

Name: _____ Class: _____

A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings

By Gabriel García Márquez
1972

Gabriel García Márquez (1927-2014) was a Colombian novelist, short-story writer, screenwriter, and journalist. He is considered one of the most influential writers of the 20th century and received the 1982 Nobel Prize in Literature. In this short story, an old man with wings disturbs a quiet town after crashing into a family's yard. As you read, take notes on the reactions of the people who see the old man with enormous wings.

[1] On the third day of rain they had killed so many crabs inside the house that Pelayo had to cross his drenched courtyard and throw them into the sea, because the newborn child had a temperature all night and they thought it was due to the stench. The world had been sad since Tuesday. Sea and sky were a single ash-gray thing and the sands of the beach, which on March nights glimmered like powdered light, had become a stew of mud and rotten shellfish. The light was so weak at noon that when Pelayo was coming back to the house after throwing away the crabs, it was hard for him to see what it was that was moving and groaning in the rear of the courtyard. He had to go very close to see that it was an old man, a very old man, lying face down in the mud, who, in spite of his tremendous efforts, couldn't get up, impeded by his enormous wings.



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Frightened by that nightmare, Pelayo ran to get Elisenda, his wife, who was putting compresses on the sick child, and he took her to the rear of the courtyard. They both looked at the fallen body with a mute stupor.¹ He was dressed like a ragpicker.² There were only a few faded hairs left on his bald skull and very few teeth in his mouth, and his pitiful condition of a drenched great-grandfather took away any sense of grandeur he might have had. His huge buzzard wings, dirty and half-plucked, were forever entangled in the mud. They looked at him so long and so closely that Pelayo and Elisenda very soon overcame their surprise and in the end found him familiar. Then they dared speak to him, and he answered in an incomprehensible dialect with a strong sailor's voice. That was how they skipped over the inconvenience of the wings and quite intelligently concluded that he was a lonely castaway from some foreign ship wrecked by the storm. And yet, they called in a neighbor woman who knew everything about life and death to see him, and all she needed was one look to show them their mistake.

"He's an angel," she told them. "He must have been coming for the child, but the poor fellow is so old that the rain knocked him down."

1. **Stupor (noun):** a state of near-unconsciousness or insensibility
 2. a person who picks up rags and other waste material on the streets for a livelihood

On the following day everyone knew that a flesh-and-blood angel was held captive in Pelayo's house. Against the judgment of the wise neighbor woman, for whom angels in those times were the fugitive³ survivors of a celestial conspiracy, they did not have the heart to club him to death. Pelayo watched over him all afternoon from the kitchen, armed with his bailiff's⁴ club, and before going to bed he dragged him out of the mud and locked him up with the hens in the wire chicken coop. In the middle of the night, when the rain stopped, Pelayo and Elisenda were still killing crabs. A short time afterward the child woke up without a fever and with a desire to eat. Then they felt magnanimous⁵ and decided to put the angel on a raft with fresh water and provisions for three days and leave him to his fate on the high seas. But when they went out into the courtyard with the first light of dawn, they found the whole neighborhood in front of the chicken coop having fun with the angel, without the slightest reverence, tossing him things to eat through the openings in the wire as if he weren't a supernatural creature but a circus animal.

