Using the DOCUMENT-BASED QUESTIONS Technique for Literature:

ELIE WIESEL’S NIGHT

by Kristina Janeway
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Elie Wiesel’s Night

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# Table of Contents

About the Author .......................................................................................................................... 3
About This Book ............................................................................................................................. 4
Correlation to Common Core College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards ................... 5
  Writing Standards Correlation .................................................................................................. 5
  Reading Standards Correlation ................................................................................................. 6
  Speaking and Listening Standards Correlation ........................................................................ 7
To the Teacher ............................................................................................................................... 8
How to Use This Book .................................................................................................................. 9
Suggestions for Teaching with DBQs ......................................................................................... 11
Handouts ...................................................................................................................................... 12
  Handout 1: Paragraph Frame for Persuasive Writing ............................................................... 12
  Handout 2: The Thesis Formula ............................................................................................... 13
  Handout 3: Five-Paragraph Essay: Keyhole Method Graphic Organizer .............................. 14
  Handout 4: Five-Paragraph Essay: Keyhole Method Blank Graphic Organizer ..................... 15
  Handout 5: DBQ Writing Rubric ............................................................................................... 16
  Handout 6: Writing Activity: Memoir ....................................................................................... 17
  Handout 7: Read More About It! .............................................................................................. 19
  Handout 8: Map Analysis Activity ........................................................................................... 20
  Map Activity Rubric .................................................................................................................. 27
  Handout 9: Visual Analysis ....................................................................................................... 28
  Basic Visual Analysis Outline .................................................................................................. 29

Using the Document-Based Questions Technique for Literature: Elie Wiesel’s *Night* .................. 31
  Author Biography ..................................................................................................................... 31
  Setting and Context .................................................................................................................. 32
  Major Characters ....................................................................................................................... 33
  Synopsis ................................................................................................................................... 34
DBQ 1: The “Jewish Question” and the Nazis’ Final Solution ................................................................. 37

Statement and Unit Question .................................................................................................................. 37
Document A: Speech by Hans Frank ...................................................................................................... 38
Document B: “From the Testimony of Yaacov Schwartzberg about the Jewish Police Deceiving Jews, Ghetto Vilna, 1943” .................................................................................. 40
Document C: “Family Album,” by Amos Neufeld .................................................................................. 41
Document D: To Be Shot as Dangerous Enemies of the Third Reich, cartoon, by Arthur Szyk .................. 43

DBQ 2: Discrimination and Restrictions ................................................................................................. 45

Statement and Unit Question .................................................................................................................. 45
Document B: “From the Testimony of Stephanie S. Sucher about the Poisonous Effect of Anti-Jewish Propaganda” .............................................................................................................. 48
Document D: Travelers Reaching Stockholm from Berlin, cartoon, by Carl Rose ............................... 52

DBQ 3: The Camps .................................................................................................................................. 53

Statement and Unit Question .................................................................................................................. 53
Document B: “From the Testimony of Don Krausz about a Sample Menu at Ravensbrück” ............... 56
Document C: “Saving the Children,” by Frieda Singer ........................................................................... 57
Document D: Russian Tourist Office, cartoon, by Saul Sandberg .......................................................... 60

DBQ 4: Mass Genocide .......................................................................................................................... 63

Statement and Unit Question .................................................................................................................. 63
Document A: Report No. 51 [Excerpt from “The ‘Final Solution’: Documents Regarding Mass Murder’], chart, by Heinrich Himmler .................................................................................................. 64
Document B: “A Call for Revenge From the Will[s] of Some of the Last Prisoners at the Chelmno Death Camp” ..................................................................................................................... 65
Document C: “Shipment to Maidanek,” by Ephim Fogel ........................................................................ 67
Document D: Better Go Easy for a While..., cartoon etc, by Carl Rose .................................................. 69

Answer Key ............................................................................................................................................. 70
About the Author

