

# **I, Too, Bear Witness**

## **An Analysis of Dehumanization through Testimonies of the Holocaust**

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### **Overview**

This curriculum unit will focus on oral and written testimonies of The Holocaust. The unit is designed for 11<sup>th</sup> or 12th grade English classes. This unit focuses on the people who bore witness – who told their personal accounts of dehumanization, deprivation and emotional and physical pain so the world would know. As such, the testimonies demand skillful and responsible teaching. This became painfully obvious to me during the course of our seminar, *Teaching the Holocaust: Bearing Witness*. We read memoirs and watched human beings give testimony that relived a nightmare that none of us can imagine or comprehend. It was a difficult experience for all of the adults in that room - in many cases leaving us emotionally drained. The same will be true for of my students who will be taught to analyze the theme of dehumanization through close reading and active hearing and viewing.

The focus of this unit is narrow. I will be using a very limited amount of oral and written testimony. But it will be covered in depth. Specifically, the material concerns only the dehumanizing strategies of Auschwitz: the cattle car journey, the selection process, and what several survivors have termed the entry into the gates of hell. We will read excerpts from Elie Weisel and Primo Levi's memoirs that share this focus. We will watch four oral testimonies that present the same material in a different, often more challenging format: the testimonies of Rita Kesselman (transcript and video), [Itka Zygmuntowicz](#), Irna Anolik, and Ellis Lewin. Edith P's account of a glimpse of normal life through the cattle car window will be compared to Elie Wiesel's description of the outside world.

The skills my students will need in order to analyze the material emphasize tone: How does the author utilize figurative language, word choice, and sentence structure to

communicate his message? How does the speaker communicate that message? Analyzing an oral testimony requires a refinement of these benchmark skills. The unit requires close reading techniques as well as close listening and viewing techniques.

These are the short-term goals that will allow my students to analyze additional testimonies through independent research and present their findings to the class in the form of a documentary using either iMovie or iWitness. Their movie will include survivor testimony that illuminates additional tactics during the Holocaust that were designed to dehumanize and humiliate victims. My long-term goal, however, is to enable my students to see beyond the words to uncover a real person. In so doing, they too will bear witness. As so many of our seminar participants reported, ‘knowing’ these survivors has changed and enhanced our lives. It has colored the way we view our relationships and our responsibility to each other. The ultimate goal for my street-smart, hard-shelled students is to walk in someone else’s shoes.

## **Rationale**

“We live in an era when young people know little and have big opinions”, according to Dorit Novak, director of Yad Vashem’s International School for Holocaust Studies. (Bronner) While Novak was referring to the Holocaust, I find this statement to be an apt description of the young people I teach. In addition, my 11<sup>th</sup> grade Honors English students are anesthetized by their own history. They are rarely deeply engaged in this literature except for graphic depictions of physical cruelty. “That was all back in the day”. “This would never have happened to me. I would be aggressive; never allow a slaveholder (or Nazi) to abuse **me!**” I want to address my students’ uninformed conception of how they might have reacted “back in the day”. What was it like to live in that time and that place? How could this have happened? The lessons of the Holocaust are powerful. Among them is that ignorance and indifference, if left unchecked and unquestioned, support atrocities against humanity.

The goal of this unit is to break through the barriers that my students erect to engaging with the past. I hope to provide my students with the tools and resources that allow them to listen to and understand the testimonies of those who bear witness. In the process, they too will bear witness. According to Elie Wiesel, “To listen to a witness is to become a witness”. I plan to have them ‘take a leap’ with me:

### For Yom Ha ‘Shoah

Come, take this giant leap with me  
into the other world . . . the other place  
where language fails and imagery defies,  
denies man’s consciousness . . . and dies  
upon the altar of insanity.

Come, take this giant leap with me  
into the other world . . . the other place

and trace the eclipse of humanity . . .  
where children burned while mankind stood by,  
and the universe has yet to learn why  
. . .has yet to learn why  
Sonia Weitz

I intend to present the Holocaust as the history of real people and families – allowing my students to make a personal connection with the survivors. Once a connection is established, the stories of the Holocaust will become my students’ stories. The challenge is that all true stories are twisted by time, literary embellishments, flaws of memory, and that language often fails. In the stories of the Holocaust the challenge becomes even greater: the events are inconceivable, and there is no easy path to understanding the stories. My students will be being challenged to understand the un-understandable:

*Normal standards do not apply to the Holocaust.  
Even language fails and words like hunger, fear, hot, cold,  
and pain lose their meaning. In fact, the Holocaust is a crime  
without a language. (Weitz, x)*

Lawrence Langer writes that witnesses’ testimonies are filled with frustration and skepticism about the audience’s ability to understand. He cites a survivor: “If you were not there it is difficult to describe and say how it was...I don’t know if there is a word to describe the nightmare one go through...how men function under such stress is one thing, and then how you communicate and express to somebody who never knew such a degree of brutality existing is a fantasy.” According to Langer, the testimonies “...impose upon us a role of not only passive listener but active hearer.” (Langer) We have no frame of reference, no common experience that will enable us to absorb and comprehend the “deep and anguished memories” survivors are relating. I intend to give my students the opportunity to step out of the role of impassive listener - to hear the two voices inherent in these testimonies, the then and the now, and to determine what they reveal and can’t express to uncover the ways in which people depict trauma and dehumanizing strategies. In so doing, students develop ‘response – ability.’

Unfortunately this will take some doing with my students. Along with their indifference to the past, my students are very poor listeners. “Hallway” interactions are often the norm in class discussions: they talk over and at each other, have preconceived notions about what will be communicated, and are extremely judgmental. Quick to anger and just as quick to dismiss what another has said without attempting to understand! Uche Ugo states in a *Psychology Today* article that “some teens’ inability to accurately read body language, interpret facial expression and tone of voice means that they have little grasp of what other people feel...” (Ugo) There is little doubt that the success of this unit depends in part on my students being able to feel what the survivor feels. Empathy is a skill they need to develop during the course of this unit. According to Ugo, this is a

learned skill that is acquired in part by observation and modeling. Certainly, I will include this in the modeling of my reactions to testimony.