- [5] Father Gonzaga arrived before seven o'clock, alarmed at the strange news. By that time onlookers less frivolous than those at dawn had already arrived and they were making all kinds of conjectures concerning the captive's future. The simplest among them thought that he should be named mayor of the world. Others of sterner mind felt that he should be promoted to the rank of five-star general in order to win all wars. Some visionaries hoped that he could be put to stud⁶ in order to implant the earth a race of winged wise men who could take charge of the universe. But Father Gonzaga, before becoming a priest, had been a robust woodcutter. Standing by the wire, he reviewed his catechism⁷ in an instant and asked them to open the door so that he could take a close look at that pitiful man who looked more like a huge decrepit⁸ hen among the fascinated chickens. He was lying in the corner drying his open wings in the sunlight among the fruit peels and breakfast leftovers that the early risers had thrown him. Alien to the impertinences⁹ of the world, he only lifted his antiquarian¹⁰ eyes and murmured something in his dialect when Father Gonzaga went into the chicken coop and said good morning to him in Latin. The parish priest had his first suspicion of an imposter when he saw that he did not understand the language of God or know how to greet His ministers. Then he noticed that seen close up he was much too human: he had an unbearable smell of the outdoors, the back side of his wings was strewn with parasites and his main feathers had been mistreated by terrestrial winds, and nothing about him measured up to the proud dignity of angels. Then he came out of the chicken coop and in a brief sermon warned the curious against the risks of being ingenuous.¹¹ He reminded them that the devil had the bad habit of making use of carnival tricks in order to confuse the unwary. He argued that if wings were not the essential element in determining the difference between a hawk and an airplane, they were even less so in the recognition of angels. Nevertheless, he promised to write a letter to his bishop so that the latter would write his primate¹² so that the latter would write to the Supreme Pontiff¹³ in order to get the final verdict from the highest courts.

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3. a person who has escaped from a place or is in hiding
 4. an officer
 5. **Magnanimous** (*adjective*): very generous or forgiving
 6. being bred for offspring
 7. a summary of the principles of Christian religion in the form of questions and answers, used to instruct Christians
 8. **Decrepit** (*adjective*): worn out or ruined because of age or neglect
 9. **Impertinence** (*noun*): lack of respect; rudeness
 10. relating to or dealing in antiques
 11. **Ingenuous** (*adjective*): innocent and unsuspecting
 12. the chief bishop or archbishop of a province
 13. the highest college of priests

His prudence¹⁴ fell on sterile¹⁵ hearts. The news of the captive angel spread with such rapidity that after a few hours the courtyard had the bustle of a marketplace and they had to call in troops with fixed bayonets to disperse the mob that was about to knock the house down. Elisenda, her spine all twisted from sweeping up so much marketplace trash, then got the idea of fencing in the yard and charging five cents admission to see the angel.

The curious came from far away. A traveling carnival arrived with a flying acrobat who buzzed over the crowd several times, but no one paid any attention to him because his wings were not those of an angel but, rather, those of a sidereal¹⁶ bat. The most unfortunate invalids on earth came in search of health: a poor woman who since childhood has been counting her heartbeats and had run out of numbers; a Portuguese man who couldn't sleep because the noise of the stars disturbed him; a sleepwalker who got up at night to undo the things he had done while awake; and many others with less serious ailments. In the midst of that shipwreck disorder that made the earth tremble, Pelayo and Elisenda were happy with fatigue, for in less than a week they had crammed their rooms with money and the line of pilgrims waiting their turn to enter still reached beyond the horizon.

The angel was the only one who took no part in his own act. He spent his time trying to get comfortable in his borrowed nest, befuddled by the hellish heat of the oil lamps and sacramental¹⁷ candles that had been placed along the wire. At first they tried to make him eat some mothballs, which, according to the wisdom of the wise neighbor woman, were the food prescribed for angels. But he turned them down, just as he turned down the papal¹⁸ lunches that the penitents¹⁹ brought him, and they never found out whether it was because he was an angel or because he was an old man that in the end ate nothing but eggplant mush. His only supernatural virtue seemed to be patience. Especially during the first days, when the hens pecked at him, searching for the stellar parasites that proliferated in his wings, and the cripples pulled out feathers to touch their defective parts with, and even the most merciful threw stones at him, trying to get him to rise so they could see him standing. The only time they succeeded in arousing him was when they burned his side with an iron for branding steers, for he had been motionless for so many hours that they thought he was dead. He awoke with a start, ranting in his hermetic²⁰ language and with tears in his eyes, and he flapped his wings a couple of times, which brought on a whirlwind of chicken dung and lunar dust and a gale²¹ of panic that did not seem to be of this world. Although many thought that his reaction had not been one of rage but of pain, from then on they were careful not to annoy him, because the majority understood that his passivity was not that of a hero taking his ease but that of a cataclysm in repose.

