

Name: _____ Class: _____

Elie Wiesel

By The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum
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Eliezer "Elie" Wiesel (1928-2016) was a Romanian-born, Jewish American writer, professor, political activist, Nobel Laureate, and Holocaust survivor. He authored 57 books, including Night, a work based on his experiences as a prisoner in the Auschwitz and Buchenwald concentration camps. As you read, take notes on how Wiesel's shared experiences has impacted human rights activism.

- [1] Elie Wiesel (1928-2016) was born in Sighet, Romania, on September 30, 1928.

A Nobel Peace Prize winner¹ and Boston University professor, Wiesel worked on behalf of oppressed people for much of his adult life. His personal experience of the Holocaust led him to use his talents as an author, teacher, and storyteller to defend human rights and peace throughout the world.

A native of Sighet, Transylvania (Romania, from 1940-1945 Hungary), Wiesel and his family were deported by the Nazis to Auschwitz² when he was 15 years old. His mother and younger sister perished³ there, his two older sisters survived. Wiesel and his father were later transported to Buchenwald,⁴ where his father died.



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1. The Nobel Peace Prize is a prestigious honor awarded annually to those who have "done the most or the best work for fraternity between nations, for the abolition or reduction of standing armies and for the holding and promotion of peace congresses."
2. The Auschwitz concentration camp was a network of German Nazi concentration camps and extermination camps. It was built and operated by the Third Reich in Polish regions that had been annexed by Nazi Germany during World War II.
3. **Perish (verb):** to suffer death, typically in a violent, sudden, or untimely way
4. Buchenwald concentration camp was one of the first and the largest of the concentration camps on German soil.

After the war, Wiesel studied in Paris and later became a journalist in that city, yet he remained silent about what he endured as an inmate in the camps. During an interview with the French writer Francois Mauriac, Wiesel was persuaded to end that silence. He subsequently wrote *La Nuit (Night)*. Since its publication in 1958, *La Nuit* has been translated into 30 languages and millions of copies have been sold. In *Night*, Wiesel describes his experiences and emotions at the hands of the Nazis during the Holocaust: the roundup of his family and neighbors in the Romanian town of Sighet; deportation by cattle car to the concentration camp Auschwitz-Birkenau; the division of his family forever during the selection process;⁵ the mental and physical anguish he and his fellow prisoners experienced as they were stripped of their humanity; and the death march from Auschwitz-Birkenau to the concentration camp at Buchenwald.

- [5] In 1978, President Jimmy Carter appointed him Chairman of the President's Commission on the Holocaust. In 1980, he became Founding Chairman of the United States Holocaust Memorial Council. Wiesel was also the founding president of the Paris-based Universal Academy of Cultures.

Wiesel's efforts to defend human rights and peace throughout the world earned him the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the United States Congressional Gold Medal and the Medal of Liberty Award, the rank of Grand-Croix⁶ in the French Legion of Honor, and in 1986, the Nobel Peace Prize. He received more than 100 honorary degrees from institutions of higher learning.

Three months after he received the Nobel Peace Prize, Elie Wiesel and his wife Marion established The Elie Wiesel Foundation for Humanity. Its mission is to advance the cause of human rights and peace throughout the world by creating a new forum for the discussion of urgent ethical issues confronting humanity.

His more than 40 books have won numerous awards, including the *Prix Medicis* for *A Beggar in Jerusalem*, the *Prix Livre Inter* for *The Testament*, and the Grand Prize for Literature from the City of Paris for *The Fifth Son*. The first volume of Wiesel's memoirs, *All Rivers Run to the Sea*, was published in New York (Knopf) in December 1995. The second volume, *And the Sea is Never Full*, was published in New York (Knopf) in November 1999.

Elie Wiesel was Distinguished Professor of Judaic Studies⁷ at the City University of New York (1972-1976), and first Henry Luce Visiting Scholar in the Humanities and Social Thought at Yale University (1982-1983). In 1976, he became the Andrew W. Mellon Professor in the Humanities at Boston University where he also held the title of University Professor.

- [10] The Elie Wiesel Award recognizes internationally prominent individuals whose actions have advanced the Museum's vision of a world where people confront hatred, prevent genocide,⁸ and promote human dignity. Established in 2011 as the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Award and renamed for inaugural⁹ recipient Elie Wiesel, it is the Museum's highest honor.

5. Once Jews were taken to a concentration camp, they were separated into male and female lines and inspected by Nazi doctors for the "selection process." Those over 14 years old and deemed "fit" for work were separated from the rest of the population, including women with children, who were usually condemned to death in the gas chambers.

6. Grand-Croix is the highest degree of distinction in the French Legion of Honor.

7. Judaic Studies refers to the academic study of Jewish people and Judaism.

8. the deliberate killing of a large group of people, especially those of a certain ethnic group or nation

9. **Inaugural (adjective):** marking the beginning of an institution, activity, or period of office

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Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: Which statement best identifies the central idea of the text?
 - A. Wiesel endured horrible things as a child in a concentration camp, but has not allowed his life to be shaped by this.
 - B. Wiesel has been recognized for sharing his experiences in the Holocaust as a way to advocate for human rights.
 - C. Wiesel's impressive writing and teaching career makes him worthy of the Holocaust Memorial Museum's highest honor.
 - D. Wiesel's importance in the history of human rights activism is owed entirely to the powerful people who have supported him.

2. PART B: Which of the following quotes best supports the answer to Part A?
 - A. "His personal experience of the Holocaust led him to use his talents as an author, teacher, and storyteller to defend human rights and peace throughout the world." (Paragraph 2)
 - B. "After the war, Wiesel studied in Paris and later became a journalist in that city, yet he remained silent about what he endured as an inmate in the camps." (Paragraph 4)
 - C. "Since its publication in 1958, *La Nuit* has been translated into 30 languages and millions of copies have been sold." (Paragraph 4)
 - D. "In 1978, President Jimmy Carter appointed him Chairman of the President's Commission on the Holocaust." (Paragraph 5)

3. PART A: What impact does the phrase "deportation by cattle car" in paragraph 4 have on the reader's understanding of the text?
 - A. It emphasizes the degrading treatment Wiesel and other Holocaust victims faced.
 - B. It emphasizes the limited resources the Nazis had during the war.
 - C. It illustrates the large number of prisoners that had to be moved.
 - D. It reinforces the idea that the Holocaust was kept secret from everyone outside the camps.

4. PART B: Which quote from paragraph 4 best supports the answer to Part A?
 - A. "roundup of his family"
 - B. "the division of his family forever"
 - C. "during the selection process"
 - D. "stripped of their humanity"

5. How does the conclusion of the article in paragraph 10 contribute to the central idea of the text?

Discussion Questions

Directions: *Brainstorm your answers to the following questions in the space provided. Be prepared to share your original ideas in a class discussion.*

1. Given what you have learned about Elie Wiesel, do you think he would consider himself a hero? Why or why not? In the context of this article, what makes a hero? Cite evidence from this text, your own experience, and other literature, art, or history in your answer.

2. What other figures from history or literature remind you of Elie Wiesel? What shared experiences or characteristics do they have? In the context of this article, what can we learn from tragedy? What did Elie Wiesel try to teach the world from his own tragedies? Cite evidence from this text, your own experience, and other literature, art, or history in your answer.

3. This text describes the numerous awards Elie Wiesel was given, but does not speak to the full scope of Wiesel's teaching and writing. Which do you think is more important for success: your work, or your recognition?