading the chapter, cite two things about Ilana that triggered Elisha’s memories of Catherine.

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12. According to Elisha, how was the room “magical”? Which boundary lines were transcended by it? How was Buchenwald also a “magical spot,” according to him?

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