Father Gonzaga held back the crowd's frivolity with formulas of maidservant inspiration while awaiting the arrival of a final judgment on the nature of the captive. But the mail from Rome showed no sense of urgency. They spent their time finding out if the prisoner had a navel, if his dialect had any connection with Aramaic, how many times he could fit on the head of a pin, or whether he wasn't just a Norwegian with wings. Those meager letters might have come and gone until the end of time if a providential²² event had not put an end to the priest's tribulations.

14. **Prudence** (*noun*): cautiousness

15. **Sterile** (*adjective*): lacking in stimulating emotional or intellectual quality

16. coming from the stars

17. relating to a religious ceremony or act of the Christian Church that is regarded as a visible sign of spiritual divine grace

18. relating to a pope or the Roman Catholic Church

19. a person who confesses sin and submits to a penance

20. relating to the mystical

21. **Gale** (*noun*): a noisy outburst

22. **Providential** (*adjective*): occurring at a favorable time

[10] It so happened that during those days, among so many other carnival attractions, there arrived in the town the traveling show of the woman who had been changed into a spider for having disobeyed her parents. The admission to see her was not only less than the admission to see the angel, but people were permitted to ask her all manner of questions about her absurd state and to examine her up and down so that no one would ever doubt the truth of her horror. She was a frightful tarantula the size of a ram and with the head of a sad maiden. What was most heartrending, however, was not her outlandish shape but the sincere affliction with which she recounted the details of her misfortune. While still practically a child she had sneaked out of her parents' house to go to a dance, and while she was coming back through the woods after having danced all night without permission, a fearful thunderclap rent the sky in two and through the crack came the lightning bolt of brimstone that changed her into a spider. Her only nourishment came from the meatballs that charitable souls chose to toss into her mouth. A spectacle like that, full of so much human truth and with such a fearful lesson, was bound to defeat without even trying that of a haughty angel who scarcely deigned to look at mortals. Besides, the few miracles attributed to the angel showed a certain mental disorder, like the blind man who didn't recover his sight but grew three new teeth, or the paralytic who didn't get to walk but almost won the lottery, and the leper whose sores sprouted sunflowers. Those consolation miracles, which were more like mocking fun, had already ruined the angel's reputation when the woman who had been changed into a spider finally crushed him completely. That was how Father Gonzaga was cured forever of his insomnia and Pelayo's courtyard went back to being as empty as during the time it had rained for three days and crabs walked through the bedrooms.

The owners of the house had no reason to lament. With the money they saved they built a two-story mansion with balconies and gardens and high netting so that crabs wouldn't get in during the winter, and with iron bars on the windows so that angels wouldn't get in. Pelayo also set up a rabbit warren²³ close to town and gave up his job as a bailiff for good, and Elisenda bought some satin pumps with high heels and many dresses of iridescent silk, the kind worn on Sunday by the most desirable women in those times. The chicken coop was the only thing that didn't receive any attention. If they washed it down with creolin²⁴ and burned tears of myrrh²⁵ inside it every so often, it was not in homage to the angel but to drive away the dungheap stench that still hung everywhere like a ghost and was turning the new house into an old one. At first, when the child learned to walk, they were careful that he not get too close to the chicken coop. But then they began to lose their fears and got used to the smell, and before the child got his second teeth he'd gone inside the chicken coop to play, where the wires were falling apart. The angel was no less standoffish with him than with the other mortals, but he tolerated the most ingenious infamies with the patience of a dog who had no illusions. They both came down with the chicken pox at the same time. The doctor who took care of the child couldn't resist the temptation to listen to the angel's heart, and he found so much whistling in the heart and so many sounds in his kidneys that it seemed impossible for him to be alive. What surprised him most, however, was the logic of his wings. They seemed so natural on that completely human organism that he couldn't understand why other men didn't have them too.

