

ENGLISH 846

Assignment: Critical Analysis
Text: *Night* Elie Wiesel
Essay Length: 5 full pages (minimum)

Choose a passage or section from *Night* and write a 5 full page analytical essay about how and how well you think that writing communicates its ideas and conveys meaning.

The primary goal of this assignment is to begin learning how to link *what* a writer says with *how* (and how well) he or she says it. The task is NOT to agree or disagree with the writer's message, or to offer your own moral, political, religious, etc. opinions about it. You should be evaluating the **clarity and effectiveness of the writer's words and rhetorical strategies**, *not* the truth of his or her ideas. Ask these kinds of big critical questions of the text from the very start:

- *What specific writing decisions (also called "rhetorical strategies") does this writer use to put forth his or her arguments?*
- *What makes these strategies effective, or not?*
- *How do the methods of communication in a given piece of writing either help or hurt a writer's message?*
- *How exactly does the writer succeed or fail in making his or her points?*

Look closely at your selection: how does Wiesel build his story to maximize the emotional weight of the moment but still unfold a story with real information that we can use to make sense of the narrative and imagine the events as he would want us to do? Is there rich and detailed description? What's the pacing of the writing like (fast? slow?)? What kinds and how frequently are historical references used, and why? Does the author comment on his own narrative, or simply tell his story? How is punctuation and paragraphing used to emphasize certain moments or points? Is this writing personal in nature, or journalistic, or a political tract? How does it treat us as readers – angrily, sympathetically, earnestly, ironically? How (differently) does it treat the subjects of its story – Germans and Jews? What does Wiesel have to say about the war at large going on around them at the time his story unfolds – how is the historical moment used to contextualize his story for us? What does he want us to take away from the writing? How do you know that? How effectively does he convey his/her messages? Why do you think so? What does Wiesel actually *do* in his writing to convince you of the truth of his "position" (the "subtext" of the story), if he has one?

Your **thesis statement** should lay out a clear position on what you believe to be the ultimate success or failure of a given element or set of elements in your selection. It should state a clear position on what you take to be the primary effectiveness or ineffectiveness of a few writing strategies used in the work. State clearly why it is you think the way you do about the text, and use good textual examples to support and illustrate what you believe to be true about the piece of writing. Examine 3 to 4 (at the most) different writing strategies in order to evaluate *how and how well* Wiesel tells his story.

In your **introduction**, introduce and summarize the selection you are examining *before* stating your primary thesis about it. Then, your thesis should argue that the writing either succeeds or fails (or something in between) to deliver its message(s) effectively **for specific reasons you list briefly in your thesis sentence(s)**, and then much more thoroughly in the body of your essay discussion. **Remember the three things a good thesis always requires: 1) a clear and narrowly focused topic, 2) the position you are taking on that topic, 3) and the specific reasons why you are taking that position.**

In your **body paragraphs**, clearly state the single topic point of each paragraph at the start, and then introduce direct textual evidence in the form of quotes or paraphrases. Remember to use quotation marks if you use direct quotes, and always put page numbers in parentheses after the textual evidence, whether it's a direct quote or a rephrasing of textual evidence in your own words (this is called a "paraphrase"). Your quotes and/or paraphrases should always support and illustrate your primary paragraph topic, but you should **never** let an author you've cited speak *for* you: use textual

references to *echo* and *amplify* your own ideas that you have already offered in your discussion. Next, spend several sentences analyzing and discussing your topic point and the textual evidence that you have included, and then link us back to your paragraph topic point and the thesis argument once again for continuity and to provide a transition or bridge to the next paragraph discussion.

I'll be looking for you to show competence in these areas:

1. Good grammatical control of your sentences **and** A narrow, focused thesis argument
2. Body paragraphs that offer lots of discussion **and** Textual examples that support each paragraph's main point
3. A clear description of the main point of the text at the beginning of your discussion
4. An evaluation of the effectiveness of the writing based on your assessment of the writer's specific method(s) of argumentation

Remember:

- Fully introduce and summarize the essay you're analyzing before you begin your analysis
- Be specific in your argumentation: Develop a sound main argument in your first paragraph that revolves around a single point you wish to make about the selection
- Use lots of **textual evidence** to support your discussion – body paragraphs that do not offer direct or paraphrased textual support will not be credited toward your required essay page total
- Develop your body paragraphs by announcing a single supporting point, then by introducing and inserting a textual quotation to provide evidence of your point, then by explaining and discussing that evidence and tying it back to the main point of your paragraph
- Cite your textual quotations with a page number in parentheses after the quotation, and follow all other formatting guidelines outlined in the **The Rules: An MLA Primer**
- Use academic language: Write only in the **present tense**, even when speaking of a text that has been written in the past: write "the author **says**," NOT "the author **said**"
- Use academic language: Write only in the **3rd person** (use: he, she, it, they, the authors, the reader, etc.). **DO NOT use me, I, you, or your anywhere in your essay – submissions that do not follow this rule will be returned ungraded and marked down a full letter grade**

Type your summary in Microsoft Word or a similar word processing program. Make sure you spend adequate time proofreading it for clarity, spelling, and sentence construction. Read your work aloud to yourself in a quiet place, or have someone else you trust read it to you – this is a very good way of catching mistakes that your eye can easily miss when rereading your draft work on the computer or on the page. Please make sure your paper formatting matches exactly the model I have provided in the **Sample Format Page** sheet on the website. Please also make sure that your language has been fully proofread and edited so that it does not contain any of the sentence level errors covered in the **Proofreading Notes** sheet on the website. Remember to use the **Sample Student Essay** provided on the website as a model to help you build your own essay.

Good luck. Start on this assignment early, and ask lots of questions to clarify the assignment for yourself. Remember too that I am happy to look at draft work if you wish to show it to me, providing helpful feedback and comments as you rework your essays for submission.