An Evening with Elie Wiesel
Companion Guide for Students Reading Elie Wiesel’s *Night* and Studying the Holocaust*†

An Evening with Elie Wiesel
Cintas Center, Xavier University
Sunday, May 6, 2012
7 pm – Public Program
Made possible by the generosity of the Jewish Foundation of Cincinnati

Use the following websites to help you and your students to find more information about each subtopic:

http://www.holocaustandhumanity.org/
http://www.ushmm.org/
http://www.yadvashem.org/
http://www.jfr.org/

Table of Contents
Biography of Elie Wiesel........................................................................................................2
Pre- and Post-Presentation Activities ......................................................................................2
Preparing Students for a Holocaust Survivor Speaker ...........................................................4
Overview of the History of the Holocaust ..................................................................................5
Overview of the History of the Holocaust Timeline.................................................................9

Made possible by the generous support of the Jewish Foundation of Cincinnati.

* This presentation packet was created by The Center for Holocaust and Humanity Education team. We are especially grateful to Ms. Rosie Alway, an eighth grade educator at Summit County Day in Cincinnati, Ohio, for her guidance and support. Please contact CHHE if you are interested in obtaining discussion and comprehension questions for the entire book.
† Although this packet can be applicable to all students attending Elie Wiesel’s presentation, this pre-presentation and post-presentation packet was designed for those students who include Elie Wiesel’s *Night* as part of their curriculum.

The Center for Holocaust and Humanity Education, (513) 487-3055, www.holocaustandhumanity.org, info@holocaustandhumanity.org
Biography of Professor Elie Wiesel

Professor Wiesel was born in 1928 in the town of Sighet, Transylvania which is now part of Romania. During World War II, he and his family were deported to Auschwitz concentration camp in Poland. Not long after he and his father were sent on a death march to Buchenwald, the Soviet troops liberated Auschwitz. He and his father were able to stay together until his father perished in January 1945. Wiesel was liberated from Buchenwald in 1945, and learned that his two older sisters had also survived. However, his mother and younger sister tragically did not. During the Holocaust, Wiesel was also interned at Gleiwitz and Buna, which are subcamps of the Auschwitz concentration camp.

After liberation, Wiesel spent a few years in an orphanage and then moved to Paris to study journalism. In 1958, he published his first book, *La Nuit*, a memoir of his experiences in the concentration camps. In 1960, *Night* was published in the United States. Since then, he has authored nearly thirty books on his experiences during the Holocaust, Judaism and human rights after the Holocaust. After his liberation, Wiesel continued to be an advocate for justice and in 1986 was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for all his amazing efforts in continuing the struggle for human rights for all.

Pre- Presentation Activity

**K-W-L (What do you know? What do you want to know? What have you learned?)**

- Prior to Professor Wiesel’s presentation, ask students to discuss what they already know about the Holocaust. Next, ask students to describe what they would like to know more about. Once you return from the presentation, ask students to reflect on what they learned from his presentation.

Post- Presentation Activity

**Loss of Identity during the Holocaust**

- Ask students to write a reflection or describe aloud the comment made by Professor Wiesel in his memoir: “I became A-7713. After that I had no other name.”
  - Discuss how genocide is a stripping away of one’s individual identity.
  - When else during the Holocaust do we see this similar loss of individual identity (i.e. yellow star, Nuremberg Laws, etc.)?

**Using Elie Wiesel’s Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech**

- Obtain a copy of Wiesel’s acceptance speech at: [http://www.pbs.org/eliewiesel/nobel/index.html](http://www.pbs.org/eliewiesel/nobel/index.html)
- Allow students the opportunity to read the speech in small groups. After reading the speech, ask students to discuss the following questions in their small groups:
  1) What do you think Wiesel was suggesting when he stated, “Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented.” Where or when do you think we see this form of “neutrality” during World War II and the Holocaust?
  2) How do you think his experiences during the Holocaust have impacted him today?
Elie Wiesel: “This I Believe”
- Play a recording of Wiesel’s “This I Believe” essay: http://thisibelieve.org/essay/41283/
- Allow students the opportunity to discuss the essay:
  - What do you think Professor Wiesel meant when he said, “Information must be transformed into knowledge, knowledge into sensitivity, and sensitivity into commitment”?
  - How would you describe the “belief” outlined in his essay?