Kristina Janeway is a Pre-AP, GT, and PSAT/Pre-AP English teacher at Terra Vista Middle School in Lubbock, Texas. In her 21-year career, Kristina has spent 19 years working with gifted and talented as well as Pre-AP, AP, and full-inclusion students in the West Texas area. She has written curriculum for grades seven through twelve, designed an academic vocabulary course for the high school, designed a Pre-AP/PSAT English course for eighth graders, designed a SAT/ACT course for seventh graders in the Duke University Talent Search Program, and designed the seventh and eighth grade GT course. Kristina has presented at numerous state and national conferences, several districts, and various Advanced Placement Summer Institutes for universities while working as a consultant for the College Board. She has completed a master’s degree in Education Administration and holds a Principal’s Certificate. Kristina was the recipient of the Frank and Nancy Newton Excellence in Education Award from the Beaumont Foundation in 2010 and the Panhandle South Plains TAGT Teacher of the Year award for 2014. Most recently, Kristina has published several books on writing instruction, reading materials, and poster projects with Teacher’s Discovery and writing assessments with Kamico®.
About This Book

English instructors, by nature, want students to make connections between the literature they read and the real world. At the same time, they need to create a strong vertical team through the introduction and practice of various concepts. In order for students to comprehend the more complex, classic texts of secondary ELA, the understanding of the context and its relationship to themes, character, plot, and conflict development is vital to making the words on the page come to life and unearthing the significance for the modern student.

*Using the Document-Based Questions Technique for Literature: Elie Wiesel’s Night* is designed with the idea of presenting the context of the reading selection while crossing the barrier of the page to bring a deeper understanding to students through the use of primary sources, poetry, various nonfiction selections, and graphics. Each document relates specifically to the main text through themes, topics, and/or motifs to bring something unique and somewhat unexpected to the instruction of the students. Teachers can use the prepared primary source, literary, and graphic materials as curriculum support or extension activities to make the analysis of *Night* a more interdisciplinary experience for the student.

As students work through the documents in order to answer the document-based questions, the goal is for them to see that the literature they are asked to read is relevant in the 21st century. The interaction the students must have with the documents and the text will create pathways for long-term memory and give them the tools to continuously look for connections across subject areas as well as in real-life events. Showing students how to discover relevance creates life-long learners.

We want students to be able to answer the question: “Why are we still reading this selection and studying this material?” The variety of genres addressed in the DBQs will heighten interest and lead students to be more engaged, inquisitive learners while giving you, the teacher, the opportunity to extend assessments from the typical to the exceptional.
To the Teacher

Remind your students that Elie Wiesel wrote *Night* many years after his liberation from the Nazi concentration camps. In fact, the foreword by François Mauriac is a great place to start in introducing the author and the unusual circumstances surrounding the writing of the book.

Since the selection is a memoir, the use of the foreword provides you an opportunity to discuss the unique origins of the book from the trepidations of the interview to the frustrations of finding just the right word for the probable translations.

The foreword gives you the chance to engage in an in-depth character analysis of Elie Wiesel’s post-camp experiences, which the students would be unfamiliar with. The foreword would also provide the students with the opportunity to make predictions about the circumstances that brought him to the point when he is interviewing François Mauriac.
How to Use This Book

Using the Document-Based Questions Technique for Literature: Elie Wiesel’s Night is divided into seven units:

- handouts
- novel background and synopsis
- four DBQ units arranged around a thematic question
- Answer Key

Handouts to copy and distribute include:

- Paragraph Frame for Persuasive Writing
- The Thesis Formula
- Five-Paragraph Essay: Keyhole Method Graphic Organizer
- Five-Paragraph Essay: Keyhole Method Blank Graphic Organizer
- DBQ Writing Rubric
- Writing Activity: Memoir
- Read More About It!
- Map Analysis Activity (inline live links and source links allow use in download and print versions)
- Map Activity Rubric
- Visual Analysis
- Basic Visual Analysis Outline

These are merely suggestions but are provided to streamline the writing and grading process.

The background and synopsis unit includes:

- an author biography
- setting and context
- a major characters list with descriptions
- a synopsis of the novel
Each **DBQ** unit focuses on a thematic question based on the novel, and features four documents related to the theme. These documents include:

- editorial/political cartoons
- poetry
- newspaper articles
- blog posts
- speeches
- informational texts

Students read and analyze the documents to make connections and answer the unit question in the form of an essay.

Sections within each unit feature:

- **Guiding Questions for Understanding**, which the teacher may assign to students to answer individually or use for whole class discussion.
- **Guiding Questions Writing Activity** allows students to build toward the final five-paragraph essay.

After students have completed the writing activities in the unit, they are to choose the three answers/paragraphs that they believe provide the strongest support for their position on the unit question. When writing the complete essay, students will connect the three topics with appropriate transitions.