In short, the issues are complex. First, my students themselves present a challenge to effectively teaching this material. They are numb to their own history of dehumanization and have a serious deficit of active listening skills that allow for empathy. Second, the oral testimonies are extremely challenging. Language is problematic, deep memory and anguished memory intrude on the present and in fact are never resolved – the experience is not in the past, but now - so that time is muddied and is not a grasping point for comprehension. There is no beginning and no end to the holocaust memories.

*“One of the most powerful themes of these tapes is this, the difficulty of narrating from the context of normality **now**, the nature of the abnormality **then**, an abnormality that still surges into the present to remind us of its potential influence.”*  
(Langer 22)

Additionally, there is no common ground between the audience and the speaker. Survivors relate the unimaginable. These are serious challenges, yet cannot be a deterrent to making these stories a part of my students’ lives – to allow them to bear witness. Finally, the biggest challenge for me is to give up control of the class discussion that will accompany instruction. I am deeply invested in this material and the responsibility I feel to honor the survivors’ testimonies. I will try to take a lesson from Al Filreis, our seminar leader, who allowed us to struggle and form interpretations without judgment. He expertly guided analysis with close reading questions as well as deeper and deeper levels of open-ended questions to shed light on meaning. I realize now that this is why so many of us in this seminar “owned” the material. Perhaps, he’ll lend me the towel he carried to his classes to remind him to keep quiet and facilitate!

## **Objectives**

This curriculum unit is appropriate for 11<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> grade English classes. It is intended to last for approximately four weeks preferably during the final quarter of the school year since it is predicated on students having a firm grasp of literary elements and higher-order thinking skills in order to analyze the theme of dehumanization during the Holocaust. The unit focuses on comparing/contrasting Holocaust memoirs and oral testimony. The objective of the unit is two-fold – analysis that addresses the constraints of spoken and written language in order to understand the processes of deprivation and dehumanization that characterize the Holocaust. My students will analyze written and oral testimony to try to understand the difficulty inherent in re-living the past, the escalating assaults that dehumanized, and the determination to cling to humanity. In each testimony – written and oral - students will analyze the author or speaker’s tone (sentence structure, word choice, shifts, nonverbal communication) to guide the evidence based inferences this material demands.

I don’t want to inundate my students with material and information. I am including a limited number of oral testimonies and corresponding excerpts from memoirs.

It is my hope that students will have questions that they will explore and answer as they conduct independent research. The unit will only consist of excerpts from oral and written testimony of Auschwitz. I will include a brief introduction to The Holocaust and focus on the dehumanizing tactics the Nazi's employed during the boxcar journey to Auschwitz, the selection process, and entry into the horror of the routines of Auschwitz, my lessons can emphasize an in-depth analysis that students can then apply to their own research.

Given the uproar in San Bernadino, California in May, 2014, it is imperative to instruct and remind students of the necessity to evaluate Internet sources on this topic. "Rialto Unified Essay Aftermath: How to teach kids about the Holocaust":

This spring, the district's approximately 2,000 eighth-graders were assigned an essay topic that directed them to "read and discuss multiple, credible articles on this issue, and write an argumentative essay, based on cited textual evidence, in which you explain whether or not you believe (the Holocaust) was an actual event in history, or merely a political scheme created to influence public emotion and gain wealth... "What scares me and worries me and troubles me ... is that teachers could think this is a good assignment," said Deborah Lipstadt, the Dorot Professor of Modern Jewish History and Holocaust Studies at Emory University, a leading expert on the Holocaust and Holocaust denial. "There are not two sides to every issue. ... Sometimes wrong is just wrong: Child abuse is just wrong. Beating up your spouse is just wrong. Holocaust denial is just wrong." (Yarborough)

## Memoirs

Memoir (or written testimony) is a nonfiction literary genre that encapsulates the memories that the author has experienced and writes about. Unlike an autobiography, a memoir usually focuses on one particular time period, often one of historical importance. The writer shares his or her experiences and gives the reader a personal glimpse into the way historical events impact people's lives. Starting the unit with an analysis of two Holocaust memoirs can be advantageous. The memoirs benefit from the literary elements that provide structure and imagery. The author has had the opportunity to revise in order to find the best way to create meaning for his reader. Close reading can illuminate and allow for inferences and possibly common ground. However, because these memoirs are challenging, they do not give up their meanings easily.

## *Close Reading*

It is crucial that students read, and re-read. The first reading is merely to figure out what the text says. A second reading focuses on how the text works in terms of organization and literary devices. The third reading is the deepest analysis and centers on evaluating the memoir in terms of meaning and connections to other texts. Close reading is an

intensive analysis of the memoir in order to come to terms with what it says, how it says it, and what it means. The author's choice of words, figurative language, and sentence structure will be analyzed as we move through excerpts from Elie Weisel's *Night*, Primo Levi's *Survival in Auschwitz* and the transcript of Rita Kesselman's account of her arrival at Auschwitz.

## Oral Testimony

Videotaped history (oral testimony) refers to the totality of audio and video that combine to create meaning and message in a videotaped interview. According to *Using Visual History Testimony in Education*, this type of testimony provides a human face to history, provides students with an affective view of history, and helps students to understand the long-term ramifications of persecution and trauma. (Shoah Foundation. pp.3-4) Oral testimony analysis creates a need for additional strategies and skills for students. These testimonies will allow me to teach close listening and watching. Here gesture, facial expression, sudden shifts, and pauses become the elements that illuminate. If language fails, the nonverbal does communicate. This is a perfect segue into analysis that addresses Langer's 'deep memory' and shifts between "then and now". I believe my students will be engaged and intrigued by the opportunity to analyze visual testimony.

