

Night

Below I have given 5 possible themes from the *Night*. I have discussed one theme (indifference) in some detail. In other words, I have explicated the theme. A good exercise for you would be to do the same for the 4 other themes and/or other pertinent themes that you have discovered.

Themes:

1. **Indifference:** Elie's indifference is mirrored by the indifference of humanity as a whole. While *Night* does capture the events of a single man's experience in a concentration camp, it also relays a message to his audience about the evils of doing nothing; being passive in the face of adversity and evil. As Elie states in his Nobel Peace acceptance speech "Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim." Also, "....action is the only remedy to indifference, the most insidious danger of all."

Of course, Elie is not immune to indifference himself. Early on in *Night* Elie and the town of Sighet are warned of the evils surrounding them. Moshe the Beadle comes back, barely surviving an execution attempt, heeding warnings to the people to leave for safety. He describes the horrors of men using children as rifle practice and of grown men digging their own graves. Yet, his messages, his warnings, fall onto deaf ears. "Even I did not believe him. I often sat with him, after services, and listened to his tales, trying to understand his grief. But all I felt was pity" This advice was ignored in 1942-two years before the Germans made their way into Sighet.

In the original version of *Night* (which was written in Kaddish) Elie made a much more purposeful response to the hatred he had towards the Nazis. This original version was over 800 pages in length. In our class translation, we see a much more condensed version. A version, that deals with more generalities than specifically pointing out the Nazis. This is purposefully done. Elie makes the point not to blame the Germans for the atrocities of WWII but rather focuses the blame of the inaction of the rest of the world. In the original *Night* Elie begins his book with the following translation: "This book is dedicated to the eternal memory of my mother Sarah, my father Shlomo, and my little sister Tzipora-who were killed by German Murderers." In our class translation, Elie has the following dedication: "In memory of parents and of my litter sister, Tzipora" Note the exclusion of "German murderers" as Elie wants to focus on the apathetic world. It would be too easy to simply blame the Germans for what happened in WWII. All of humanity played their part in this play, so to speak.

“Yet we were not worried. Of course we had had heard of Fascists, but it was all in the abstract. It meant nothing more to us than a change of ministry” A part of our indifference comes about from the use of abstract terms. We do not fully understand the complex terms and, of course, the terms often do not do the meaning justice. Think of the term “genocide.” It strikes the ear and mind as a somewhat vague and distant term. However, it indicates the extinction of an entire race. Still, we remain indifferent to such language. Something concrete placed within our minds is when the indifference becomes something real and urgent. Take, for example, the following quote from Elie during his first few days in Auschwitz:

“The word “chimney’ here was not an abstraction; it floated in the air, mingled with the smoke. It was, perhaps, the only word that had a real meaning in this place.”

The following are other possible themes. I have given some possible discussion points in which you may (or may not) wish to follow. Certainty, these should be used as a guide only. There are plenty more good ideas within the text. As these are only ‘jumping off points’ you will need to expand on these points and examples in your paper, in order to attain a good grade.

2. **Commitment:** Elie and his relationship with his father.
 - a. Examples that show this commitment
 - b. Examples that contrast this commitment (perhaps other characters, as well)Elie and his relationship with God
 - a. Commitment but also fractures his relationship-how?
3. **Numbness:** Both emotionally and physically.
 - a. Running in the snow (a separation or duality of body and mind when he runs)
 - b. Inability to ‘feel’ (various examples)
4. **Disruption of Innocence:**
 - a. Does nothing when his father is struck on the first night of Auschwitz
 - b. Witness the burning babies.
 - c. His childhood innocence contrasted with that of the man in the mirror at the end of the memoir.
 - d. His childhood relationship with God versus his thoughts now on God.
5. **Losing the humane:**
 - a. “That night the soup tasted excellent”

- b. The thousands that dies no longer troubled me
- c. Yet, he still had some shred of humaneness within in..."That night the soup taster like corpses"

***When writing an essay consider:

- *Where is the conflict or lack of conflict
- *Point-Proof-Connect
- *Consider how the conflict has affected the character.