23. an enclosed piece of land for breeding rabbits

24. a disinfectant

25. a natural resin extracted from thorny trees and mentioned in the Old Testament

When the child began school it had been some time since the sun and rain had caused the collapse of the chicken coop. The angel went dragging himself about here and there like a stray dying man. They would drive him out of the bedroom with a broom and a moment later find him in the kitchen. He seemed to be in so many places at the same time that they grew to think that he'd be duplicated, that he was reproducing himself all through the house, and the exasperated and unhinged Elisenda shouted that it was awful living in that hell full of angels. He could scarcely eat and his antiquarian eyes had also become so foggy that he went about bumping into posts. All he had left were the bare cannulae²⁶ of his last feathers. Pelayo threw a blanket over him and extended him the charity of letting him sleep in the shed, and only then did they notice that he had a temperature at night, and was delirious with the tongue twisters of an old Norwegian. That was one of the few times they became alarmed, for they thought he was going to die and not even the wise neighbor woman had been able to tell them what to do with dead angels.

And yet he not only survived his worst winter, but seemed improved with the first sunny days. He remained motionless for several days in the farthest corner of the courtyard, where no one would see him, and at the beginning of December some large, stiff feathers began to grow on his wings, the feathers of a scarecrow, which looked more like another misfortune of decreptitude.²⁷ But he must have known the reason for those changes, for he was quite careful that no one should notice them, that no one should hear the sea chanteys²⁸ that he sometimes sang under the stars. One morning Elisenda was cutting some bunches of onions for lunch when a wind that seemed to come from the high seas blew into the kitchen. Then she went to the window and caught the angel in his first attempts at flight. They were so clumsy that his fingernails opened a furrow²⁹ in the vegetable patch and he was on the point of knocking the shed down with the ungainly flapping that slipped on the light and couldn't get a grip on the air. But he did manage to gain altitude. Elisenda let out a sigh of relief, for herself and for him, when she watched him pass over the last houses, holding himself up in some way with the risky flapping of a senile³⁰ vulture. She kept watching him even when she was through cutting the onions and she kept on watching until it was no longer possible for her to see him, because then he was no longer an annoyance in her life but an imaginary dot on the horizon of the sea.

Gabriel García Márquez "Un señor muy viejo con unas alas enormes", La increíble y triste historia de la cándida Eréndira y su abuela desalmada © Gabriel García Márquez, 1972 and Heirs of Gabriel García Márquez

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26. Cannulae are the tubular pieces that attach feathers to the animal's body.
27. **Decreptitude (noun):** the state of being old and in bad condition or poor health
28. a sailor's song
29. a narrow trench
30. **Senile (adjective):** having or showing the weaknesses of old age

Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: Which statement best identifies theme of the text? [RL.2]
 - A. People seek to rationalize the unexplainable in ways that serve their self-interest.
 - B. People are able to form strong connections with others in their community during hard times.
 - C. Humans constantly take advantage of and abuse the environment around them, as well as its creatures.
 - D. Sometimes people are not held accountable for their hurtful actions, but rather go on to prosper from them.

2. PART B: Which detail from the text best supports the answers to Part A? [RL.1]
 - A. "By that time onlookers less frivolous than those at dawn had already arrived and they were making all kinds of conjectures concerning the captive's future." (Paragraph 5)
 - B. "With the money they saved they built a two-story mansion with balconies and gardens and high netting so that crabs wouldn't get in during the winter, and with iron bars on the windows so that angels wouldn't get in." (Paragraph 11)
 - C. "That was one of the few times they became alarmed, for they thought he was going to die and not even the wise neighbor woman had been able to tell them what to do with dead angels." (Paragraph 12)
 - D. "And yet he not only survived his worst winter, but seemed improved with the first sunny days." (Paragraph 13)

3. Re-read paragraph 4. How does the language in paragraph 4 contribute to the tone of the story? [RL.4]
 - A. The joyful words used to describe the healing of the child create a hopeful tone.
 - B. The straightforward, objective descriptions of the events and characters' feelings create a removed, neutral tone.
 - C. The choppy sentences and many clauses develop an urgent and insistent tone.
 - D. The bleak descriptions of the setting convey the desperation of the family and create a hopeless tone.