### *Effective Listening*

Making students familiar with the barriers to active listening helps them understand the way they normally listen. Judging people, thinking in advance you know what someone is going to say, twisting a message to make it say what you want someone to say, and interjecting your own emotions are common practices that interfere with grasping another's meaning. Conversely, there are strategies students can be taught to focus on the speaker's message. The videotapes require that students pay close attention and recognize emotional messages, interpret the message by attempting to paraphrase, focus on nonverbal communications that contradict the verbal, be aware of sudden shifts in topic and prolonged pauses and consider all information available before evaluating or making inferences and conclusions. In short, they must try to feel what the speaker is feeling - to empathize. (Utah State University) Like close reading, close listening and watching requires re-visiting the tapes several times. Chunking oral testimonies is as advantageous as chunking written accounts.

## **Strategies**

### Preliminary Strategies:

This curriculum unit requires that we define terms and establish accepted vocabulary at the outset: These include but are not limited to Holocaust, anti-Semitism, concentration camp, Nazi SS, testimony, memoir, survivor, deep memory, dehumanization tactics, selection process, deprivation. We will develop a word wall as students read. The wall will be generated by teacher and students as the unit progresses.

In order to provide students with a brief background of events that lead to the final solution, I will show an eleven-minute excerpt from *The Path to Nazi Genocide*. The film can be accessed at [www.ushmm.org/learn/introduction-to-the-holocaust/path-to-nazi-genocide](http://www.ushmm.org/learn/introduction-to-the-holocaust/path-to-nazi-genocide). We will be viewing the section that deals with the escalation of anti-Semitism following Germany's invasion of Poland and ending with the relocation of Jews to concentration camps. This will provide students with an opportunity to hear and see terminology applied as well as provide a frame of reference for the testimonies that concern Auschwitz.

In addition, it will be necessary to prepare students before watching testimonies: Testimonies can include graphic descriptions of horrific events, and stark emotions. The teacher needs to set the tone by explaining why survivors might have agreed to bear witness and understand the difficulty in re-living as well as trying to explain what this period of their lives entailed. Students should be allowed time to debrief at the end of testimony as well.

The strategies I will implement to analyze written and oral testimony are student centered and designed to nurture students' literacy and critical thinking skills in a respectful classroom climate. Both oral and written testimony rely heavily on close reading (or listening) and chunking.

### Annotation

The written materials in this unit will be copied for students so that they are able to annotate the text. In addition, I supply them with thin colored markers - not yellow highlighters. This avoids the tendency of students to highlight ad nauseam! I spend considerable time teaching and modeling this strategy at the beginning of every school year since it is the first step in engaging students with texts. This strategy puts the student actively and immediately in a dialogue with the author or speaker and the issues. It involves underlining/circling key words and phrases within the text as well as using margin notes to summarize, paraphrase, and question the text. I encourage students to develop their own symbol system to emphasize what speaks to them in the text.

While students will not have written text to work with as we move into oral testimony, they can use the same skills to actively engage with the speaker taking notes to summarize, identifying use of specific words and phrases, questioning meaning, jotting down key ideas and gestures. I will provide students with a listening/watching graphic organizer for each testimony that will allow them to record their 'annotations' and form the basis of their independent analyses.

### Modeling

Modeling is an instructional strategy in which the teacher demonstrates a new concept or approach to learning and students learn by observing. During the initial direct instruction phases of this unit, I will model the skills my students will need to meet the objectives. It is especially important to me that students have an example of how to read, listen to, and react to testimonies that present difficult material – emotionally and intellectually. What is it that effective readers and active listeners do? Therefore the types of modeling I am suggesting for this unit involve *disposition modeling* which focuses on conveying personal values or ways of thinking about the testimonies. It addresses the character and empathy issues that will build a climate of respect in my classroom. As previously stated, this is the learned behavior I that will allow my students to walk in a survivor’s shoes. The second type of modeling is *meta-cognition modeling*, basically a think-aloud. In this type of modeling teachers talk through their thought process while they read a passage or interpret an oral testimony. It can focus on identifying examples of tone in written texts as well as repetitions, or instances of deep memory intruding on oral testimony. Third, using modeling as a scaffolding technique allows the teacher to consider students’ position in this learning process and use modeling to meet them at their level and guide them to attaining the skills and tools they will ultimately need to effectively read, listen to, and analyze testimonies independently. Teachers first model the task for students, and then students begin the assigned task and work through the task at their own pace. (Coffey)

### Close Reading

Close Reading requires reading and re-reading. The focus in this unit certainly involves understanding the ‘who’, ‘where’, and ‘what’ analysis of a first reading. But, the emphasis is on the ‘how’. How does the writer use language and form to enable the reader to understand the dehumanization of the Holocaust?

- Are figurative devices used?
- Are certain sounds, words or phrases repeated?
- Are certain parts of speech repeated?
- Is the diction unexpected or unfamiliar?
- Is there order of words (syntax) unexpected or unfamiliar?
- What types of sentences are used (simple, complex)?
- Do any details seem odd or irrelevant?
- Do any of the line breaks seem abrupt or odd?

Students will then move to determining why the author writes the passage the way he does and analyzing the theme of dehumanization presented in the testimony.

In this unit, I will initially model the process with excerpts from *Night* and then facilitate the process as students work independently and collaboratively with excerpts from *Survival in Auschwitz*.

These are the same techniques I will be using with oral testimony. The tapes need to be watched and re-watched. Students will identify the ‘who’, ‘what’, ‘where’, and ‘when’ aspects of the tapes and summarize. Here again, the emphasis is on the ‘How’.



It's not just what is said but how it's communicated that adds another dimension to visual history testimonies. In addition to the spoken word, viewers can also read or interpret the interviewee's nonverbal communication to better comprehend the meaning. (USC Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education. p. 9) The above list applies with the addition of the following viewing points.