Follow-Up Activity
- Ask each student to write his/her own “This I Believe” essay. For more information on writing “This I Believe” essays in the middle school and high school classrooms, visit http://thisibelieve.org/educators/
  - The TIB topic can be open-ended, but could also be centered on Wiesel’s quote above and explore some thing that students are committed to as a result of a belief.

Comprehension and Discussion Questions: Elie Wiesel’s Night

Key concepts and ideas:
- Belief, Faith and Religion
- Collaboration
- Self-imposed Denial
- Separation of Family
- Dehumanization

General Comprehension Questions:
1. Describe the role played by the Hungarian police.
2. Describe the relationship between Elie Wiesel and his father.
3. How do you think that the dehumanization of those targeted by the Nazis led to the collaboration of ordinary men and women?

Excerpt Comprehension Questions
“I wanted to come back to Sighet to tell you the story of my death. So that you could prepare yourselves while there was still time…I wanted to come back, and to warn you…no one will listen to me…” (5).

1. Why do you think the people of Sighet did not believe Moshe the Beadle’s story?

“The yellow star? Oh well, what of it? You don’t die of it…. (Poor Father! Of what then did you die?)” (9).

1. Describe how this passage illuminates the power of the memoir as a way for the survivor to reflect and look back.

2. Describe how Wiesel’s family reacted to the escalation of Jewish persecution.
“Faster! Faster! Get on with you, lazy swine!’ yelled the Hungarian police” (17).

1. Describe how this language can be dehumanizing. What effect do you think it would have on its targets?

“Three days after the liberation of Buchenwald, I became very ill: some form of poisoning. I was transferred to a hospital and spent two weeks between life and death. One day when I was able to get up, I decided to look at myself in the mirror on the opposite wall. I had not seen myself since the ghetto. From the depths of the mirror, a corpse was contemplating me. The look in his eyes, as they stared into mine, has never left me” (109).

1. In his text, Absence/Presence: Critical Essays on the Artistic Memory of the Holocaust, Steven Feinstein describes genocide as the presence of absence, and an absence of presence. Describe whether you agree or disagree with this statement, and whether it fits with Wiesel's final thoughts.

Preparation Students for a Holocaust Survivor Speaker

Hearing from a Holocaust survivor is a unique and powerful opportunity for students. As the last generation to be able to directly hear from survivors, the experience is even more important as they will help to keep the survivors’ testimonies alive.

Provide Context and Historical Background

Explain to students that any first-person account is limited by several variables including the survivor’s age, gender and country of origin. Some were caught up early or later in the war. Some survived in hiding; others found themselves in labor camps, death camps, partisan or resistance groups. Ask students to be alert to these variables during the presentation and to understand that this is one person’s personal account. In addition to providing a historical overview of the Holocaust, you may want to have students read selection from Wiesel’s memoir in advance of the survivor’s presentation. You may also want to emphasize that survivors are aging and passing away, and that we may be the last generation that will have the opportunity to hear from eyewitnesses of the Holocaust.

Provide Opportunities for Reflection

Ask students to keep journals to help them reflect on what they are hearing from and discussing with a survivor. Journals can be used by teachers to carry on a dialogue with students about a variety of related issues. After the presentation, ask students: What did you learn from the survivor that you did not know before? How did this account change your understanding of the Holocaust? Which issues, raised by the speaker, are still with us today? How can this first person account help us address issues of prejudice, discrimination, stereotyping, social justice and genocide today? What would you like to know more about?

(Parts of document taken from the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre.)
Overview of the History of the Holocaust

The Holocaust
The Holocaust was the state-sponsored, systematic persecution and annihilation of European Jewry by Nazi Germany and its collaborators between 1933 and 1945. Jews were the primary victims—six million were murdered; Gypsies, the handicapped and Poles were also targeted for destruction or decimation for racial, ethnic, or national reasons. Millions more, including homosexuals, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Soviet prisoners of war and political dissidents, also suffered grievous oppression and death under Nazi tyranny. As early as 1919, Hitler identified Jews as not a religious community, but as a race. The “ultimate goal must definitely be the removal of the Jews altogether.”
(Source: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum)

