

8.L.1.2a, 8.L.1.2b

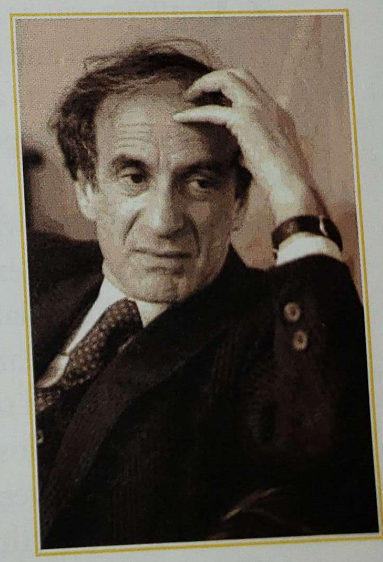


Background The first German concentration camps were built only for opponents of the Nazi Party. Later, these camps were also used to imprison Jews and other supposed enemies of the state. Auschwitz, the largest Nazi concentration camp, was opened in 1940 in southern Poland. Inside, prisoners were forced to do work for the Nazi government. Those who were unable to do useful work were killed. Over one million Jews were sent to Auschwitz. Most of them died inside its walls. The camp was finally abandoned by German soldiers as the Russian army advanced upon it in 1945.

After Auschwitz

Speech by Elie Wiesel

Elie Wiesel (b. 1928) was born in Romania. After the Germans invaded his town, Wiesel and his family were sent to Auschwitz. Only Wiesel and two of his sisters survived. After the war, Wiesel moved to France and became a journalist. It was there that he wrote *Night*, a book about his experiences at Auschwitz. The book has sold millions of copies in many different languages. Wiesel later moved to the United States. There he devoted himself to ensuring that the deaths of millions of Jews in concentration camps would never be forgotten, and that other human beings would never be subjected to such crimes. In 1986, Wiesel was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his life's work.



SETTING A PURPOSE The horrible crimes committed in Nazi concentration camps occurred long ago. As you read, think about why the author continues to reflect on these events. Why does he believe people need to be reminded of them? Write down any questions you have.



*"After Auschwitz, the human condition is not the same,
nothing will be the same."*

Here heaven and earth are on fire.

I speak to you as a man, who 50 years and nine days ago
had no name, no hope, no future and was known only by his
number, A7713.¹

I speak as a Jew who has seen what humanity has done
to itself by trying to exterminate an entire people and inflict
suffering and humiliation and death on so many others.

10 In this place of darkness and malediction² we can
but stand in awe and remember its stateless, faceless and
nameless victims. Close your eyes and look: endless nocturnal
processions are converging here, and here it is always night.
Here heaven and earth are on fire.

Close your eyes and listen. Listen to the silent screams
of terrified mothers, the prayers of anguished old men and
women. Listen to the tears of children, Jewish children, a
beautiful little girl among them, with golden hair, whose
vulnerable tenderness has never left me. Look and listen as

¹ A7713: the identification number tattooed on Wiesel at Auschwitz.

² malediction (māl'ī-dīk'shən): curse.

they quietly walk towards dark flames so gigantic that the planet itself seemed in danger.
All these men and women and children came from everywhere, a gathering of exiles drawn by death.

Yitgadal veyitkadash, Shmay Rabba.³

In this kingdom of darkness there were many people. People who came from all the occupied lands of Europe. And then there were the Gypsies and the Poles and the Czechs . . . It is true that not all the victims were Jews. But all the Jews were victims.

Now, as then, we ask the question of all questions: what was the meaning of what was so routinely going on in this kingdom of eternal night. What kind of demented mind could have invented this system?

And it worked. The killers killed, the victims died and the world was the world and everything else was going on, life as usual. In the towns nearby, what happened? In the lands nearby, what happened? Life was going on where God's creation was condemned to blasphemy⁴ by their killers and their accomplices.

Yitgadal veyitkadash, Shmay Rabba.

Turning point or watershed,⁵ Birkenau⁶ produced a mutation⁷ on a cosmic scale, affecting man's dreams and endeavours. After Auschwitz, the human condition is no longer the same. After Auschwitz, nothing will ever be the same.

Yitgadal veyitkadash, Shmay Rabba.

As we remember the solitude and the pain of its victims, let us declare this day marks our commitment to commemorate their death, not to celebrate our own victory over death.