- Is eye contact maintained with the interviewer?
- Are there gestures that seem unusual or troubling?
- Are there elongated pauses, periods of silence, or sudden shifts in subject?
- Is there a change in volume or pitch? Articulated sounds?
- Are there changes in facial expression?

## Chunking

Chunking is a strategy that helps students break down difficult text into more manageable pieces. It is an important tool that I will use both in written and oral testimony as we move through the process of close reading, listening, and viewing. Chunking initially enables me to guide students towards successful progress. In my lesson plans, each chunked segment is followed by a series of questions to be answered after each reading of the text or viewing of the videotapes. These questions move from checking for understanding to higher-order analytical questions, which direct students to use evidence from the testimonies to support their inferences. Ultimately, the goal is for students to chunk and question independently. In the long term, it will enable them to learn how to tackle the testimonies independently in a methodical way.

## Lesson Plans

The plans I am including in this section follow the introduction to the unit as outlined in the Strategies Section of the unit. By this point, students should have definitions for key terms especially **tone** and **dehumanization**. The film clip allows for background knowledge of the events that lead to concentration camps and provides a context for the section of Wiesel's memoir that focuses on his journey to Auschwitz, the selection process, and his entry into the camp.

Plan #1 – **“The world was a cattle wagon hermetically sealed.”**

Excerpt from *Night* – Elie Wiesel – (pp. 20-6)

**Objective:** Students will be able to identify examples of Wiesel's use of figurative language and sentence structure in order to analyze the tone of this excerpt.

**Do Now:** (Picture of cattle car displayed on Promethean Board:)

[http://www.theholocaustexplained.org/public/cms/70/92/139/243/fUCeqj\\_web.jpg](http://www.theholocaustexplained.org/public/cms/70/92/139/243/fUCeqj_web.jpg)

Prompt: Look closely at the picture and describe what you see, what you imagine the people are feeling.

**Direct Instruction:** (Students will have handout with the entire excerpt with the text chunked and reading questions for each chunk. A copy of the text and reading questions are displayed on Promethean Board so that teacher can model)

- Explain objective to students and review vocabulary and tone.
- Preview how we will handle this section of the excerpt: Annotation, Close reading: read and re-read for deeper meaning.
- Ask students to read the first chunked section – annotating what stands out for them and briefly summarize the text.
- Model annotating the text for sequence of events while thinking aloud about Wiesel’s details and choice of words. Students will be mirroring my underlining, circling of words, and margin notes on their handouts.

**Note:** This is a sample of the sentence structure, word choice, imagery, and figurative language that can be annotated during this meta-cognition modeling. The point is to help students focus on how Wiesel expresses tone.

*“Marched to the station; eighty people in each car; the cars were sealed; Two Gestapo officers strolled about on the platform, smiling.”*

*Very little air; blossoming countryside roll by; tortured by thirst, heat became unbearable; From this moment, you come under the authority of the German army...That’s all.”*

*“We were caught in a trap, right up to our necks. The world was a cattle car hermetically sealed. We felt that an abyss was about to open, beneath our bodies. Our terror was about to burst the sides of the train. Our nerves were at a breaking point. Our flesh was creeping. It was as though madness were taking possession of us all.”*

*“Once more the young men tied her up and gagged her. They even struck her. People encouraged them. An endless night. Auschwitz.”*

*“Through the window we could see barbed wire. And as the train stopped, we saw this time that flames were gushing out of a tall chimney into a black sky. Abominable odor; odd looking characters...leapt into the wagon...began to strike outright and left, shouting.”*

*“In front of us flames. In the air that smell of burning flesh. ...midnight; reception center for Auschwitz.*

**Guided Practice:** In this section of the lesson, we will re-read this chunked text to examine more closely the tone of the text. At this point, we will identify types of figurative language, consider why specific sentences are short, and focus on word choice. The class discussion will center around examples from the text. We will answer the first set of reading questions together.

1. What image is the most vivid in this section? Why?
2. There are several examples of metaphor, simile, and personification in this section. Select two examples and consider the message Wiesel is communicating in these comparisons.

3. Why does Wiesel say the *Gestapo officers strolled*? What is communicated by the use of that word? What other word choices stand out for you? What is the message being communicated by these words?

4. There are several instances when Wiesel uses very short sentences in the excerpt. Notice “*An endless night.*” and “*In front of us flames.*”

“Elie Wiesel has said that in his writing “the unspoken is as important as the spoken.” Meaning lies in the images he tries to convey through a single word or phrase... Those (short) sentences signal the reader that the author wants them to stop and think about the meaning of these words or phrases in this particular context. The word night is a good example. It clearly refers to more than a time of day.” (Facing History and Ourselves, 11)

What do these sentences communicate? Do they add to the meaning Wiesel is leaving unspoken? How?

**Independent Practice:** This part of the lesson involves students doing the last close reading activity. Students will re-read the excerpt, given the identification of the components of tone, to analyze the tone in this section. This is the third reading of the section and centers around the “how” and “why” of close reading.

5. What is tone of this section of Night? Support your inference with evidence from the text that illuminates Wiesel’s attitude. Consider how he uses figurative language, words, and sentence structure to communicate his attitude to his readers.

6. Wiesel’s purpose in describing his cattle car experience is to help his readers understand the dehumanizing tactics of the transportation of victims to concentration camps. Select at least three examples of dehumanization that Wiesel relates.

**Debriefing:** Given the nature of the memoirs and testimonies, I am including this activity that will stay student – directed. It will be used to address student issues, questions, recap of the lesson, or emotional reactions to the materials.

**Homework:** Finish the reading questions and be prepared to discuss your answers tomorrow.

Lesson Plan #2 – “**Men to the left! Women to the right!**”

Day 2 - Excerpt from Night (pp. 27-32)

**Objective:** Students will be able to identify examples of Wiesel’s use of figurative language and sentence structure in order to analyze the tone of this excerpt. (The lesson builds on the close reading activities of Day 1 with more focus on student-generated comments and analysis. In this lesson, I intend to facilitate with guiding questions.)

