

# Spiritual Resource Ideas for *Night*

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## RATIONALE

The integration of WWII, spirituality, and significant Jewish cultural and religious holidays and practices expressed in outstanding prose makes Elie Wiesel's Nobel Peace Prize-winning book, *Night*, an excellent selection for a 2-5 week study. The following are ideas for purposefully teaching spiritual development and religious understanding while teaching from this powerful text.

## GRADE LEVEL

10-12

## LEARNING OUTCOMES

Oral and written analysis of literature  
Reflection on personal meaning and application  
Understanding Jewish religion and cultural practices  
Understanding self in relationship to God, suffering, life

## POTENTIAL JOURNEY TO EXCELLENCE CONNECTIONS

- ✓ Acceptance of God
- ✓ Commitment to the Church
- ✓ Interpersonal Relationships
- ✓ Responsible Citizen
- ✓ Healthy Balanced Living
- ✓ Intellectual Development
- ✓ Communication Skill
- ✓ Personal Management
- ✓ Aesthetic Appreciation

## RESOURCE IDEAS FOR TEACHING SPIRITUALITY

### A. Elie's Spiritual Paradigm Shift

At the start of *Night*, Elie is a boy hungry to know and experience God. His mystic tutor, Moshe, mentors him toward that end. At the end of the book, as a result of his horrific experience at Auschwitz, Elie describes himself as "a corpse." He approaches life existentially and can no longer believe that there is a God. His previous belief system cannot account for the immense suffering he goes through, so he gives it up.

- Trace the shift in Wiesel's spiritual paradigm as he moves the reader through his holocaust horror. Identify and analyze the events that are major steps in his spiritual paradigm shift.

### B. Elie's Response to Suffering Contrasted

Contrast Elie's response to his concentration camp experience where he gives up his beliefs to that of Christians Cory ten Boom and Father Maximillian Kolbe whose faith is tested, yet ultimately strengthened.

- For Cory ten Boom, show a clip from the movie *The Hiding Place*, where she and her sister lead the other women in her barrack in prayer and Scripture reading, and even thank God for the fleas that infest their quarters, because it gives them a measure of freedom from Nazi cruelty. In her writings, Cory describes how her faith kept her going, as well as the journey to forgiveness and healing.
- Father Maximillian Kolbe, was a priest whose peaceful, steady presence and sacrificial care-giving in the camp was a source of spiritual comfort to the other prisoners. Ultimately, he calmly asks to take the penalty of a young man about to be shot. This young man survives to tell the story. For more on Father Maximillian, along with photos, google "Father Maximillian Kolbe" and research any number of websites online.
- Questions for Discussion/Writing:
  - Describe Elie's belief system and views about God before Auschwitz. What are possible reasons why Elie's belief system fails to hold up under the pressure of his horrific suffering?
  - What beliefs in Christianity provide support and comfort in such suffering?

- We will never understand evil and why some pass through such tragedies. Yet through the ages, the Christian faith has sustained millions in the face of torture and death. Why? How?
- A person's worldview and beliefs about God will determine their behavior, decision-making, and response to life's experiences. What are your beliefs about God at this time? What are they founded on? Would they sustain you in tragedy and suffering? How and why?
- If Elie were to ask you, "How can there be a God and all this happen?" what would you say?
- When an "unbelieving" friend in your life has experienced a tragedy and is going through great suffering, how should you, an Adventist Christian friend respond?
- What's the best way for you to "be there" for a friend who is going through a loss?

### C. The Road to Dehumanization

From being corralled into ghettos to insanely scrapping for crumbs in starving animal fashion, Elie reveals the Nazi process of dehumanization. Each step removes another humanizing quality or characteristic, another freedom.

