

A JOINT LITERARY PROJECT FOR AMERICAN AND
ISRAELI TEENAGERS:

TEACHING ELIE WIESEL'S *NIGHT* TO AMERICAN
AND ISRAELI TEENAGERS

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for the Bergen County High School of Jewish Studies
and The Amal School in Nahariya, Israel

February, 2006

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CAJE PRESENTATION
Tuesday, August 8, 2006
Divinity-Westbrook 030
2:00 – 3:15

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Teaching Elie Wiesel's Night to American and Israeli Teenagers
Zev Shanken, August 2006

For a number of years high school students at BCHSJS have gone to Israel over Presidents Week. Our trip to Israel is unique, I think, in that it is part of a course that students take from September to June. This gives the teacher – for the past five years me – a chance to have the students bond as a *hevre* and to learn Israeli history, politics, geography, vocabulary. Over the years I've generated daily lesson sheets keyed to the itinerary that our principal, Fred Nagler, and his Israel Experience counterpart develop.

One recent addition to our program has been that our county, Bergen County in New Jersey, is 'twinned' with the P2K community in Nahariya. Our students meet Israeli high school students, stay with them and participate in various activities. Last year I began to wonder if it were possible that the two populations meet by email before they meet face to face. I also began to wonder about the programs that the two populations did together. We usually had very good 'ice breaker' activities run by first class social workers. Both populations loved these activities. (We hand out very elaborate evaluation sheets to the kids on the return flight and assiduously use their responses to fine-tune our next trip.) I wondered if we could somehow develop programs with a bit more content.

Another aspect of the program is that few of our students are Orthodox. Most of our regional Sunday school services Conservative Congregations' students from grades 8 to 12. The Israeli students whom they meet in Naharia are also not Orthodox. So much of American Zionism is influenced by the Orthodox, that a program that wishes to foster continuing relationships between the two populations faces a real problem if it wants to provide content for the Conservative, Reform, Reconstructionist or simply unaffiliated adolescent. The big question is: How can we engender a non-Orthodox love of Israel? On what connections can we focus?

My first thought was that our students read poems by Yehuda Amichai in translation. Our students would study a poem in class and then write responses to their counterparts in Israel. This, however, posed two problems. The first was that not all teenagers are interested in poetry, not to mention that Amichai, according to Avital Perach, my Israeli counterpart in Nahariya, even for the rare Israeli teenager who reads poetry, is already considered old fashioned. But the greater problem was that the activities we had planned between the two groups would have been one sided. It would have required Israeli kids to help or translate or identify allusions for the Americans. I wanted a more equal kind of exchange because I wanted the project to open the possibilities for the two populations to develop real, that is to say, equal, relationships. I did not want the American kids to meet Israelis for altruistic "mitzvah" reasons. Nor did I want our kids to feel they had to place themselves in the demeaning role of disciple to the wise, hardened Israeli teen, just two or three years from military service. I wanted the book they read to serve as an opening for a relationship between equals.

We chose to work with Elie Wiesel's *Night*, not only because it had obvious Jewish content, but also because it was neither American nor Israeli. Both the American and Israeli teenagers were equidistant from the time period and from the shtetl mentality that opens the book. Neither population had a privileged access to the material; both

populations could equally claim this common enemy and maybe even be encouraged to speak to their grandparents about where they were during the Shoah.

So in this session we want to share this experience with you with the hope that you will start a conversation with your community about ways in which you can foster American – Israeli relationships.

The program worked like this.

We divided the program into two parts. The first part spanned from September to January, the first semester of the school year. The American students in my class and the Israeli students in Avital Perach's English class at the Amal School in Nahariya were assigned the same pages to read on a weekly basis. We generated Reading Guide questions that we sent to all the students in my class and hers. We partnered the kids by email and encouraged them to work on the answers together.

For the second phase, we developed five mini-seminars that integrated pairs of students would lead in Israel. The seminar leaders were determined about a month before our visit and they were chosen by Avital and me. The students who were not chosen to lead the seminars were the participants, about 35 of our group and about the same number of Israelis.

The first part of our hand out (pp. 5 to 13) consists of a collection of some of the weekly email lessons I sent out to the American and Israeli kids.

The second part of the hand out (pp. 14 to 26) consists of the Five Seminar Lessons (which we called "Table Lessons" that we gave the Leaders.)

The idea of the Seminars was to structure a situation where both populations could place their similarities and differences into relief. Because we wanted the students themselves to conduct the seminars, I provided them with enough scripted text to reduce the disadvantage of their not being trained teachers.

The Leaders moved from station to station in the school's library in 20 to 30 minute periods. Teachers and staff were assigned to each station in order to translate difficult words and to jump in if necessary.

After all five groups had been visited by the five pairs of Table Leaders, we all gathered together in the main room of the library for a culminating activity where we asked students to share out what they had learned and felt from the experience. I chaired that session and closed it by reading excerpts from Elie Wiesel's Noble Prize Acceptance Speech where he speaks of his love for the State of Israel and calls for peace and understanding between Arabs and Jews.