**Do Now:** Quotation on Promethean Board:

*“The heat, the thirst, the pestilential stench, the suffocating lack of air – these were as nothing compared with those screams which tore us to shreds.”*

Prompt: Explain the quotation. How does it encapsulate the cattle car experience? What does it contribute to the process of dehumanization Wiesel describes?

**Direct Instruction:**

- Brief class discussion of the quotation in order to review Day 1’s class.
- Discussion of homework questions – checking for understanding through accountable talk as students share their analysis of dehumanization of cattle cars.
- Explain objective and preview today’s activities: close reading to unearth tone and second context of dehumanization – the selection process
- Review Annotation and the purpose of the first reading of a text.

**Guided Practice:** Students will read the remainder of the excerpt marking the text for sections that ‘speak’ to them and additional examples of word choice, figurative language and sentence structure. We will annotate the text together with student volunteers coming to the board to underline, circle, make margin notes, etc. **in groups of 4** students will re-read the text in order to answer the first four reading questions. I will circulate among groups to monitor their discussions.

1. What image is the most vivid in this section? Why?
2. There are several examples of metaphor, simile, and personification in this section. Select two examples and consider the message Wiesel is communicating in these comparisons.
3. Why does Wiesel say, “Yet that was the moment when I **parted** from my mother”. What is communicated by the use of the word ‘parted’? What other word choices stand out for you? What is the message being communicated by these words?
4. There are several instances when Wiesel uses very short sentences in the excerpt. Notice:

*“Eight short, simple words.”*

*“Not to be left alone.”*

*“I saw it – saw it with my own eyes...those children in the flames*

*“Ten steps still. Eight. Seven”*

What does Wiesel want the reader to stop and think about? What is he trying to communicate? What does the use of these sentences add to the deeper meaning of the excerpt?

**Class discussion:** Re-read the parallel structure in the section that begins “*Never shall I forget that night...*” Students will volunteer to read a sentence from this section aloud and interpret it in terms of tone.

Why does Wiesel use this format? Why does he repeat himself? How does this section contribute to the dehumanization theme?

## **Debriefing:**

**Homework:** Students will answer the remaining two questions on their handout.

5. What is tone of this section of Night? Support your inference with evidence from the text that that illuminates Wiesel's attitude. Consider how he uses figurative language, words, and sentence structure to communicate his attitude to his readers.
6. Wiesel's purpose in describing his first selection experience is to help his readers understand additional dehumanizing tactics. Select at least three examples of dehumanization that Wiesel relates.

Plan #3: "**Within a few seconds, we had ceased to be men.**"

Day 3 - Excerpt from Night (pp. 32-37)

**Objective:** Students will be able explain examples of Wiesel's tone in order to analyze the theme of the excerpt. The lesson builds on the previous days' lessons. Close-reading is a slow process, but is extremely important to this curriculum unit since students will be required to read and view extremely challenging testimony. While the Night excerpt might be taught in one class period, I doubt students would be able to appreciate how Wiesel struggles to make his experience understandable. We focus today on the entry into Auschwitz.

**Do Now:** Which of the dehumanizing experiences you selected for homework seems the most inhumane? Why?

## **Direct Instruction:**

- Students will share their answers to the prompt.
- Explain objective and preview focus of this class. We are dealing with the final excerpt as well as analyzing the theme of dehumanization. We will discuss the tactics the Nazis used to accomplish their goal.
- Review annotation and close-reading strategies before students independently close-read the last section.

## **Guided Practice:**

- In **different** groups of four students, class will share their annotations and answers to reading questions (which follow the same format as the previous day's lessons). I will join each group as they discuss their strategies to uncover Wiesel's meaning and purpose for including episodes.
- Class discussion: Facilitator questions:
  1. Consider the way the Germans systematically strip Wiesel and other prisoners of their identity.
  2. How does Wiesel respond to the removal of his clothes and other belongings? To the shaving of his hair?
  3. Explain these lines:

*“The morning star was shining in the sky. I too had become a completely different person.”*

*“I had lost all sense of time.”*

*“Surely it was a dream.”*

How do these quotations illuminate the theme of dehumanization?

### **Independent Practice:**

- A student will read the following:

Primo Levi, who was also at Auschwitz, wrote in the next memoir that we will read:

*It is not possible to sink lower than this: no human condition is more miserable than this, nor could it conceivably be so. Nothing belongs to us any more; they have taken away our clothes, our shoes, even our hair; if we speak, they will not listen to us, and if they listen, they will not understand. They will even take away our name: and if we want to keep it, we will have to find ourselves the strength to do so, to manage so that behind the name some - thing of us, of us, as we were, remains.*

- Students will compare/contrast this statement to Wiesel’s account to his entry into Auschwitz. The brief essay you are asked to write must contain evidence from the text that supports your analysis of the dehumanization theme of *Night*. Consider tone as you select evidence.
- Students will discuss with a partner their initial reactions to the Levi quote.

### **Debriefing:**

**Homework:** This handout and all of its reading questions are due tomorrow.

### **Note to Teachers:**

**The unit moves from *Night* to Primo Levi’s *Survival in Auschwitz*.**

Students will be given a handout with the excerpt, referred to as "On the Bottom" in Holt’s *Elements of Literature*, Sixth Course. The online textbook can be accessed on SchoolNet and the excerpt can be copied for students to annotate.

After students have read this excerpt that incorporates the same objectives and strategies as the *Night* lesson plans, **the unit moves to a written transcript of the testimony of Rita Kesselman’s testimony.** I have included a copy of the testimony in the appendix of this unit. **In addition, students will have the opportunity to view her oral testimony and compare it to the transcript.** Her oral testimony can be viewed at:

<http://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn514129>.

