

Before You Read

Night chapters 1 and 2

FOCUS ACTIVITY

What events can suddenly change the course of a person's life?

Discuss

In a small group, discuss events that unexpectedly change people's lives—a natural disaster or death of a loved one, for example. Discuss possible effects and emotional reactions you or others might have to each event.

Setting a Purpose

Read to find out how young Elie Wiesel's life is profoundly and forever changed.

BACKGROUND

Time and Place

The town of Sighet, where *Night* begins, has been part of both Romania and Hungary at various times. During Wiesel's childhood, Sighet was home to 15,000 Jews. Most were devout Hasidic Jews whose lives focused on family, religion, and learning. Like most of their Jewish neighbors, the Wiesels were poor but intensely committed to education. For young Elie that meant spending his days and evenings studying sacred Jewish texts such as the Torah and Talmud. At the age of twelve, Wiesel began exploring *cabbala*, or Jewish mysticism—an approach to Bible study that analyzes hidden meanings in the text.

As World War II progressed, Wiesel's father Chlomo began helping Jews escape from Poland, risking his life to help others escape Nazi persecution. Chlomo continued to believe that he and his family would not be separated.

Did You Know?

Judaism dates back nearly 4,000 years. It shares many ideas with—and in fact is an ancestor to—both Christianity and Islam. These three religions all originated in the same part of the world, the area we now call the Middle East. The sacred texts of all three religions overlap in several ways. The Hebrew Bible is what Christians call the Old Testament. Many of these Bible stories also appear in the Islamic sacred text, the Qur'an.

Two important Jewish holy days are Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Rosh Hashanah is the Jewish New Year and usually occurs in September. Ten days later comes Yom Kippur, which is a day of fasting and atonement. Passover is a springtime ritual that celebrates the Jews' escape from slavery in Egypt.

VOCABULARY PREVIEW

compatriots [kəm pə'trē əts] *n.* fellow countrymen

edict [ē'dikt] *n.* official statement; law

expound [iks paund'] *v.* to set forth in detail

firmament [fur'mə mənt] *n.* the sky, or heavens

hermetically [hur met'ik lē] *adv.* completely sealed; airtight

pestilential [pes'tə len'shəl] *adj.* filled with disease; contagious

phylacteries [fi lak'tər ēz] *n.* small boxes containing scripture; worn by some Jewish men for daily prayer

pillage [pil'ij] *v.* to rob with open violence

premonition [prē'mə nish'ən] *n.* anticipation of an event, usually negative, even without actual warning

truncheon [trun'chən] *n.* a police officer's stick