

Before You Read

Night chapters 6 through 9

FOCUS ACTIVITY

What does it mean to feel hopeless? How do you think hopelessness affects people's lives?

Quickwrite

Describe on paper a time when you or a friend felt hopeless. What circumstances caused this feeling? How did you or your friend respond to the situation?

Setting a Purpose

Read to find out how Wiesel confronts and responds to the increasing hopelessness of his situation.

BACKGROUND

Time and Place

The Allies invaded Europe on D-Day, June 6, 1944. At the time of Wiesel's imprisonment in 1944, Germany was already losing the war. This reality only inflamed Hitler's desire to exterminate the Jews. Gassings and mass shootings escalated despite calls from the German army for more war production laborers. Many camps were closed in the spring of 1944, not long after Wiesel had reached Auschwitz. While many non-Jews were sent to labor camps, many Jews were sent to the Auschwitz gas chambers.

Did You Know?

Psychologists who study Holocaust survivors have recognized a pattern of reaction to the concentration camp experience. At first, prisoners were stunned and paralyzed by the horror. Many did not survive this early shock, in fact, the highest death toll was among new prisoners. Even if they weren't selected for death, they fell ill, were grief-stricken by the loss of family members, became exhausted, or simply gave up hope in the face of evil. Those who survived these early experiences recovered some sense of balance. Many have reported that they separated themselves from their surroundings and even their bodies. They focused on surviving one day at a time. With each new onslaught of horror or loss, prisoners repeated this process. Some people became what prisoners called *muselmänner* or "walking dead." If a prisoner fell into this state for too long, death was probably imminent. Viktor E. Frankl's book, *Man's Search for Meaning*, offers insightful clues as to why some people survived the psychological horror of concentration camps and others did not.

VOCABULARY PREVIEW

contagion [kən tə'jən] *n.* an influence that spreads rapidly

embarkation [em'bær kə'shən] *n.* beginning of a journey

encumbrance [en kum'brəns] *n.* burden

indeterminate [in'di tur'mi nit] *adj.* vague, not fixed in advance

rivet [ri'v'it] *v.* to hold attention tightly, as if physically attached

semblance [sem'bləns] *n.* outward appearance, but with a sense of falsity

vigilance [vij'ləns] *n.* state of extreme watchfulness