The first part of the documents that follow comprise the reading guides I sent by email to both Israeli and American students for them to answer with their e-pals while they read *Night* in their respective classes. The second part consists of the actual scripts I developed for the joint groups in Nahariya.

FIRST SET OF Reading Guide Questions on Night and Israel

■ Zev Shanken, teacher, BCHSJS

Our overriding question is: **Do Israeli teenagers and American teenagers read Eli Wiesel's *Night* differently?**

We can answer this question by comparing reactions to different episodes in the book. The questions are geared to start email conversations between Israeli and American teens. If these questions invite new questions, that's good.

→ Kinds of answers we want. ←

This reading guide is not intended as a quiz or homework sheet. The questions are designed to help you focus on your reactions to the characters and author of the book. We want these questions to serve as springboards for you and your Israeli counterpart to share your common or different reactions. We are using this book as a tool for starting a dialogue between you and Israeli teens about your common or different attitudes toward the holocaust. At times you are asked to "free write" a response. This means we just want you to write the first things that come to your mind. You will be sharing your reactions with others, but you will always be able to revise what you wrote here. The more honest you are in your reaction, the better the dialogue will be.

1. Many of us already know the story of *Night*, yet the book still holds our attention. Why? What exactly is it you want to learn from *Night*? Write an answer before you read / re-read the book.

2. One thing that makes this book a classic is its honesty. Read the passage below and underline a part of it you would **not** have used if you had been the writer. In two or three sentences explain why you would not have written it.

page14 "One by one they passed in front of me, teachers, friends, others, all those I had been afraid of, all those I once could have laughed at, all those I had lived with over the years. They went by fallen, dragging their packs, dragging their lives, deserting their homes, the years of their childhood, cringing like beaten dogs."

I would not have written... / or / I would not have omitted anything.._____

because...._____

3. Read the following section, paying careful attention to what we have italicized. Then answer the questions below.

page 15 “My father had accompanied the deportees as far as the entrance of the ghetto. They first had to go through the big synagogue, where *they were minutely searched, to see that they were not taking away any gold, silver, or other objects of value.* There were outbreaks of hysteria and blows with the truncheons.”

What were they NOT searched for? _____

What do we learn about the Nazi’s opinion of the Jews from what the Nazis were searching for?

What do we learn about the Nazi’s opinion of the Jews from what the Nazis did NOT even think the Jews would have the guts to sneak in?

4. Read the following sentence and write down your thoughts about the narrator based on what he wants to do.

Page 16: “I was up at dawn. I wanted time to pray before we were expelled.”

Second set of NIGHT Reading Guide questions. (Zev Shanken, BCHSJS -- PASSPORT TO ISRAEL)

These questions are designed to get you thinking. You will share them with other students. We hope that after you read one another's answers, you will ask more questions. Even if you have already read the pages, read them again before you answer.

Vocabulary for our American Friends

[electric torch – British English for *flashlight*]

[lorry – British English for *truck*]

[oaths – Polite for *curse words*]

page 3. "I pray to the God within me that He will give me the strength to ask Him the right questions."

1. What do you think the 'right questions' are?

2. Why do you think it takes 'strength' to ask?

3. Why do you think the author placed a question like this at the start of the book?

4. *Moshe the shamus says, "We must never make the mistake of wanting to enter the orchard [of mystical knowledge of God's true nature] by any gate but our own."*

Imagine that Moshe is not talking about Jewish mysticism, but about finding our way in life, deciding how we should live our lives. Then the idea of 'gate' means that each of us has our own unique way of living a good life. Do you agree? Explain.

5. Page 5: What answer does Moshe give Eli about why he is so anxious that people should believe his report of the Gestapo slaughter?

6. What would the Jewish community have done if it had believed Moshe's story?

7. Page 6. 1944. The Nazi plan seems more believable. Read the following passage and comment:

At that time, it was still possible to obtain emigration permits for Palestine. I had asked my father to sell out, liquidate his business, and leave.

"I'm too old, my son," he replied. "I'm too old to start a new life. I'm too old to start from scratch again in a country so far away..."

Even if there had been a state of Israel, many would not have gone, for the reasons the narrator's father provides. But try to answer this related question. If there had been a Jewish State, do you think the Nazis would have tried to exterminate all the Jews? Or do you think that the existence of a Jewish state would have disproved some of the Nazi theories about Jews?

8. page 7 Contrast the Jewish reaction to Berkovitz's and Moshe's reports of the coming holocaust.

9. page 9 "*The yellow star? Oh well, what of it? You don't die of it...*" (*Poor Father! Of what then did you die?*) This is a good example of sardonic foreshadowing. We know the answer. Why will the narrator's father die?

10. The requirement to wear a yellow star comes at the climax of a number of anti-Semitic decrees. They are presented on page 8. List them:

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____

11. Do these rules come from an angry irrational mob or an organized, intelligent, authority? Explain how the answer shows greater cruelty than if it came from an irrational mob.

12. page 13 "To the very last moment, a germ of hope stayed alive in our hearts." Describe how reading this sentence made you feel.

13. page 18 "*Who knows? Perhaps we are being deported for our own good. The front isn't very far off; we shall soon be able to hear the guns. And then the civilian population would be evacuated anyway...*"

There are many examples of DENIAL in the book so far. By this point, however, the narrator says that nobody believed them.