4. PART A: Reread the conclusion of the story. How does the author's portrayal of the old man departing contribute to the meaning of the text? [RL.5]
 - A. The ending shows how even sympathetic reactions are rooted in selfishness.
 - B. People have the ability to shape their future, if they're willing to do what it takes.
 - C. Although some people believe they can control their fate, it will go away and leave them alone.
 - D. While people may believe they can outsmart death, it will always be one step ahead of them.

5. PART B: Which quote from paragraph 13 best supports the answer to Part A? [RL.1]
- A. "But he must have known the reason for those changes, for he was quite careful that no one should notice them"
 - B. "Elisenda let out a sigh of relief, for herself and for him, when she watched him pass over the last houses, holding himself up in some way with the risky flapping of a senile vulture."
 - C. "Then she went to the window and caught the angel in his first attempts at flight. They were so clumsy that his fingernails opened a furrow in the vegetable patch and he was on the point of knocking the shed down with the ungainly flapping that slipped on the light and couldn't get a grip on the air."
 - D. "She kept watching him even when she was through cutting the onions and she kept on watching until it was no longer possible for her to see him, because then he was no longer an annoyance in her life but an imaginary dot on the horizon of the sea."

6. How does the text develop the character of the old man, and how does this characterization contribute to the meaning of the story as a whole? [RL.3]

7. How does the way people treat the old man change over the course of the story and how does this develop the theme? [RL.3]

Discussion Questions

Directions: Brainstorm your answers to the following questions in the space provided. Be prepared to share your original ideas in a class discussion.

1. What could the old man symbolize? Does he symbolize different things to the characters in the story and to readers?
2. In the context of the short story, why do people do bad things? Cite evidence from this text, your own experience, and other literature, art, or history in your answer.
3. In the context of the short story, what makes you who you are? What defines the characters of the short story?
4. How does this story exemplify the qualities of the magical realism genre?

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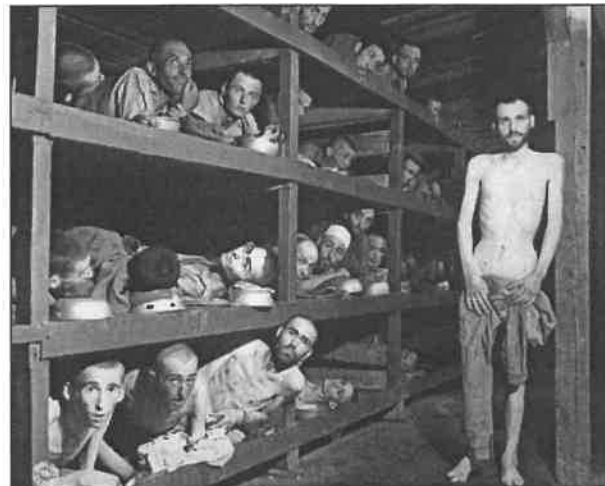
Elie Wiesel's "The Perils of Indifference" Speech

By Elie Wiesel
1999

Eliezer "Elie" Wiesel (1928-2016) was a Romanian-born, Jewish American writer, Nobel Laureate, political activist, and Holocaust survivor. On April 12, 1999, First Lady Hillary Clinton invited Wiesel to speak at the White House to reflect on the past century. While introducing Wiesel, Hillary Clinton discussed the parallels of Wiesel's experiences during the Holocaust and the events in Kosovo, which was experiencing ethnic cleansing at the time. In this speech, Wiesel discusses the consequences of indifference in the face of human suffering and his hopes for the future. As you read, identify the events that shaped Wiesel's perspective on indifference and suffering.