How has Anti-Semitism Changed Over Time?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CANONICAL LAW</th>
<th>NAZI MEASURE</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jews and Christians not permitted to eat together. Synod of Elvira, 306</td>
<td>Jews barred from dining cars (Transport Minister to Interior Minister, December 30.1939)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jews not allowed to hold public Office. Synod of Clermont, 535</td>
<td>Law for the Reestablishment of the Professional Civil Service. April 7, 1933</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jews not allowed to employ Christian servants or possess Christian slaves, 3d Synod of Orleans, 538</td>
<td>Law for the Protection of German Blood and Honor. September 15, 1935</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jews not permitted to show themselves in the streets during Passion Week. 3 (1 Synod of Orleans, 538.</td>
<td>Decree authorizing local authorities to bar Jews from the streets on certain days (i.e. Nazi holidays), December 3, 1938</td>
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<tr>
<td>Burning of the Talmud and other books, 12th Synod of Toledo, 681</td>
<td>Book burnings in Nazi Germany</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christians not permitted to live in Jewish homes, Synod of Narbonne, 050</td>
<td>Directive by Göring providing for concentration of Jews in houses, December 28, 1938 (Bormann to Rosenberg, January 17, 1939)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The marking of Jewish clothes with a badge, 4th Lateran Council, 1215. Canon 68</td>
<td>Decree of September 1, 1941</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christians not permitted to attend Jewish ceremonies, Synod of Vienna, 1267</td>
<td>Friendly relations with Jews prohibited. October 24, 1941 (Gestapo directive)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compulsory ghettos. Synod of Breslau, 1267</td>
<td>Order by Heydrich, September 21, 1939</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jews not permitted to obtain academic degrees. Council of Basel, 1434, Sessio XIX</td>
<td>Law against Overcrowding of German Schools anti Universities. April 25, 1933.</td>
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</tbody>
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(For full version, see: Raul Hilberg’s The Destruction of European Jews, 1985, pp.10-11.).

World War I and the Treaty of Versailles, 1919
Early in his career, Hitler became influenced by the German nationalist and racist wave that swept Austria at the end of the nineteenth century. He was also influenced by Karl Lueger, the charismatic, populist leader of the antisemitic Christian-Social party in Austria who became mayor of Vienna in 1897 and served until his death in 1910.
After serving as a soldier in the Bavarian army in World War I, Hitler became enraged at the declarations stated in the Treaty of Versailles:

- Germany must concede territories to Belgium, Czechoslovakia and Poland.
- Germany must return Alsace-Lorraine to France, which was annexed in 1871 during the Franco-Prussian War.
- All German overseas colonies now were mandated by the League of Nations and the ethnically German city of Danzig, which bordered Germany and Poland, was now a “free city.”
- Germany was demilitarized, only permitted to maintain an army of 100,000 men, and was no longer permitted to hold an air force.
- Article 231, or the “War Guilt Clause” forced Germany to accept complete responsibility for World War I, making the nation responsible for all damages and to pay reparations to all nations involved in WWI (Undoubtedly, this led to the hyperinflation witnessed in Germany preceding the rise of Hitler and Nazism.)
- Germany was also forced to conduct trials against their own leaders for waging an aggressive war. The Leipzig Trials proved and were viewed by all (including Germans) as unsuccessful.

Beer Hall Putsch
In 1923, Hitler attempted to overthrow the Weimar government by holding a rally in Munich in 1923. Although the coup failed, and nine members of the Nazi Socialist Party were arrested, the coup was also seen as a success, as it made the public aware of its aims. Hitler was sentenced to a year in jail where he wrote Mein Kampf.

The Rise of the Nazi Party
With growing inflation, economic insecurity, and Hitler’s intention to create the Jews as scapegoats to all of Germany’s problems, in 1928, the Nazi party won 12 seats in Parliament leading to 230 seats in 1932, taking majority of the Parliament seats. On January 30, 1933, Hitler is legally appointed Chancellor of Germany by President Hindenburg. When President Hindenburg dies in 1934, Hitler declares himself President of Germany.