DENIAL is a psychological condition in which a person resists seeing an obvious, painful truth. A person in DENIAL is lying to himself.

If you had been there, for which one of the many examples of denial we have read so far do you think you would have fallen?

14. page 22 – 26 In what way is Madame Schachter's vision correct?

15. In what way is the way they react to Madame Schachter similar to the way they reacted to Moshe?

16. page 28 Why does the prisoner want Elie and his father to lie about their ages?

17. Read the following passage from page 29 and then answer the question below.

“We’ve got to do something. We can’t let ourselves be killed. We can’t go like beasts to the slaughter. We’ve got to revolt.”

There were a few sturdy young fellows among us. They had knives on them, and they tried to incite the others to throw themselves on the armed guards.

One of the young men cried:

“Let the world learn of the existence of Auschwitz. Let everybody hear about it, while they can still escape...”

But the older ones begged their children not to do anything foolish:

“You must never lose faith, even when the sword hangs over your head. That’s the teaching of our sages....”

The wind of revolt died down.

PERSONAL REACTION:

Read the passage again. Write a paragraph about which character in this passage makes you angry and why.

Third Set of NIGHT Reading Guide Questions (pp. 32 – 35) (Zev Shanken, BCHSJS -- PASSPORT TO ISRAEL)

Activity #1: Read the passage that begins on the top of page 32, “Never shall I forget that night..” to “Never shall I forget these things, even if I am condemned to live as long as God Himself. Never.”

This is the real beginning of the book. Everything up to now has been introduction. The rest of the book is the commentary on this paragraph. The rest of Jewish history since 1945 is a commentary on this paragraph.

Meditation Activity

Start this activity alone. Read the passage orally in your room with nobody around. Every time you read the word “never” think of an event in Jewish history that has happened since World War Two. Let your mind wander as if it were watching a slide show. Each time you say “never” picture a new Jewish event since the end of World War Two (1945) coming on the screen. Try to remember photographs you have seen in history books or on television. For example, try to imagine Ben Gurion declaring the State of Israel; or tanks liberating Jerusalem, photographs of soldiers at the Kotel during the Six Day War. Or Rabin shaking hands with Arab leaders, or Yiddish writer I. B. Singer winning the Noble Prize for Literature, or Agnon or Nellie Sachs. But not only political or military events or famous people. Picture Jewish farmers, Jewish businessmen, lawyers, your own parents. Picture Russian Jews arriving in Israel from the Soviet Union or Ethiopia or the United States or Mexico. Picture joyous moments and tragic moments in our history. And don’t forget to picture private moments too, like your bar / bat mitzvah or being at synagogue or meeting a friend for Shabbat. Picture as many “Jewish” moments as you can.

Now do it again, only this time close your eyes and have somebody read the passage to you. As the person reads, understand that what you are hearing is the voice that has haunted, inspired, terrified and influenced the Jewish imagination for the past 60 years. Each time you see a Jewish picture in your mind, understand that the people in that picture were acting in some way under the shadow of this passage. Jews who felt despair and Jews who felt pride and Jews who are religious and Jews who are non religious or anti-religious -- all in some way were acting under the influence of the feelings that are being described in this passage. If asked why they are doing what they are doing, sooner or later they will refer to this half page. Even if they never read *Night*, they understand the feelings in this passage. The ideas in this passage turned some people into atheists, turned some into believers, turned some into poets, turned some into hating poetry, turned some into nationalists, turned some into socialists, turned some into not caring about anything but themselves. Auschwitz changed every Jew on earth from that moment on.

Now read it a third time and write your feelings down in your journal. Do you agree with the importance of this passage? Did you get other ideas as you read? Record it in writing, because it will change.

Activity #2 Read to page 35.

Activity #3

Re-read page 32 and decide what part of your journal you wish to share with your e-pal or classmate. Make sure NOT to share it all.

Fourth Set of NIGHT Reading Guide Questions

(Zev Shanken, BCHSJS -- PASSPORT TO ISRAEL)

These activities are all based on material found on the bottom of page 48 of *Night*.

MEET YOSSI AND TIBI

Read these two paragraphs that follow “We were lucky”

There were two boys attached to our group. Yossi and Tibi, two brothers. They were Czechs whose parents had been exterminated in Birkenau. They lived, body and soul for each other.

They and I very soon became friends. Having once belonged to a Zionist youth organization, they knew innumerable Hebrew chants. Thus we would often hum tunes evoking the calm waters of Jordan and the majestic sanctity of Jerusalem. And we would often talk of Palestine. Their parents, like mine, had lacked the courage to wind up their affairs and emigrate while there was still time. We decided that, if we were granted our lives until the liberation, we would not stay in Europe a day longer. We would take the first boat for Haifa.

With your e-pal, make a list of three or four reasons Elie is attracted to Yossi and Tibi.

1. They were close to the same age
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

INFERENCES

Read the passage again and pay close attention to the portions that are underlined. Below are a number of statements. With your e-pal decide which of them can be inferred (figured out, deduced) from the underlined portions. Some are deliberately wrong. This is to get you and your e-pal thinking about what Zionism meant to European Jews in the first half of the 20th century. Exchange ideas about which inferences are correct and which are not correct.