The **Answer Key** contains possible answers for the Guiding Questions for Understanding as well as for the writing activity. There is also additional information for each document that may relate to audience, purpose, historical background, and author’s point of view. This additional information may be used by the teacher to help introduce each document.

Copy the unit and distribute it to the students. Use the DBQ units separately or as a whole. The units may represent a two- to three-day lesson, depending on how they are used. The analysis of the documents along with the Guiding Questions for Understanding may be completed in the classroom and/or as homework. The writing activities should be completed in the classroom.
Suggestions for Teaching with DBQs

There are a number of ways for you to use this book in the context of teaching *Night* to your students.

**Pre-Reading Assessment:**

As a formative assessment, select DBQs to introduce the students to the context of the book. The following four DBQ topics will provide them with a strong context for the plot development of the book once they begin:

- **DBQ 1:** “The ‘Jewish Question’ and the Nazis’ Final Solution”
- **DBQ 2:** “Discrimination and Restrictions”
- **DBQ 3:** “The Camps”
- **DBQ 4:** “Mass Genocide”

**Spiraling the DBQs as Extension Activities:**

Once again, given the topics of the DBQs, you can stop the novel and do a DBQ as either a summative or formative assessment of student comprehension. If you want to provide a stronger context and create a formative assessment before the section of the novel dealing with a particular topic, stop the students, have them read and analyze before the section, complete the DBQ, and then continue with the analysis of the book.

If you want to provide the students with the ability to compare/contrast the treatment of the topic in the book to that of the materials in the DBQ as more of a summative assessment, read and analyze the specific section of the novel, complete the DBQ, then discuss the similarities and differences among each selection’s treatment of the topic.

**Post-Reading Assessment:**

As a summative assessment, select DBQs to allow students to connect the context of the book to their own lives. The following four DBQ topics will provide them with a stronger comprehension of Elie Wiesel’s experiences and allow them to make different text-to-text and text-to-world connections:

- **DBQ 1:** “The ‘Jewish Question’ and the Nazis’ Final Solution”
- **DBQ 2:** “Discrimination and Restrictions”
- **DBQ 3:** “The Camps”
- **DBQ 4:** “Mass Genocide”
Author Biography

Eliezer Wiesel was born September 30, 1928, in a small, predominantly Jewish village in Romania. The Nazis invaded Wiesel’s village in March 1944 when Wiesel was 15 years old. Wiesel and his family, along with the other village residents, were rounded up and deported to Auschwitz. His parents and his younger sister ultimately perished in the camps.

After the liberation of the camps in 1945, Wiesel studied in Paris at the Sorbonne. He began writing for a French newspaper. A mentor encouraged him to write about his experiences in the camps, and thus he began his life’s work. In 1958, he published his memoir *Night* (originally published in French, as *La Nuit*). He has since written more than 30 books on the Holocaust.

New York was home to Wiesel for several decades. In 1956, he was in a catastrophic auto accident, which left him confined to a wheelchair for a year. During this time, he decided to become a United States citizen and he became a key figure in the country’s remembrance of the Holocaust. He was chairman of the United States Holocaust Memorial Council from 1980 to 1986. He received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1986, and served as a Professor of Humanities at Boston University. Elie Wiesel died July 2, 2016.
Setting and Context

The novel is a personal account of the author’s horrendous experience as a young teenager living first in the ghettos of Sighet and then in the concentration camps of Buchenwald and Auschwitz.

The overall setting of the novel is the almost unimaginable concentration “work” camps in Europe during World War II, when the Nazis were rounding up and putting Jews and other “undesirables” in concentration camps across Europe. The author chooses to begin his autobiographical work at the start of 1941 in his home town of Sighet, Transylvania (modern day Romania), in order to show the sharp contrast between what life for a Jewish family was like prior to the war, with its traditions, security, and overall belief in the goodness of people, and that extreme barbarism of the camps. The description of the brutal conditions within the concentration camps and the forced death marches experienced by the author completes the stark contrast between “home” and the concentration camp.

Although the account of the events which Wiesel saw and experienced is being remembered years later, it is clear from the graphic imagery of the novel that the emotional and physical pain he experienced is engraved in his memory. The transformation from a teenager with a strong faith in God to one who has come to believe, like the philosopher Nietzsche, that “God is dead” is dealt with very poignantly in the novel and gives the reader the opportunity to explore his or her own faith or beliefs.