Nazi Propaganda
Joseph Goebbels became head of the Ministry of Propaganda in March 1933. Immediately following, he planned the first boycott of Jewish businesses in April 1933 and a book burning of any book written by Jewish authors. In 1939, the Hitler Youth movement became compulsory. This youth group emphasized physical training, Nazi ideology, and absolute obedience to Hitler and the Nazi party. Additionally, youth were subject to intensive propaganda regarding racial and national superiority, insuring Nazi hatred would continue with future generations. The Nuremberg Laws in 1935 officially made Jews into second-class citizens, robbing them of their citizenship and declaring such laws as Jews can no longer own bicycles to Jews are no longer permitted to marry non-Jews. Furthermore, the Nuremberg Laws boldly stated the definition of a Jew which will be used when the “Final Solution” takes its deadly effect. In 1936, an addendum was added to the Nuremberg Laws making them applicable to Roma (Gypsies), as well.
The Evian Conference
After the Anschluss (annexation of Austria), and the merging of Austria and Germany, more Jews were now being targeted for persecution by the Nazis. The international community finally began to notice and President Roosevelt called a conference in the city of Evian, France of the world’s leaders to discuss the refugee crisis of Europe. Roosevelt did not attend the meeting and instead sent Myron Taylor to represent the United States. At the conclusion of the conference, only the Dominican Republic offered to expand their quotas, allowing entry of Jewish refugees.

Pogromnacht (Kristallnacht)—“The Night of Broken Glass”
Not long after the Evian Conference, on the night of November 9 and through November 10, 1938, the Nazis destroyed synagogues and the shop windows of Jewish-owned stores throughout Germany and annexed Austria. German officials claimed the pogrom had started as a result of a Polish Jewish teenager, Herschel Grynszpan, shooting and killing a Nazi official, Ernst vom Rath. Grynszpan had been living in Paris where vom Rath was stationed, and had heard news that his parents had been expelled from Poland. Many Jews view this event as the turning point for the war as following the pogrom, it became harder for Jews to immigrate to other countries. Furthermore, we also see the breakdown of society, as Jews are forced to “clean up” after the pogrom.

T4 and Euthanasia Program
Beginning in October 1939, public health authorities began to encourage parents of children with disabilities to admit their children to specially designated pediatric clinics throughout Germany and Austria. Under the guise that their children would be cared for, these clinics were actually euthanasia centers and were designed to murder the children by lethal overdoses of medication or by starvation. According to USHMM, it is suggested that at least 5,000 physically and mentally disabled German children perished as a result of the child “euthanasia” program during the war years. Beginning first with infants and toddlers, the program was later extended to older children and adults. In the autumn of 1939, the T4 operation (named after the coordinating office’s address, Tiergartenstrasse 4) began under the leadership of physician Karl Brandt and continued through 1940 when gassing centers were established at hospitals throughout Germany and Austria. Historians estimate that the “Euthanasia” Program, in all its phases, claimed the lives of 200,000 individuals.

Ghettoization
During World War II, ghettos were areas of the city in which the Germans concentrated the Jewish population of a particular region, separating them from non-Jewish communities and forcing them to live under miserable conditions. There were at least 1,000 ghettos established in German-occupied territory. There were three types of ghettos: closed ghettos, open ghettos, and destruction ghettos. The largest ghetto in Poland was the Warsaw ghetto.

The “Final Solution”
Although the T4 program and other murderous policies had already taken effect, it wasn’t until late 1941 with the invasion of the Soviet Union that Nazi policy became focused on the murder of European Jewry. In January 1942, 15 high ranking Nazi officials, excluding Hitler, met in Wannsee to discuss the implementation of the “Final Solution.” With the invasion of Soviet Union, the Einsatzgruppen, (mobile killing squads) began killing Jewish communities by shooting. Yet, this method proved problematic, as its impact on the ordinary men committing the crimes proved too much (For more information, see Christopher Browning’s Ordinary Men (1993)).

Thus, six extermination camps were established: Chelmno, Belzec, Majdanek, Treblinka, Sobibor, and Auschwitz. Majdanek and Auschwitz were also concentration camps; thus the purpose of the
other four camps was specifically for killing. Despite common misconceptions, not every concentration camp utilized gas chambers.

**Resistance**
Throughout the Holocaust, there were those who resisted the persecution of European Jewry in various ways. Whether by armed or spiritual resistance, it is important to include these various stories as part of our Holocaust study.

**Liberation and Nuremberg Trials**
On January 27, 1945, Auschwitz was liberated by the Soviet troops. The war finally ended when Soviet troops invaded Berlin, Germany, officially ending the war on May 7, 1945 (western allies) and May 9, 1945 (eastern allies). V - E Day is officially declared on May 8, 1945.

Yet, for survivors the struggle continued. Many survivors only left the concentration camp to be placed in a Displaced Persons (DP) Camp. Pogroms continued throughout Poland and Jews continued to seek and be refused refuge in safe havens. Many survivors tried to return to their homes, only to find them occupied by someone else and with no family having returned.