1. Zionist youth organizations used to sing a lot.
2. These three boys knew what Israel was really like.
3. These three boys had pretty good ideas about what Israel was like.
4. Because these boys were suffering so much, they made Israel into a perfect paradise.
5. Israel represented an ideal place to all the Jews in Europe.
6. The boys faulted their parents for not having left Israel before the Shoah.
7. It takes courage to leave your home and go to a distant land to live.
8. It takes idealism to leave your home and go to a distant land to live.

Fifth Set of NIGHT Reading Guide Questions (Zev Shanken, BCHSJS -- PASSPORT TO ISRAEL)

FAMILY HISTORY.

These three boys are living in the 1940s in concentration camps. They are about the age of your grandparents. Find out the following information about your grandparents.

Where were your grandparents in 1940?

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____
- d. _____

If they were in Europe, this could have been their story. If they lived in Israel, find out how, why and when they got there. If they lived in the United States, find out how, when and why they got there. If they lived in other places, find out why, how and when.

If you are an American, find out why they didn't move to Israel

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____
- d. _____

If you are an Israeli, find out why they didn't move to the United States.

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____
- d. _____

Exchange this information with your e-pal. After you exchange this information, ask your e-pals if it makes them feel closer to you?

CABBALISTIC DREAMS

Page 48 ends with a paragraph that may seem out of place.

Still lost in his cabbalistic dreams, Akiba Drummer had discovered a verse in the Bible which, interpreted in terms of numerology, enabled him to predict that the deliverance was due within the coming weeks.

All of a sudden Elie is talking about Akiba Drummer and the Bible and Jewish mysticism. What do you think the connection is between the paragraph on Zionism and the next paragraph on Cabbalah? Write the connection here and share it with your e-pal. Does it have to do with hope? With faith? With illusion? With hunger for finding meaning in life?

Sixth Set of Night Reading Guide Questions

(Zev Shanken, BCHSJS -- PASSPORT TO ISRAEL)

→ Your task: Read the assigned pages and then read the paragraphs on this email that follow.

The Gold Tooth p 49 – 50

There are two surprises in this passage. The first is that the dentist accepted Elie's excuse about being too ill to have his gold crown removed. This is a rare example of compassion at a concentration camp. The second surprise is that after Elie learns that the dentist was hanged, he feels no pity for him. "I did not feel any pity for him. I was even pleased about what had happened. I had saved my gold crown. It might be useful to me one day to buy something – bread or life. I now took little interest in anything except my daily plate of soup and my crust of stale bread. Bread, soup – these were my whole life. I was a body. Perhaps less than that even: a starved stomach. The stomach alone was aware of the passage of time."

The sages (chazal) have a saying, "*The worst thing about slavery in Mitzrayim was that we got used to it.*"

Explain how the quote by the sages would be a good title to this episode. "We Got Used To It"

The French Jewess p 50 – 51

Why do you think the narrator placed this episode right after his confession about not feeling compassion for the hanged dentist? Is this example of compassion placed here to remind us that although the narrator has lost his soul, others have not? Discuss.

His Father Is Beaten pp 52 – 54

As the book progresses, the son is becoming his father's father. How sad that he must teach his father how to march!

There is a Yiddish proverb, "*When a father feeds a son, both laugh; when a son feeds a father, both cry.*" Apply the idea of that proverb to the passage you have just read.

The Execution pp 58 – 60.

How do the concluding sentences of the episode -- "After the march, we were given permission to return to the blocks for our meal. I remember that I found the soup excellent that evening..."-- fit with the conclusions of the earlier episodes we have examined in this lesson? After describing a horrible event, the narrator shows that he has lost his feelings for others. He has grown *used to it*. Almost.

Is there evidence that he has NOT completely lost his humanity? How does the narrator end the second execution story? (Page 62)

(Footnote to history: Page 61. "This time the Lagerkapo refused to act as executioner. Three SS replaced him." Notice that there is no report that the Lagerkapo was punished for disobeying orders.)

Table Lesson 1: Grandparents in WWII

Theme: *k'lal yisrael*

[Equipment: Family History Form, pencils or pens.]

Leader 1: Everybody at this table had relatives who were alive in the 1940s. On the sheets you have in front of you, we are going to ask you to fill out the form about some of these relatives. After you fill out the form, we will go around the table and ask you to read your answers to the group.

Leader 2: The purpose of this activity is for us to understand how Elie's experience could very well have been the experience of our grandparents or other family members. But first, please follow along as I read:

There were two boys attached to our group: Yossi and Tibi, two brothers. They were Czechs whose parents had been exterminated at Birkenau. They lived, body and soul, for each other.

They and I very soon became friends. Having once belonged to a Zionist youth organization, they knew innumerable Hebrew chants. Thus we would often hum tunes evoking the calm waters of Jordan and the majestic sanctity of Jerusalem. And we would often talk of Palestine [*eretz yisrael*]. Their parents, like mine, had lacked the courage to wind up their affairs and emigrate while there was still time. We decided that, if we were granted our lives until the liberation, we would not stay in Europe a day longer. We would take the first boat for Haifa.