[1] Mr. President, Mrs. Clinton, members of Congress, Ambassador Holbrooke, Excellencies, friends:

Fifty-four years ago to the day, a young Jewish boy from a small town in the Carpathian Mountains woke up, not far from Goethe's beloved Weimar,¹ in a place of eternal infamy² called Buchenwald.³ He was finally free, but there was no joy in his heart. He thought there never would be again. Liberated a day earlier by American soldiers, he remembers their rage at what they saw. And even if he lives to be a very old man, he will always be grateful to them for that rage, and also for their compassion. Though he did not understand their language, their eyes told him what he needed to know — that they, too, would remember, and bear witness.



"Buchenwald concentration camp" by Private H. Miller is in the public domain.

And now, I stand before you, Mr. President — Commander-in-Chief of the army that freed me, and tens of thousands of others — and I am filled with a profound and abiding gratitude to the American people. "Gratitude" is a word that I cherish. Gratitude is what defines the humanity of the human being. And I am grateful to you, Hillary, or Mrs. Clinton, for what you said, and for what you are doing for children in the world, for the homeless, for the victims of injustice, the victims of destiny and society. And I thank all of you for being here.

1. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe was a German writer and politician who lived in Weimar, Germany.
2. **Infamy (noun):** the state of being well known for some bad quality or act
3. a German Nazi concentration camp

We are on the threshold of a new century, a new millennium. What will the legacy of this vanishing century be? How will it be remembered in the new millennium? Surely it will be judged, and judged severely, in both moral and metaphysical⁴ terms. These failures have cast a dark shadow over humanity: two World Wars, countless civil wars, the senseless chain of assassinations (Gandhi, the Kennedys, Martin Luther King, Sadat, Rabin), bloodbaths in Cambodia and Algeria, India and Pakistan, Ireland and Rwanda, Eritrea and Ethiopia, Sarajevo and Kosovo; the inhumanity in the Gulag and the tragedy of Hiroshima. And, on a different level, of course, Auschwitz⁵ and Treblinka. So much violence; so much indifference.

- [5] What is indifference? Etymologically,⁶ the word means “no difference.” A strange and unnatural state in which the lines blur between light and darkness, dusk and dawn, crime and punishment, cruelty and compassion, good and evil. What are its courses and inescapable consequences? Is it a philosophy? Is there a philosophy of indifference conceivable? Can one possibly view indifference as a virtue? Is it necessary at times to practice it simply to keep one’s sanity, live normally, enjoy a fine meal and a glass of wine, as the world around us experiences harrowing⁷ upheavals?

Of course, indifference can be tempting more than that, seductive. It is so much easier to look away from victims. It is so much easier to avoid such rude interruptions to our work, our dreams, our hopes. It is, after all, awkward, troublesome, to be involved in another person’s pain and despair. Yet, for the person who is indifferent, his or her neighbor are of no consequence. And, therefore, their lives are meaningless. Their hidden or even visible anguish⁸ is of no interest. Indifference reduces the Other to an abstraction.

Over there, behind the black gates of Auschwitz, the most tragic of all prisoners were the “Muselmänner,”⁹ as they were called. Wrapped in their torn blankets, they would sit or lie on the ground, staring vacantly into space, unaware of who or where they were — strangers to their surroundings. They no longer felt pain, hunger, thirst. They feared nothing. They felt nothing. They were dead and did not know it.

Rooted in our tradition, some of us felt that to be abandoned by humanity then was not the ultimate. We felt that to be abandoned by God was worse than to be punished by Him. Better an unjust God than an indifferent one. For us to be ignored by God was a harsher punishment than to be a victim of His anger. Man can live far from God — not outside God. God is wherever we are. Even in suffering? Even in suffering.

In a way, to be indifferent to that suffering is what makes the human being inhuman. Indifference, after all, is more dangerous than anger and hatred. Anger can at times be creative. One writes a great poem, a great symphony. One does something special for the sake of humanity because one is angry at the injustice that one witnesses. But indifference is never creative. Even hatred at times may elicit¹⁰ a response. You fight it. You denounce it. You disarm it.