In November 1945, the allied forces attempted to bring justice to those who carried out the genocide. Yet, only 22 Nazi officials were tried in Nuremberg, Germany. Just less than a year later in October 1946, 18 were convicted, three were acquitted and eleven were sentenced to death.

Following WWII, Adolf Eichmann, who was responsible for the creation of deportation lists of Jews from around Europe to different concentration and extermination camps escaped to Argentina where he lived under the alias, Ricardo Klement. In May 1960, Eichmann was arrested by Israeli Security Service and on June 1, 1962, Eichmann was executed.

**Raphael Lemkin and the Creation of the Term, “Genocide”**
Following the Holocaust and the Armenian genocide, Raphael Lemkin coined the term “genocide.” The UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide was unanimously adopted on December 9, 1948 and ratified on January 12, 1951. However, not until 1988 did President Ronald Reagan sign the 1948 document, while fighting opposition from those who thought it would reduce American sovereignty.

The Convention defines genocide as any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

a. Killing members of the group;
b. Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
c. Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
d. Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
e. Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

The specific “intent to destroy” particular groups is unique to genocide. A closely related category of international law, crimes against humanity, is defined as widespread or systematic attacks against civilians.

(Source: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Description</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1933</td>
<td>January 30</td>
<td>Adolf Hitler is elected and appointed Chancellor of Germany.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1933</td>
<td>April 1933-1934</td>
<td>The Nazi Party boycotts Jewish shops and excludes Jews from education and working civil service jobs.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1934</td>
<td>August 1934</td>
<td>Hitler becomes dictator in Germany with an approval rating of 90%.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1935</td>
<td>September 15</td>
<td>The German Government passes the Nuremberg Laws forbidding Jews to be citizens of Germany or marry or be in a relationship with non-Jews.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1936</td>
<td>August 1</td>
<td>Germany hosts the Summer Olympics and temporarily tones down public antisemitism to avoid international criticism.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1938</td>
<td>July 6-14</td>
<td>Delegates from 32 countries meet at the Evian Conference in France to discuss German refugees. The United states and most other countries are unwilling to ease immigration restrictions.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1938</td>
<td>October 5</td>
<td>Jewish passports are stamped with the letter “J” following a request by the head of the Swiss federal police.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1938</td>
<td>November 9-10</td>
<td>Approximately 100 Jews are murdered, hundreds of synagogues and shops are destroyed or burned, around 30,000 Jews in Germany and Austria are sent to concentration camps during Kristallnacht, the night of broken glass.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1939</td>
<td>June 6</td>
<td>Passengers of the St. Louis are admitted into the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, France and Belgium after being denied access to Cuba and the United States.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1939</td>
<td>September 1</td>
<td>Germany invades Poland starting World War II in Europe and ending the Western European policy of Appeasement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1939-1940</td>
<td>October</td>
<td>The deportation of Jews to Poland and the restriction of Jews to Nazi-enforced ghettos begins. The Nazis also begin a policy of publicly identifying Jews with Yellow Stars.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>July</td>
<td>Einsatzgruppen (mobile killing units) begin shooting Jewish men, women, and children without regard for age or sex, and burying them in mass graves.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>December 7</td>
<td>Japan bombs Pearl Harbor. The United States declares war the next day.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
January 20, 1942
High ranking Nazi Party leaders meet at the Wannsee Conference and enacted the **Final Solution**, the code name for the systematic, deliberate, and physical annihilation of European Jews.

January – December 1942
The Nazis deported hundreds of thousands of Jews from occupied Europe to killing centers called **Death Camps** in Eastern Europe.

April 19, 1943
The **Warsaw Ghetto Uprising** begins, inspiring other uprisings in other ghettos and killing centers.

January 1945
Nazis force thousands of prisoners from death camps to go on **Death Marches** to Germany.

January 27, 1945
Soviet forces liberate the **Auschwitz** camp complex.

May 7-9, 1945
Nazi Germany surrenders to the allied forces.

1945-1952
Survivors and refugees begin to rebuild their lives in **Displacement Camps** and find family members they were separated from. International organizations help refugees establish schools, synagogues and job training programs.

Many displaced persons felt they were unable to return to their homes and instead emigrated to countries around the world including the newly established Israel, and the United States.

**We also offer additional learning resources on teaching *Night* in the classroom. Please contact us for more information.**