#### ➤ Springboard Questions for Discussion, Writing, and Projects

- Identify each significant step toward the dehumanization of the Jews, beginning with the removal from their homes (personal space characterizing themselves and their families) and ending with the reality that they are willing to destroy their own for a scrap of food.
- At each step, look at the restriction or action taken by the Nazis against the Jews (specifically Elie and his father), and analyze how and why each progressively worsens their human state. What is the significance of each freedom removed, of each action taken, in the light of dehumanization?
- How do each of the steps to dehumanization directly counter how God created us to exist? *(For example, the Jews were stripped of their names and their branded with numbers. This attacks the blessing of*

*God given to children via parents through the act of naming. It also signifies the person no longer "owns himself/herself," which counters the freedom of choice inherent in true humanity as designed by God.)*

- Where else in our world is dehumanization at the hands of fellow human beings happening? (i.e. Areas of starvation, extreme poverty, people ruled by dictatorship, lack of education resulting in continued ignorance that can even lead to death). Describe specific situations.
- How does dehumanization happen in your school? Describe things that students do to each other that attack the image of God and dehumanize each other.
- What can you do right now at your school to build up instead of tear down each other—to affirm one's human value and freedom? Be specific.
- What specific things are Seventh-day Adventist Christians doing that help to reduce dehumanization and lead toward restoring the human being into the image of God?
- How could Adventists improve in this endeavor? What more could we do?
- Think about your interests and talents and what career you may pursue. How might you use your interests, talents and career to fight dehumanization in your community or in the other parts of the world?

#### **D. Significant Jewish Practices**

Jewish traditions, events and holidays rooted in the Mosaic teachings are rich with spiritual significance that communicate volumes about God's nature and His intentions for us. Research, writing and creative projects can be developed from these.

##### ➤ Naming

- Research how Jewish babies are named. In the Mosaic teachings, naming intentionally spoke blessing into the identity and destiny of the child. Often, names of Jews reflected the life and character of the individual, thus emerging as a title or "thesis statement" of their life.
- Research the meaning of your name and explore how it may or may not reflect the course of your life up to this point.

- What is the blessing (statement of identity or destiny) to be found in the meaning of your name?
- Naming and names often reflect the values of society. Research naming trends nowadays. For example, these days, babies are sometimes named after consumer products. What might that say about societal values?

➤ Jewish Holidays (<http://www.jewfaq.org/holiday0.htm>)

- Jewish holidays are rich with spiritual meaning. Most originated in Mosaic times. Research the Jewish holidays that give rhythm and shape to *Night*. When were they instituted, how are they celebrated, and what do they symbolize?
- Celebrate/practice with the class various traditions from selected holidays. (Can include Hebrew songs/recitations, dance, special foods, clothing, etc.; Students do research and preparation.)
- Analyze the connections between the symbolism of Jewish holidays and the context/events surrounding them in *Night*. How do the events Wiesel describes illustrate the symbolic meaning of the holiday around/on which it occurs?
- Research the biblical origins and Jewish practices of Shabbat (Sabbath). Explore the symbolic meanings of these traditions and practice appropriate ones in class, if possible.
- Organize a special Sabbath for your class in which elements of Jewish Shabbat observance are practiced; each class member can be responsible for the researching and leading out in various parts of the celebration.

➤ Jewish Blessings

- Research and teach to the rest of the class certain types of blessings: parent-child, Shabbat, special occasions, daily blessings, etc.
- Focus on parent-child blessings. Parents are God's agents for blessing the identity and destiny of children. Read through some of the biblical examples of a father blessing his son. Analyze, explore/discuss these questions:
  - What is the point of blessing?

- What are the basic parts of a blessing
  - What is accomplished through blessing?
  - What other aspects besides words are important to blessing (body position, touch/hands, etc.)?
- Based on what you've learned, craft a blessing for an assigned classmate that reflects the basic elements of a Jewish blessing.
    - Creatively display the blessing on paper
    - Pronounce the blessing over your classmate

## **E. Messianic Judaism**

Messianic Judaism is the movement of Jews who embrace Jesus as the prophesized Messiah while continuing to practice several Jewish traditions and beliefs, including the observance of Shabbat (Sabbath).

### ➤ Messianic Judaism and Seventh-day Adventism

- Compare and contrast Messianic Jewish beliefs with those of Seventh-day Adventism.
- Compare and contrast the Sabbath observance of Messianic Jews and Seventh-day Adventists.

## **F. Judaism Through the Ages**

Where and when did anti-Semitism begin? Some scholars trace it all the way back to the crucifixion of Jesus—blaming Jews and their subsequent generations for killing God Himself.

- Research this question and report your findings
- How might it feel if you were Jewish and other groups of people looked down on you, abusing you verbally or otherwise?
- How would you respond to a situation where a Jewish person is being mocked, criticized, bullied, etc.?