The love and respect that Elie shows his father, in direct contrast with others who would fight their own loved ones for a piece of bread, encourages us to think about the principles and values we hold most dear, as well as how strong our convictions are when confronted with extreme hatred, intolerance, and cruelty. What makes us human, and how quickly can we lose that sense of humanity when following an ideology or a charismatic leader?

The novel Night is unique in its perspective on the Holocaust. Wiesel recounts his actual experiences as a teenager suffering the extreme conditions in the concentration camps of World War II. Wiesel and his family endure both physical and emotional torture at the hands of Hitler’s officers in the death camps. In the end, Elie witnesses the death of his family, as well as the death of his innocence.
DBQ 1: THE “JEWISH QUESTION” AND THE NAZIS’ FINAL SOLUTION

Directions: After reading and discussing the documents, you will compose a final essay that smoothly integrates your interpretation of Documents A through D and your knowledge of the events in Night to answer the unit question. Exemplary scores will only be earned by an essay that both cites at least three key pieces of evidence from the documents and draws on outside knowledge of the novel.

Review the following documents and answer the questions under each to explore different facets of the unit question.

It was clear that the Nazis, under the leadership of Adolf Hitler, openly targeted the Jews as well as other populations determined to be undesirable to the ultimate goals of the Aryan Race. The real question, however, was what to do with these people that did not fit into Hitler’s mold. In the foreword to Night, François Mauriac writes:

“For today, thanks to recently discovered documents, the evidence shows that in the early days of their accession to power, the Nazis in Germany set out to build a society in which there simply would be no room for Jews. Toward the end of their reign, their goal changed: they decided to leave behind a world in ruins in which Jews would seem never to have existed. This is why everywhere in Russia, in the Ukraine, and in Lithuania, the Einsatzgruppen carried out the Final Solution by turning their machine guns on more than a million Jews, men, women, and children, and throwing them into huge mass graves, dug just moments before by the victims themselves. Special units would then disinter the corpses and burn them. Thus, for the first time in history, Jews were not only killed twice but denied burial in a cemetery.

It is obvious that the war which Hitler and his accomplices waged was a war not only against Jewish men, women, and children, but also against Jewish religion, Jewish culture, Jewish tradition, therefore Jewish memory.”

UNIT QUESTION:
Why were so many of the Jews taken by surprise by the Nazis’ Final Solution?
Note: Hans Frank, the governor of Occupied Poland, made the following speech as closing remarks to a cabinet session in Cracow, Poland. It is excerpted below.

**Speech by Hans Frank**
Governor of Occupied Poland  
December 16, 1941

As far as the Jews are concerned, I want to tell you quite frankly that they must be done away with in one way or another. The Fuehrer said once: “Should united Jewry again succeed in provoking a world-war, the blood of not only the nations which have been forced into the war by them, will be shed, but the Jew will have found his end in Europe”. […]

But what should be done with the Jews? Do you think they will be settled down in the Ostland [Nazi-occupied eastern Poland], in villages? This is what we were told in Berlin: Why all this bother? We can do nothing with them either in the Ostland nor in the Reich kommissariat [the zone of occupied countries: Lithuania, Estonia, and Latvia]. So liquidate them yourself.

Gentlemen, I must ask you to rid yourself of all feeling of pity. We must annihilate the Jews, wherever we find them and wherever it is possible, in order to maintain there the structure of the Reich as a whole. […]

The Jews represent for us also extraordinarily malignant gluttons. We have now approximately 2,500,000 of them in the General Government [Nazi-occupied Poland], perhaps with the Jewish mixtures and everything that goes with it, 3,500,000 Jews. We cannot shoot or poison those 3,500,000 Jews, but we shall nevertheless be able to take measures, which will lead, somehow, to their annihilation, and this in connection with the gigantic measures to be determined in discussions from the Reich. The General Government must become free of Jews, the same as the Reich. Where and how this is to be achieved is a matter for the offices which we must appoint and create here.