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4. “Metaphysical” refers to abstract thought or subjects.
 5. a network of German Nazi concentration camps
 6. the study of the history of words, their origins, and how their form and meaning have changed over time
 7. **Harrowing** (*adjective*): extremely distressing or difficult
 8. **Anguish** (*noun*): severe emotional or physical pain
 9. a German term used by concentration camp prisoners to refer to inmates who were on the verge of death
 10. **Elicit** (*verb*): to draw or bring out

[10] Indifference elicits no response. Indifference is not a response. Indifference is not a beginning; it is an end. And, therefore, indifference is always the friend of the enemy, for it benefits the aggressor — never his victim, whose pain is magnified when he or she feels forgotten. The political prisoner in his cell, the hungry children, the homeless refugees — not to respond to their plight, not to relieve their solitude by offering them a spark of hope is to exile them from human memory. And in denying their humanity, we betray our own.

Indifference, then, is not only a sin, it is a punishment.

And this is one of the most important lessons of this outgoing century's wide-ranging experiments in good and evil.

In the place that I come from, society was composed of three simple categories: the killers, the victims, and the bystanders. During the darkest of times, inside the ghettos¹¹ and death camps — and I'm glad that Mrs. Clinton mentioned that we are now commemorating¹² that event, that period, that we are now in the Days of Remembrance — but then, we felt abandoned, forgotten. All of us did.

And our only miserable consolation was that we believed that Auschwitz and Treblinka¹³ were closely guarded secrets; that the leaders of the free world did not know what was going on behind those black gates and barbed wire; that they had no knowledge of the war against the Jews that Hitler's armies and their accomplices waged as part of the war against the Allies. If they knew, we thought, surely those leaders would have moved heaven and earth to intervene. They would have spoken out with great outrage and conviction. They would have bombed the railways leading to Birkenau,¹⁴ just the railways, just once.

[15] And now we knew, we learned, we discovered that the Pentagon knew, the State Department knew. And the illustrious¹⁵ occupant of the White House then, who was a great leader — and I say it with some anguish and pain, because, today is exactly 54 years marking his death — Franklin Delano Roosevelt died on April the 12th, 1945. So he is very much present to me and to us. No doubt, he was a great leader. He mobilized the American people and the world, going into battle, bringing hundreds and thousands of valiant and brave soldiers in America to fight fascism,¹⁶ to fight dictatorship, to fight Hitler. And so many of the young people fell in battle. And, nevertheless, his image in Jewish history — I must say it — his image in Jewish history is flawed.

11. "Ghettos" were areas of a city where Jews were previously required to live.

12. **Commemorate (verb):** to recall and show respect for someone or something in a ceremony

13. an extermination camp built by Nazi Germany

14. Birkenau, also known as Auschwitz II, was a combination of an extermination camp and a concentration camp.

15. **Illustrious (adjective):** well known, respected, and admired for past achievements

16. a political system headed by a dictator in which the government controls business and labor, and opposition is not permitted

The depressing tale of the St. Louis is a case in point. Sixty years ago, its human cargo — nearly 1,000 Jews — was turned back to Nazi Germany. And that happened after the Kristallnacht¹⁷, after the first state sponsored pogrom,¹⁸ with hundreds of Jewish shops destroyed, synagogues burned, thousands of people put in concentration camps. And that ship, which was already in the shores of the United States, was sent back. I don't understand. Roosevelt was a good man, with a heart. He understood those who needed help. Why didn't he allow these refugees to disembark? A thousand people — in America, the great country, the greatest democracy, the most generous of all new nations in modern history. What happened? I don't understand. Why the indifference, on the highest level, to the suffering of the victims?

