

Chapters 1 and 2 study Questions

1. Having read the original opening in the preface, why would Wiesel change the way he began his novel? How are the two openings different?
2. Describe Wiesel's community at the beginning of the story. How does young Elie view the world and his place in it?
3. How does Elie talk about his father? Describe Shlomo Wiesel.
4. How important is religion to the way Eliezer defines his identity?
5. Who is Moishe the Beadle? Why is he so important to young Elie?
6. What do the Jews of Sighet know about the outside world in 1941? How do they respond to what they know?
7. What are some incidents that suggest or foreshadow the coming danger to the Sighet Jews? Why doesn't the community believe it is in danger or listen to Moishe the Beadle's warnings?
8. How do the Jews of Sighet react to the arrival of the Germans? The creation of the ghettos? Their own deportation? How do you account for these responses?
9. How did Wiesel feel about the Hungarian police?
10. Who was Martha and what events happened after she visited the Wiesel family in the ghetto?

Chapter 2

11. To what does Elie Wiesel compare the world? What could be his purpose in doing this?
12. What are the conditions on the Jews' train journey? How do the Jews react to Madame Schächter's behavior? What does this reveal about human nature?
13. What does Madame Schächter see in her vision?

14. What connection might there be between Madame Schächter's treatment on the train and possible future events in the concentration camp? What are some other ways that Wiesel foreshadows, or hints at, the horrors ahead?
15. Even though it was 1944, and Nazi extermination of Jews had begun years earlier, the Sighet Jews had very few facts about it. Do you think it is possible in today's world for a community to know so little, to be so unprepared? Explain.
16. When does Elie say they left their illusions behind? Why does he say this?
17. What prayer was Elie's father using when he was herded off of the train? Why was this so unusual?
18. Why do you think the Germans take away the inmates' personal belongings? Their clothing? Why do they cut off their hair? Tattoo a number on each person's arm?
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20. How does Eliezer respond when his father is beaten for the first time? How does that response affect the way he sees himself? What does he fear is happening to him?
21. Wiesel, in recounting the first night in the concentration camp says, "Never shall I forget that night, the first night in the camp, which has turned my life into one long night..." What does it mean for a life to be turned into "one long night"?