³ **Yitgadal veyitkadash, Shmay Rabba:** the words that begin a Jewish prayer for the dead.

⁴ **blasphemy** (bläs' fə-mē): a disrespect for religion.

⁵ **watershed:** a place that marks a change of course or direction.

⁶ **Birkenau:** the sub-camp at Auschwitz where prisoners were killed.

⁷ **mutation** (myōō-ta' shən): change.

As we reflect upon the past, we must address ourselves to the present and the future. In the name of all that is sacred in memory, let us stop the bloodshed in Bosnia, Rwanda and Chechnia; the vicious and ruthless terror attacks against Jews in the Holy Land.⁸ Let us reject and oppose more effectively religious fanaticism and racial hate.

Where else can we say to the world "*Remember the morality of the human condition*," if not here?

For the sake of our children, we must remember Birkenau,
60 so that it does not become their future.

Yitgadal veyitkadash, Shmay Rabba: Weep for Thy children whose death was not mourned then: weep for them, our Father in heaven, for they were deprived of their right to be buried, for heaven itself became their cemetery.

COLLABORATIVE DISCUSSION Elie Wiesel delivered the speech you just read at a ceremony marking the 50th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz. With a partner, discuss whether you think his message was the right one for the occasion. Cite evidence from the text to support your thoughts.

Name: _____

Class: _____

Date: _____

After Auschwitz

Multiple Choice

Identify the choice that best completes the statement or answers the question.

Comprehension

Read each of the following questions. Then choose the letter of the best answer.

- _____ 1. Which is the most likely reason that Elie Wiesel was asked to give a speech at Auschwitz?
 - A He went to Poland during the war to learn about the camp.
 - B He was one of its few survivors and can say what it was like.
 - C He and his family often visit the camp to share their ideas.
 - D He knew the prayers that were said each day at the camp.
- _____ 2. Wiesel gives his speech when he is
 - A almost a teenager.
 - B just released from Auschwitz.
 - C over fifty years old.
 - D about to enter Auschwitz.
- _____ 3. Wiesel says that the victims of Auschwitz were
 - A people from all over Europe.
 - B always Jewish people.
 - C mothers and their children.
 - D from towns nearby.
- _____ 4. Besides remembering Auschwitz, Elie Wiesel believes that people should
 - A continue to say daily prayers for those who died.
 - B recognize the non-Jewish victims of the camps.
 - C watch for nighttime processions of families.
 - D prevent similar situations from happening again.
- _____ 5. When Wiesel says, "Here heaven and earth are on fire" he is calling to mind
 - A the bright sun on the day of his speech.
 - B the death and destruction at Auschwitz.
 - C the warm feelings throughout the audience.
 - D the constant need for light at Auschwitz.
- _____ 6. Which is an example of an emotional appeal that Wiesel uses in his speech?
 - A "Listen to the silent screams of terrified mothers ..."
 - B "All these men and women and children came from everywhere ..."
 - C "It is true that not all the victims were Jews."
 - D "...we must address ourselves to the present and the future."
- _____ 7. In his speech, Elie Wiesel uses repetition to
 - A appeal to emotions.
 - B gain moral support.
 - C emphasize an idea.
 - D prove he is right.

Name: _____

8. Which is an ethical appeal that Wiesel makes during his speech?

- A "...let us stop the bloodshed in Bosnia, Rwanda and Chechnia..."
- B "...they quietly walk toward dark flames so gigantic..."
- C "In this place of darkness and malediction we can but stand in awe..."
- D "Listen to the tears of children, Jewish children..."

9. When Wiesel says that the victims of Auschwitz were "stateless, faceless, and nameless," he is using a rhetorical device known as

- A repetition.
- B personification.
- C imagery.
- D parallelism.

10. Why does Wiesel repeat a Jewish prayer for the dead during his speech?

- A to show that he values his religion
- B to convince listeners of the value of prayer
- C to offer thanks that he survived Auschwitz
- D to honor those who died at Auschwitz

Short Answer

Written Response

Answer the following questions based on your knowledge of the speech.

- 11. According to Wiesel, what impact did people in nearby towns have on the situation in Auschwitz?
- 12. What does Wiesel suggest by calling Auschwitz "this kingdom of darkness" and "this kingdom of eternal night"?