Guiding Questions for Understanding:

1. What were some of the reasons given in the speech for the targeting of the Jews?
2. What is the meaning of the word “liquidate” in the context of the second paragraph?
3. Why would Hans Frank warn the people to “rid [themselves] of all pity” toward these people?
4. Why do you think Hans Frank describes the Jews as “malignant gluttons” in the fourth paragraph?
5. Why does Hans Frank say that they “cannot shot or poison those 3,500,000 Jews, but we... will lead them somehow to their annihilation” in the fourth paragraph?

Guiding Questions Writing Activity:

- On a separate sheet of paper, compose a well-developed paragraph explaining your perceptions of the rationale behind the Nazis’ Final Solution. Be sure to provide textual evidence from the documents to support your observations.
“From the Testimony of Yaacov Schwartzberg about the Jewish Police Deceiving Jews, Ghetto Vilna, 1943”

In 1943, I remember it was summer time. I don’t exactly know which month it was. Suddenly we got some people in the ghetto, they brought some people in the ghetto that lived across the street from the house that the gates where we were, the court where I lived inside, across “Rodnitska”. We lived 14, I think it was 16 or something like that. No, I think it was an odd number, 17 or something like that. I’m not sure what number.

They had several hundred people there across and the Jewish police were watching over them. These people were brought from the surrounding areas from Vilna. They called them the “nitige”. They came from the country, surrounding towns, small towns and villages, that were brought into the ghetto. And they were there for several weeks. They had food with them. They were much better fed than we were, those people. They had more supplies. And the Jewish police, at that time they put on hats, like officer hats, they looked like German hats, and they gave them handguns and they rounded up those people, they took them and they told them they’re taking them to a different area, a camp, and with the help of the Jewish police, they were taken to Panar [an execution site] and killed and shot. These people. They were fooled by the ghetto, the administration. That I remember well. It was one of the dirty episodes that the Jewish police did in the Vilna ghetto. This was in the summertime of 1943.


Guiding Questions for Understanding:
1. Why do you think Yaacov Schwartzberg was taken by surprise by the Jewish Police?
2. What factors in Yaacov Schwartzberg’s testimony gave a false sense of security within the ghetto?
3. Why do you think the members of the Jewish police so willingly helped with the tasks required of them by the Nazis?
4. What was the tone of this testimony and why?

Guiding Questions Writing Activity:
- On a separate sheet of paper, compose a well-developed paragraph explaining why you believe many of the Jewish people blindly followed the various authority figures. Be sure to provide textual evidence from the documents to support your observations.
“Family Album”
By Amos Neufeld

My father stands in the picture
with his parents, brothers and sisters,
(The gas and sealed cattle-cars
are still two years away.) They smile
not knowing this is the last time
they will be gathered happily together,
that nothing guards their world,
that sky will be all that remains.

Their eyes rest peacefully
on one another and on the camera
while tomorrow winds its arms
and twists tighter round their necks.
Yes it is still too early
to see the black boots coming:
smoke floats carelessly from a cigarette
and children go to summer camp.

We see them—not yet lost,
standing on the precipice of wind and fire,
their image of vanished innocence,
captured and in our memory engraved.
Still they stand, unsuspecting,
composed, like any other happy family,
while their black and white world rushes toward...
is already on the final page.

Guiding Questions for Understanding:

1. Why does the author of the poem choose to juxtapose the future with the serenity of the family photo?
2. What was the author’s purpose in the use of the parentheses in stanza one?
3. What mood does that author’s diction create for the reader and why?
4. In the last two lines of the poem, why does the author use the ellipses?
5. What is the “final page”?

Guiding Questions Writing Activity:

- On a separate sheet of paper, compose a well-developed paragraph explaining why you think the author of the poem wanted to humanize the victims of the Holocaust for the reader. What was the writer trying to accomplish with the message to the reader? Be sure to provide textual evidence from the documents to support your observations.
To Be Shot as Dangerous Enemies of the Third Reich
By Arthur Syzk


Directions: Using the Visual Analysis handout as a guide, answer the following questions individually or with a group.

Guiding Questions for Understanding:

1. What was the purpose of the physical depiction of the Jews in the cartoon?
2. What was the purpose of the facial expressions of the soldiers in the cartoon?
3. Why did the artist choose to include armed soldiers in the cartoon?
4. What conflicts could be identified within the cartoon and why?

Based on the quotation and the documents, write an essay that both cites at least three key pieces of evidence from the documents and draws on outside knowledge of Night to answer the question: Why were so many of the Jews taken by surprise by the Nazis’ Final Solution?