I am focusing on the part of the testimony that begins at 31:14 and ends at 39:00. This matches the transcript and students can see how her testimony moves beyond what words

*communicate. During this phase of the unit, I will introduce students to close listening/watching skills.*

**Plan #4 “Normal language was not normal here. Everything was the opposite”**

Testimony of Itka Zygmuntowicz: USC Shoah Foundation

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=plxJDVgO\\_fc](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=plxJDVgO_fc)

2:01 to 2:09

This plan is a sample of the close listening/watching strategy. The testimony (film on Promethean Board) will be watched in its entirety and then chunked into sections for analysis. Students will ‘annotate’ the video by focusing first on words and summarizing the sections. The second viewing of the chunked section will focus on nonverbal communication – when it occurs and what calls attention to itself. The third viewing will focus on combining the nonverbal with the verbal to uncover deep memory and meaning. This lesson lays the groundwork for analyzing the next two videos and final research project.

**Objective:** Students will be able to listen actively and critically in order to analyze the speakers’ message.

**Do Now:** Based on your experience with Rita Kesselman’s testimony, what types of nonverbal behaviors communicate that the speaker is experiencing deep memory – that the “then” is impacting on the “now”?

**Direct Instruction:**

- Students will share their responses to the prompt.
- Review active listening, the viewing points of close listening/watching (see **Strategies**), and deep memory.
- Play testimony on Promethean Board.
- Re-play the first chunked section of the tape (splitting the screen). Modeling taking notes on the key phrases, word choice, and sequence of events as Itka relates her experience at the train station at Auschwitz.
- Think Aloud to model disposition and meta-cognition. The focus here is on the dehumanizing tactic of selection and the respect and responsibility the material demands:
  - “Words don’t have the same meaning... To the right meant selection... Red Cross is death... Everything is disguised.”
  - “I never said goodbye.”
  - “Everything that I loved was gone.”

**Guided Group:**

- We will watch the clip again focusing on nonverbal communication and note pauses, gestures, crying, repetitions, pauses, eye contact, shifts in topic, etc.

- Class discussion centering on when she lapses into deep memory and how this communicates additional meaning.
- We will repeat the process with the rest of the tape focusing on events, word choice, and other ingredients of tone. Then on the nonverbal communication patterns and instances of deep memory.
- Class discussion: Words fail Itka. She reverts to Yiddish several times. Yet, her message is loud and clear. She does not have the option to edit her words as Wiesel and Levi do. How are those memoirs that deal with the same issues different from this oral testimony? Which type of testimony seems more powerful? Why?

### **Independent Practice:**

Students will be given a handout with key quotes from the video, and nonverbal behaviors that accompany them. Students' task is to analyze Itka's tone as she relates the dehumanizing experiences she suffered. With a partner, they will discuss how they might answer the following prompt:

Testimony question: Like Primo Levi, Elie Wiesel and Rita Kesselman, Itka Zygmuntowicz was stripped of her identity, gave up the last shred of her past, and was treated as a nonhuman. Does her testimony convince you that she will never see herself as 26573? Why? Consider her words as well as her nonverbal behavior. (Notice she still has her tattoo, but Rita had hers removed.)

### **Debriefing:**

**Homework:** Answer the testimony question using evidence from the video to support your opinion.

### **Explanation of final project**

The unit will culminate with independent research that focuses on presenting and analyzing additional testimony that bears witness to dehumanization of the Holocaust. Students will have the opportunity to use laptops in class for two weeks after the memoirs and oral testimony class work is completed. Students will focus on one aspect of dehumanization either that we have covered in class or that they are interested in after visiting the two initial background information websites I will suggest.

Their task is to illuminate the dehumanization through one or two survivor testimonies. The survivor must have an ID card – a brief biography of that person's life before and during the Holocaust. The research will be presented in a narrated documentary – either on iMovie or iWitness (still to be determined). The movie must include testimony clips and text, but may also include photos, artwork, music – whatever the student decides will enhance his project. The movie will be presented to the class at the end of the unit.



## Common Core Standards

Reading Informational Text... 1.3: Students read, understand, and respond to informational text—with an emphasis on comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, and making connections among ideas and between texts with a focus on textual evidence.

### CC.1.3.11–12.A

Determine and analyze the relationship between two or more themes or central ideas of a text, including the development and interaction of the themes; provide an objective summary of the text.

### CC.1.3.11–12.B

Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly, as well as inferences and conclusions based on and related to an author's implicit and explicit assumptions and beliefs.

Writing ... 1.4: Students write for different purposes and audiences. Students write clear and focused text to convey a well-defined perspective and appropriate content.

### CC.1.4.11–12.A

Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately.

### CC.1.4.11–12.B

Write with a sharp, distinct focus identifying topic, task, and audience.

### CC.1.4.11–12.C

Develop and analyze the topic thoroughly by selecting the most significant and relevant facts, extended definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples appropriate to the audience's knowledge of the topic; include graphics and multimedia when useful to aiding comprehension.

### CC.1.4.11–12.D

Organize complex ideas, concepts, and information so that each new element builds on that which precedes it to create a whole; use appropriate and varied transitions and syntax to link the major sections of the text; provide a concluding statement or section that supports the information presented; include formatting when useful to aiding comprehension.

### CC.1.4.11–12.K

Write with an awareness of the stylistic aspects of composition. Use precise language, domain-specific vocabulary, and maintain a formal style and objective tone while attending to the norms of the discipline in which they are writing.

### CC.1.4.11–12.S

Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

### CC.1.4.11–12.U

Use technology, including the Internet, to produce, publish, and update individual

or shared writing products in response to ongoing feedback, including new arguments and information.

CC.1.4.11–12.V

Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

Speaking and Listening...1.5: Students present appropriately in formal speaking situations, listen critically, and respond intelligently as individuals or in group discussions.