-- Page 48

Leader 1: These three boys are living in the 1940s in concentration camps. They are about the age of our grandparents or great grandparents. Think about that as you fill out the form on your table.

[Pause for **3 minutes**]

Leader 2: Now let's go around the table and have each person read his / her form.

[Each member at the table reads about one or two relatives – **7 minutes**.]

CONCLUDING ACTIVITY:

Leader 1: Let's re-read the passage orally, but with these two changes. 1. Replace the names of the boys – Yossi and Tibi, -- with names of **your** family members. When the names come up, we will all together say our individual family names. 2. Replace the name of the boys' nationality, "Czechs" with the **country or countries** that your family lived in during the 40s.

[Xerox one copy for each member of the table]

FAMILY HISTORY FORM

There were two boys attached to our group: Yossi and Tibi, two brothers. They were Czechs whose parents had been exterminated at Birkenau. They lived, body and soul, for each other.

They and I very soon became friends. Having once belonged to a Zionist youth organization, they knew innumerable Hebrew chants. Thus we would often hum tunes evoking the calm waters of Jordan and the majestic sanctity of Jerusalem. And we would often talk of Palestine [Eretz Yisrael]. Their parents, like mine, had lacked the courage to wind up their affairs and emigrate while there was still time. We decided that, if we were granted our lives until the liberation, we would not stay in Europe a day longer. We would take the first boat for Haifa.

-- Page 48

These three boys are living in the 1940s in concentration camps. They are about the age of your grandparents or great uncles or aunts. Think about this as you fill out the form. (Please answer only in the space provided. These answers are notes for you to share with the group.)

Do you have relatives who come from Europe? _____

Where were some of them in 1941?

Name: _____ Country: _____

Name: _____ Country: _____

Name: _____ Country: _____

Name: _____ Country: _____

Name: _____ Country: _____

Name: _____ Country: _____

If they were in Europe during WWII, could this have been their story? ____

When did most of your family arrive in Israel?

How? _____

Why? _____

When? _____

When did most of your family arrive in The United States?

How? _____

Why? _____

When? _____

Did any of your grandparents or family members fight in WWII? _____

→ Select some facts from this sheet to share with the group at your table.

Table Lesson 2: Father – Son Relationships
Theme: Adolescence and Auschwitz

[Equipment: Hand – out of excerpts from *Night*, blank sheets of paper, pencils or pens.]

LEADER #1 One of the things rarely discussed about the Shoah is that it stole an entire generation's youth. Most of us go through a process from childhood through adulthood where we gradually figure out that our parents are not perfect. This process is called adolescence.

LEADER #2: Activity – 1 --

Write down a memory from childhood where you thought your parents were 'PERFECT.' Think of a time you wanted to be just like them, a time you wanted to dress just like them or agreed with every big idea they had because they were your parents. If you can't remember a personal time, then write down one that you have observed in other children. [1 minutes to write]

LEADER #1 Activity – 2 --

Now write down a recent experience in which your father or mother did something that was wrong, stupid, or foolish. [1 minutes to write]

Notice how different our attitudes toward our parents have become. This is normal, healthy, and expected. Would someone like to share their two stories? [3 minutes]

LEADER #2: The five excerpts from *Night* that you have in front of you trace this 15 year old's development as an adolescent. As you listen, compare your own healthy growth toward understanding that your parents are only human to that of Elie's experience as an adolescent in the concentration camp.

LEADER #1: The first selection describes the first time Elie saw his father cry. It shows the beginning of his loss of idealization of his father. It comes at the start of their deportation.

[call on volunteer to read Excerpt #1]

LEADER #2: The second selection goes a step further. Elie is beginning to become his father's father. And not a very patient one at that. It comes around the time Elie is teaching his father how to avoid getting beaten by learning to march.

[call on volunteer to read Excerpt #2]

LEADER #1: The third excerpt presents a further example of Elie's development toward becoming his father's father. Instead of the father giving the son life, Elie, the son, gives his father life by saving him from extermination.

[call on volunteer to read Excerpt #3]

LEADER #2: Finally, two passages that might be the two most truthful and horrible passages in the whole of *Night*.

Elie is looking for his father and says the following:

[Call on volunteer to read Excerpt #4]

LEADER #1 The final excerpt is too terrible to be read orally. Please take a minute to read it to yourselves and then write an answer the question at the bottom of your sheet.

[Silent reading of Excerpt #5]

LEADER #2 Closing activity:

Let me re-read the question and then ask you to tell us what you wrote or how you feel about it.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. “Do you feel Elie’s honesty about his feelings makes us look bad in the eyes of non-Jews who may read this book? Would it have been better for Jewish ‘hazbarah’ [public relations] if he had left out the last two excerpts?”
2. Do you feel Elie’s honesty about his feelings weakens or strengthens the power of the book? Would it have been if he had left out the last two excerpts?”

[Conduct discussion on their answers to the question till the time runs out.]