CC.1.5.11–12.A

Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions on grade-level topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CC.1.5.11–12.B

Evaluate how the speaker's perspective, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric affect the credibility of an argument through the author's stance, premises, links among ideas, word choice, points of emphasis, and tone.

CC.1.5.11–12.C

Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitative, orally) in order to make informed decisions and solve problems, evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source and noting any discrepancies among the data.

CC.1.5.11–12.D

Present information, findings, and supporting evidence, conveying a clear and distinct perspective; organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and task.

CC.1.5.11–12.F

Make strategic use of digital media in presentations to add interest and enhance understanding of findings, reasoning, and evidence.

## **Bibliography**

For Teachers

Anti-Defamation League, USC Shoah Foundation, and Yad Vashem. [Echoes and reflections: A Multimedia Curriculum On The Holocaust](#). New York: Anti-Defamation League, 2010.

An outstanding resource for both teachers and students. It includes photographs, films, videoed testimony, lesson plans, and a wealth of teaching materials. The website includes downloadable materials: [www.echoesandreflections.org](http://www.echoesandreflections.org)

Bronner, Ethan. Memo From Jerusalem From Overseas Visitors, a Growing Demand to Study the Holocaust. 12 February 2012.

<[http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/15/world/middleeast/lessons-from-the-holocaust-are-widespread-and-varied.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/15/world/middleeast/lessons-from-the-holocaust-are-widespread-and-varied.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0)>.

The article reports on the world-wide interest in Holocaust seminars at Yad Vashem. It's interesting to see how attendees at the seminar planned to use what they had learned.

Coffey, Heather. Modeling. <<http://www.learnnc.org/lp/pages/4697>>.

I used this site to explain the different types of modeling strategies that this type of material demands.

Facing History and Ourselves National Foundation. Holocaust and Human Behavior: Brookline, 1994

This is an extremely valuable resource for teachers of any grade or subject. It focuses on the Holocaust but extends the lessons to other historical periods of genocide. The book offers resources to promote reflection and connections for students as well as teachers. Five hundred pages of wisdom!

In addition the website includes additional teaching resources in the For Educators section: [www.facinghistory.org](http://www.facinghistory.org)

Facing History and Ourselves. "A Teacher's Resource for Night by Elie Wiesel." Witness to History Series. Facing History and Ourselves & Voices of Love and Freedom.

<<https://www.facinghistory.org/sites/default/files/publications/night.pdf>>.

This is an outstanding resource for teachers - not only for its Lesson plan suggestions, but for the wealth of teachers' resources it provides.

Witness: USC Shoah Foundation. Watch Testimonies.

<<http://iwitness.usc.edu/SFI/BrowseTopics.aspx>>.

This site is amazing. It provides teaching resources, allows teachers to develop online interactive activities for students, and helps students create a movie. Teachers can register students and track their progress on assignments. The testimonies are two to three minutes in length and can easily be downloaded into a student project. I'm especially impressed by the student tutorial for ethical editing. It is a wonderful alternative to iMovie since it does not require a MAC computer.

Johnson, Mary and Strom, Margot S. and Facing History and Ourselves National Foundation and Mary Johnson. Elements of Time: Holocaust Testimonies. Boston: Facing History and Ourselves, 1991.

Companion publication to Facing History and Ourselves. It includes helpful background information on the testimonies as well as teaching strategies.

Langer, Lawrence. Holocaust Testimonies: the ruins of memory. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991.

I love this book. It was a tremendous help to me in designing this curriculum unit. Langer explains the inherent problems of analyzing Holocaust testimony in his discussions of memory. He uses examples from testimony throughout the book to support his theory.

Levi, Primo. Survival In Auschwitz. Trans. Woolf. Collier Books, 1993.

The memoir is outstanding. Levi underscores the difficulty in trying to relate the horrors of Auschwitz to readers who have no conception. You can almost see him wrestling with words. I have included an excerpt on his initiation into the hell of Auschwitz and the dehumanizing tactics of the Nazis as a major focus of this unit.

London Jewish Cultural Center. The Holocaust Explained Key Stage 4. 2011.

<<http://www.theholocaustexplained.org/ks4/#.U4NZ6iiVvfg>>.

The site proclaims it is for students 11-16 years old only. I found it extremely helpful for teachers. There is a wealth of material and resources for the classroom. here. It organizes it well. Very helpful Auschwitz section. This is a site I will recommend that my students visit to conduct research.

NEN Education Network. Survivor Testimonies.

<[www.bl.uk/learning/histcitizen/voices/testimonies/survivors.html](http://www.bl.uk/learning/histcitizen/voices/testimonies/survivors.html)>.

Another source for testimonies. These are audio only, but include written transcripts of the testimony. This is a London based organization that produced this site in conjunction with Yad Vashem and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

Shanahan, Timothy. What is Close Reading. 18 July 2012.

<<http://www.shanahanonliteracy.com/2012/06/what-is-close-reading.html>>.

I used this source in the strategies section of the unit. Very clear and concise.

U.S. Shoah Foundation. Auschwitz II Birkenau Testimony.

<[www.usc.edu/vhi/segmentsfortheclassroom](http://www.usc.edu/vhi/segmentsfortheclassroom)>.

Again, a wealth of outstanding material. I used this section to augment the list of testimonies I considered for the unit.

Ugo, Uche. "Promoting Empathy With Your Teen." Psychology Today (2012): 10-11.

Ugo makes the point that many teens are not able to empathize and more importantly that empathy is a learned skill.

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Resources for Educators.

<<http://www.ushmm.org/educators>>.

A wealth of material. Film, artwork, testimony, historical, social and political background, timelines - the list is endless. There are links to additional resources.

Unites States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Introduction to the Holocaust: The Path to Nazi Genocide. Unites States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

<[www.ushmm.org/learn/introduction-to-the-holocaust/path-to-nazi-genocide](http://www.ushmm.org/learn/introduction-to-the-holocaust/path-to-nazi-genocide)>.