Quote Sheet for Father – Son Relationships

Hand out for Script II: Father – Son Relationships / Adolescence in Auschwitz

[EXCERPT #1]

My father wept. It was the first time I had ever seen him weep. I had never imagined that he could. (p.16)

[EXCERPT #2]

And [Idek] began to beat [my father] with an iron bar. At first my father crouched under the blows, then he broke in two, like a dry tree struck by lightning, and collapsed. I had watched the whole scene without moving. I kept quiet. In fact I was thinking of how to get farther away so that I could not be hit myself. What is more, any anger I felt at that moment was directed, not against the Kapo, but against my father. I was angry with him, for not knowing how to avoid Idek's outbreak. This is what concentration camp life had made of me. (p.52)

[EXCERPT #3]

The SS officers did the selecting. The weak, to the left; those who could walk well, to the right.

My father was sent to the left. I ran after him. An SS officer shouted at my back:

“Come back here!”

I slipped in among the others. Several SS rushed to bring me back, creating such confusion that many of the people from the left were able to come back to the right – and among them, my father and myself.” (p.91)

[EXCERPT #4]

I went to look for [my father].

But at the same moment this thought came into my mind: “Don't let me find him! If only I could get rid of this dead weight, so that I could use all my strength to struggle for my own survival, and only worry about myself.” Immediately I felt ashamed of myself, ashamed forever. (p.101)

[EXCERPT #5]

I did not weep, and it pained me that I could not weep. But I had no more tears. And, in the depth of my being, in the recesses of my weakened conscience, if I could have searched it, I might perhaps have found something like – free at last. (p.106)

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION: 1. “Do you feel Elie's honesty about his feelings makes us look bad in the eyes of non-Jews who may read this book? Would it have been better for Jewish ‘hazbarah’ [public relations] if he had left out the last two excerpts?
2. Do you feel Elie's honesty about his feelings weakens or strengthens the power of the book? Would it have been if he had left out the last two excerpts?”

**Table Lesson 3: How Israelis Feel About How Zionism and Israel are Portrayed in
Night**

Theme: Israel in the Eyes of the Diaspora / Diaspora in the Eyes of Israel

Leader 1: When we read the following passage in class, we learned something about the Nazi view of the European Jews.

“My father had accompanied the deportees as far as the entrance of the ghetto. They first had to go through the big synagogue, where they were minutely searched, to see that they were not taking away any gold, silver, or other objects of value. There were outbreaks of hysteria and blows with the truncheons.”(p.15)

Leader 2: The Nazis were searching us for gold, silver and other objects of value. They were not searching us for weapons. As the passage indicates, they were right. Neither the narrator nor the characters even imagine that a Jew would be sneaking a knife or gun or some improvised weapon of defense. We were perceived as easy to push around.

Leader 1: Now let us compare what we just read to the following passage that shows how the European Jews viewed Israel even before it existed as a country.

Having once belonged to a Zionist youth organization, they knew innumerable Hebrew chants. Thus we would often hum tunes evoking the calm waters of Jordan and the majestic sanctity of Jerusalem. And we would often talk of Palestine. Their parents, like mine, had lacked the courage to wind up their affairs and emigrate while there was still time. We decided that, if we were granted our lives until the liberation, we would not stay in Europe a day longer. We would take the first boat for Haifa. (p. 48)

Leader 2: Here’s one more passage that helps us see how the European Jews thought of Israel.

At that time, it was still possible to obtain emigration permits for Palestine. I had asked my father to sell out, liquidate his business, and leave.

“I’m too old, my son,” he replied. “I’m too old to start a new life. I’m too old to start from scratch again in a country so far away...” (p. 6)

There seems to be a real difference between the way the book portrays Diaspora Jews and Israelis (called the *yishuv* before the state was established.). Even before Modern Israel came into existence in 1948, there were images, fantasies, dreams of what Israel would be like. It was seen as a land for the young, brave, non-materialistic. In *Night* we see what Diaspora Jews *wanted* Israel to be.

Leader 1: We’d like to ask this question to the Israelis at the table. **Do you feel that Diaspora Jews place unfair expectations on you?** When you read these passages in *Night*, do you feel that you have inherited Diaspora Jewry’s dream that you know “innumerable Hebrew chants?” How do you feel when you read that teenagers your age in the concentration camps sang of “the majestic sanctity of Jerusalem?” *Do you feel responsible to their dream?* Do you feel that for their sake you have a special *duty* to Israel? How did it make you feel when you read about what Elie thought about Israel? First we would like each Israeli to respond. Then we would like to ask the Americans to tell us if these passages influence *their* view of Israel.

Hand Out of *Reading Selections* for Table Lesson 3 HOW ISRAELIS FEEL ABOUT HOW ZIONISM AND ISRAEL IS PORTRAYED IN NIGHT.

Question: How did it make you feel when you read about what Elie thought about Israel?