This is only one of the outstanding films that are available from the Holocaust Museums throughout the world. I used a brief excerpt to provide historical background from the late 1930's to the rise of concentration camps.

The Holocaust: A Learning Site for Students .

<<http://www.ushmm.org/learn/students/the-holocaust-a-learning-site-for-students>>

It's all here! This is a fantastic site for students to explore. It allows them to answer research questions as well as providing additional background information. It's hard not to spend hours on this site.

USC Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education. Guidelines for Using Visual History Testimonies in Education. 2010.

<[http://www.echoesandreflections.org/pdfs/guidelines\\_visual\\_history\\_testimony.pdf](http://www.echoesandreflections.org/pdfs/guidelines_visual_history_testimony.pdf)>.

This needs to be read and re-read before using testimonies. It covers instructional and ethical issues as well as the emotional issues involved in teaching the material.

Utah State University. Effective Listening.

<[http://www.usu.edu/arc/idea\\_sheets/pdf/active\\_listening.pdf](http://www.usu.edu/arc/idea_sheets/pdf/active_listening.pdf)>.

I used this site in the Strategies section. It covers aspects of not only active listening but hones in on many of the behaviors that are obstacles to empathy.

Weitz, Sonia Schrieber. I Promised I Would Tell. Brookline: Facing History and Ourselves National Foundation, 2012.

This is a recent addition to Facing History and Ourselves website. It can be downloaded in its entirety. It includes poetry, artwork, and experiences. The preface is outstanding. A wonderful book.

Wiesel, Elie. Night. Trans. Stella Rodway. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1982.

I used a section of this memoir to introduce students to the dehumanization theme of the unit.

Yad Vashem. The Voice of the Survivors.

<<http://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/remembrance/multimedia.asp> >.

As is the case with many of the websites I've included, there is so much to help both teachers and students. This section was another source for testimony. It is only a small section of the website.

Yale University Library. Testimony Excerpts:: Introduction .

<<http://www.library.yale.edu/testimonies/excerpts/> >.

The beauty of this site is the thumbnail excerpts that are organized by topic. The site includes full testimony as well.

Yarborough, Beau. The Sun Education. 10 May 2014. <<http://www.sbsun.com/social-affairs/20140510/rialto-unified-essay-aftermath-how-to-teach>>.

The reaction to the insensitive essay assignment in a California school district that prompted students to argue against the existence of the Holocaust. The fact that this happened underscores the necessity for Internet research guidelines.

#### Student Resources:

IWitness: USC Shoah Foundation. Watch Testimonies.

<<http://iwitness.usc.edu/SFI/BrowseTopics.aspx>>.

This is probably the easiest site for students to view and gather testimonial resources for their final project. The testimonies are two to three minutes in length and can easily be downloaded into a student project. The testimonies are organized into categories with side bar information and additional suggestions for further research. Provides student work samples. Access to student pages is password protected.

Levi, Primo. Survival In Auschwitz. Trans. Woolf. Collier Books, 1993.

Students will read an excerpt from the memoir - "On the Bottom".

London Jewish Cultural Center. The Holocaust Explained Key Stage 4. 2011.

<<http://www.theholocaustexplained.org/ks4/#.U4NZ6iiVvfg>>.

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It's all here! This is a fantastic site for students to explore. It allows them to answer research questions as well as providing additional background information. It's hard not to spend hours on this site.

Wiesel, Elie. Night. Trans. Stella Rodway. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1982.

Students will read "Arrival at Auschwitz" section of the memoir for an introduction to the theme of dehumanization.

## Appendix

Rita Kesselman: Testimony Transcript

From Holocaust and Human Behavior, Facing History and Ourselves (347)

For three days and three nights, we were taken. Destination unknown. Trains were stopping in villages and train stations, in cities. We were screaming through the windows, "Water, water." We were hungry. The pail in the corner filled up very quickly. And then people went on the floor. The stink, the smell, in the cattle car was terrible. People were changing positions. One was standing up, and one was sitting down. I was alone. I didn't have my parents to cuddle up with. I was sitting there by myself.

After three days and three nights, we arrived in a big field. And that was Auschwitz. Auschwitz was a city, and Birkenau was a suburb. In Birkenau went on all the killing, gassing, and burning the people. There were four crematoriums in Birkenau. When I came into Auschwitz, the trains didn't go to Birkenau. They came into Auschwitz. And we were made, the people that were selected..., they made us come off the train. In front of us, SS men with guns and dogs. And on trucks, more SS men with guns, watching us. And we saw people in striped clothes, helping the people coming off the train. At the time, we didn't know who they were. They were like mutes. They didn't talk. They weren't allowed to talk. They were Jews, most of them, that helped the people come off the train. They were prisoners that had to help the Germans.

We were told to separate the men from the women. On the side were empty trucks waiting. The women and children were told to go on the trucks. And older people. And then, from the younger people were selected, people to go to the right and to the left. At the time, we did not know that the people who were selected to go to the right, would live and the rest would die. About one hundred people were picked from the women to go to work. And we envied the others, because we thought that they would go on the trucks. And after three nights being exhausted and hungry, we had to walk.

It was smoggy and raining. We walked for miles, and as we came closer, we saw like a camp with barbed wires. A band was playing at the gate. And the SS men were watching the camp from towers. A band of women played at the gate. They brought us inside. There were barracks – twenty-five barracks. They put us in an empty barrack on the floor. And we waited all night, not knowing what is going to happen to us.

In the morning, the SS came, women and men SS, and they took us to another barracks. It was a bathhouse. We were made to undress, leave the clothes on one side, and they took us to the other side. Every person was given a tattoo. My number was thirty thousand seven hundred seventy-five...

Our hair was shaved and we were given striped clothes and wooden shoes. And that was our uniform for the two years I was in Auschwitz. I never bathed. I never saw water. I never had water to drink.