“My father had accompanied the deportees as far as the entrance of the ghetto. They first had to go through the big synagogue, where they were minutely searched, to see that they were not taking away any gold, silver, or other objects of value. There were outbreaks of hysteria and blows with the truncheons.”(p.15)

Having once belonged to a Zionist youth organization, they knew innumerable Hebrew chants. Thus we would often hum tunes evoking the calm waters of Jordan and the majestic sanctity of Jerusalem. And we would often talk of Palestine. Their parents, like mine, had lacked the courage to wind up their affairs and emigrate while there was still time. We decided that, if we were granted our lives until the liberation, we would not stay in Europe a day longer. We would take the first boat for Haifa. (p. 46)

At that time, it was still possible to obtain emigration permits for Palestine. I had asked my father to sell out, liquidate his business, and leave.

“I’m too old, my son,” he replied. “I’m too old to start a new life. I’m too old to start from scratch again in a country so far away...”(P. 6)

Table Lesson 4:
How Auschwitz Changed Jewish History and Vision
Theme: The World after Auschwitz

→ {Table Leaders See Special Instructions at end of script }←

LEADER #1: In this session we want to dramatize one paragraph from *Night* that shows how Auschwitz changed history. First, let us listen.

[Reads passage from page 32]

from *Night*, page 32

Never shall I forget that night, the first night in camp, which has turned my life into one long night, seven times cursed and seven times sealed. Never shall I forget that smoke. Never shall I forget the little faces of the children whose bodies I saw turned into wreaths of smoke beneath a silent blue sky.

Never shall I forget those flames which consumed my faith forever.

Never shall I forget that nocturnal silence which deprived me, for all eternity, of the desire to live. Never shall I forget those moments which murdered my God and my soul and turned my dreams to dust. Never shall I forget these things, even if I am condemned to live as long as God Himself. Never.

LEADER #2: Auschwitz showed that civilized humans could systematically use their most advanced technological and organizational skills to do evil. Not just ignorant angry mobs, but rational, intelligent men and women. Not outlaws, but leaders of their countries.

LEADER #1: The voice of Elie in the passage we have just read has echoes through every Jew in every land since the Shoah. Since the Shoah, one of the great cries in the Jewish world has been “Never again!” Every Jewish movement, idea, political party, religious system and individual has heard and in their own way tried to follow this cry.

LEADER #2: Every Jew has heard this passage, felt the cry “Never Again,” and developed some idea of how to prevent a new Holocaust.

LEADER #1: It is as if they say, “If we had only done a certain thing this wouldn’t have happened.” We want to read the passage a second time, inserting all the different ways Jews think that the Shoah could have been prevented.

[Hand out script]

LEADER #2: Where it says, “CHORUS,” everyone at the table reads. We’ll read the “READER 1 AND 2” parts.

[Read *CHORAL READING OF NIGHT*, (page 32) With “Never Again” Insertions.]

CHORAL READING OF NIGHT, (page 32) With “Never Again” Insertions.

CHORUS (Entire table in unison) Never shall I forget that night,

VOICE 1: NEVER AGAIN WILL WE BE SO PASSIVE.

CHORUS: the first night in camp,

VOICE 2: NEVER AGAIN WILL WE BE SO CLANISH.

CHORUS: which has turned my life into one long night,
seven times cursed and seven times sealed.

VOICE 1: NEVER AGAIN WILL WE BE SO IRRELIGIOUS.

VOICE 2: NEVER AGAIN WILL WE BE SO ISOLATED. IT BLINDED US TO WHAT
WAS COMING.

CHORUS: Never shall I forget that smoke.

VOICE 1: NEVER AGAIN WILL WE BE HUMANITARIANS. THAT’S WHAT THEY
HATED ABOUT US.

CHORUS: Never shall I forget the little faces of the children

VOICE 2: NEVER AGAIN WILL WE BE SO RICH – THAT’S WHAT THEY HATED ABOUT
US.

VOICE 1: NEVER AGAIN WILL WE BE SUCH SOCIALISTS -- THAT’S WHAT THEY
HATED ABOUT US.

CHORUS: whose bodies I saw turned into wreaths of smoke

VOICE 2: NEVER AGAIN WILL WE BE ZIONISTS. IT MADE US STAND OUT AS
DIFFERENT.

CHORUS: beneath a silent blue sky.

VOICE 1: NEVER AGAIN WILL WE CARE WHAT THEY THINK. THEY ALWAYS HATE
US ANYWAY.

VOICE 2: NEVER AGAIN WILL WE IGNORE WHAT THEY THINK. THEY HAVE
POWER THAT WE CAN’T BE IGNORED.

VOICE 1: NEVER AGAIN WILL WE BE STATELESS. IT MADE US EASY TO PUSH
AROUND.

VOICE 2: NEVER AGAIN WILL WE BE SO INTELLECTUAL. IT BLINDED US TO THE
TRUE NATURE OF HUMANITY.

CHORUS: Never shall I forget those flames which consumed my faith forever.

VOICE 1: NEVER AGAIN WILL WE BE SO RELIGIOUS.

VOICE 2: NEVER AGAIN WILL WE IGNORE THE MITZVOT.

CHORUS: Never shall I forget that nocturnal silence

VOICE 1: NEVER AGAIN WILL WE BE SUCH INTERNATIONALISTS.

VOICE 2: NEVER AGAIN WILL WE BE SO SELF ABSORBED.

CHORUS: which deprived me, for all eternity, of the desire to live.

VOICE 1: NEVER AGAIN WILL WE LISTEN TO BEETHOVEN.

CHORUS: Never shall I forget those moments which murdered my God and my soul

VOICE 2: NEVER AGAIN WILL WE BE SO DIFFERENT.

VOICE 1: NEVER AGAIN WILL WE TOLERATE RACISM.

CHORUS: and turned my dreams to dust.

VOICE 1: NEVER AGAIN WILL WE BE SUCH DREAMERS.

CHORUS: Never shall I forget these things,

VOICE 2: NEVER AGAIN WILL WE ABANDON OUR DREAMS.

CHORUS: even if I am condemned to live as long as God Himself.

VOICES 1,2: NEVER AGAIN! NEVER AGAIN! NEVER AGAIN!

CHORUS: Never.

[After Choral Reading]

LEADER 1: We would now like you to write your own ‘Never Again’ lines to the script. What do you think could prevent this happening again? Write your ideas in “never again” format and we’ll re-read the paragraph. Where the script says “Reader” you will insert your line.

[Pause for Participants to write their own lines.]

LEADER 1: Now we will count off each person who has a line to read.

[Assign each writer a number, “Reader 1, Reader 2, Reader 3...”]

[When you run out of new lines, return to the ones in the script and complete the paragraph as before.]

LEADER 2: The idea of this activity is to help us understand how deeply the experience in Auschwitz has influenced our thinking about Jewish and Israeli issues. Even those who were not there, even those who do not even know the story – we are all living in the shadow of the Holocaust and many of us make Jewish decisions based on it.

[If time, ask for their reactions.]

Instructions to TABLE LEADERS for Session 4 “How Auschwitz Changed Jewish History and Vision.”

Your task before the session:

Before the presentation, the TABLE LEADERS must invent five lines that begin with “Never again will we _____.” LEADERS can add their new lines to this existing script, or replace some of the current NEVER AGAIN lines with their own inventions. I’ve written the current script to give you an idea of the form we want. The final script is up to the TABLE LEADERS. It should be a page long.

TABLE LEADERS will have to share their lines by e-mail before the session in Nahariya. After they come up with a script that they all agree to, they can email it to Zev Shanken [zevshanken@optonline.net] who will make enough copies for all the participants at the sessions.

What the lines should do:

Each NEVER AGAIN line should present a thought about how the Jews could have prevented a *Shoah*. Probably there is no way, but the wish – “ *if we had only done something different we could have prevented the Shoah*” -- is an idea that is in the back of the minds of many Jews. It haunts us, and we should explore it in this dramatic way. The NEVER AGAIN lines that you write do not have to represent what you personally feel. You are acting as reporters of different voices you hear in the community about what we could have done to prevent the Shoah, and what we could do now to prevent it ever happening again.

At the session:

At the table sessions, Leaders will read the script they have written and then ask others at the table to write their own NEVER AGAIN lines.

Participants at the table will then read the paragraph a third time, with the table’s NEVER AGAIN lines inserted.

Table Lesson 5: Sharing Our Personal Responses to the Shoah

LEADER 1: In this session we would like to talk about our personal responses to the book, *Night*. In front of you, you have a "Personal Response Sheet." Please take a few minutes to fill it out and prepare your answers.

[Allow 5 minutes]

LEADER 2: Now let's count off by twos around the table. 1,2 1,2 1,2...

LEADER 1: We would like each pair to share their responses with each other. After that we will ask you to share with the whole group.

[Allow 3 minutes]

LEADER 1: I will begin. What I circled was _____. The reason I chose this was because _____.

LEADER 2: I circled _____. The reason I chose this was because _____.

LEADER 1: I circled _____. The reason I chose this was because _____.

LEADER 2: Now we would like to go around the table and have each participant tell us what they learned and how.

NIGHT – TABLE LESSON FIVE
PERSONAL RESPONSE SHEET

*Please circle **all** the statements with which you agree.*

*Then select **ONE** to talk about when your turn comes up.*

If there are statements you wish to make that are not on the chart, please write them in the space and share them when your turn comes.

Night helped me understand why some people are religious.

Night helped me understand why some people are not religious.

Night made me want to have children.

Night made me want to be kinder to my parents.

Night helped me understand what it is like to be persecuted.

Night helped me understand what it was like in the concentration camps.

Night helped me understand how people can trick themselves with denial of the obvious.

Night helped me understand the evils of dictatorships.

Night helped me understand the evils of military rule.

Night helped me understand the necessity of having political power.

Night helped me understand why some Jews try to hide their Jewish identity.

Night made me want to fight assimilation.

Night helped me understand the Holocaust.

Night helped me understand the importance of a Jewish State.

Night made me proud to be a Jew.

Night made me worried about anti-Semitism.

Night made me more negative about non-Jews.

Night made me more eager to avoid misunderstandings with Arabs.

Night made me want to learn more about Judaism.

Night made me want to learn more about Jewish history.

Night made me want to learn more about modern European history

Night made me disgusted with Europe.

Night made me disgusted with human kind.

Night made me want to figure out how the Shoah could be prevented in the future.

Night made me wonder if something like this could ever happen again.

Night helped me understand that everybody is a part of everybody else.