But then, there were human beings who were sensitive to our tragedy. Those non-Jews, those Christians, that we call the "Righteous Gentiles,"¹⁹ whose selfless acts of heroism saved the honor of their faith. Why were they so few? Why was there a greater effort to save SS²⁰ murderers after the war than to save their victims during the war? Why did some of America's largest corporations continue to do business with Hitler's Germany until 1942? It has been suggested, and it was documented, that the Wehrmacht²¹ could not have conducted its invasion of France without oil obtained from American sources. How is one to explain their indifference?

And yet, my friends, good things have also happened in this traumatic century: the defeat of Nazism, the collapse of communism, the rebirth of Israel on its ancestral soil, the demise of apartheid,²² Israel's peace treaty with Egypt, the peace accord in Ireland. And let us remember the meeting, filled with drama and emotion, between Rabin and Arafat²³ that you, Mr. President, convened in this very place. I was here and I will never forget it.

And then, of course, the joint decision of the United States and NATO²⁴ to intervene in Kosovo²⁵ and save those victims, those refugees, those who were uprooted by a man, whom I believe that because of his crimes, should be charged with crimes against humanity.

[20] But this time, the world was not silent. This time, we do respond. This time, we intervene.

Does it mean that we have learned from the past? Does it mean that society has changed? Has the human being become less indifferent and more human? Have we really learned from our experiences? Are we less insensitive to the plight of victims of ethnic cleansing and other forms of injustices in places near and far? Is today's justified intervention in Kosovo, led by you, Mr. President, a lasting warning that never again will the deportation, the terrorization of children and their parents, be allowed anywhere in the world? Will it discourage other dictators in other lands to do the same?

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17. Kristallnacht, also known as the Night of Broken Glass, took place on November 9-10, 1938. Conducted by Nazi paramilitary members and German citizens, Kristallnacht resulted in the destruction of numerous Jewish-owned businesses, buildings, and synagogues, as well as many deaths.
 18. A "pogrom" is an organized massacre of a particular ethnic group.
 19. non-Jewish people who risked their lives to save Jewish people from the Nazi Party
 20. The SS, also known as the Schutzstaffel was a semi-militarized organization that was controlled by Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party.
 21. the armed forces of Nazi Germany from 1935 to 1946
 22. "Apartheid" was the system of racial segregation and discrimination in South Africa.
 23. referring to the first face-to-face agreement between the government of Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization
 24. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization is an intergovernmental military alliance, in which member states agree to a mutual defense in response to an attack by an external party.
 25. referring to the Kosovo War (during which ethnic groups were targeted for their ethnicity) that was ended by the military intervention of NATO

What about the children? Oh, we see them on television, we read about them in the papers, and we do so with a broken heart. Their fate is always the most tragic, inevitably. When adults wage war, children perish. We see their faces, their eyes. Do we hear their pleas? Do we feel their pain, their agony? Every minute one of them dies of disease, violence, famine.

Some of them — so many of them — could be saved.

And so, once again, I think of the young Jewish boy from the Carpathian Mountains. He has accompanied the old man I have become throughout these years of quest and struggle. And together we walk towards the new millennium, carried by profound fear and extraordinary hope.

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Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: Which statement best identifies the central idea of the text? [RI.2]
 - A. The twentieth century witnessed numerous tragedies, outweighing the few instances of peace and eclipsing any hope for future change.
 - B. During World War II, the U.S. was the driving force behind freeing victims of the Holocaust and promoting peace.
 - C. The Holocaust could have been prevented if the world had the means to identify the warning signs of ethnic cleansing.
 - D. The Holocaust exemplifies the consequences of how apathy towards human suffering can cause tragedy.

2. PART B: Which passage from the text best supports the answer to Part A? [RI.1]
 - A. "Liberated a day earlier by American soldiers, he remembers their rage at what they saw... he will always be grateful to them for that rage, and also for their compassion." (Paragraph 2)
 - B. "These failures have cast a dark shadow over humanity: two World Wars, countless civil wars, the senseless chain of assassinations... So much violence; so much indifference." (Paragraph 4)
 - C. "During the darkest of times, inside the ghettos and death camps... we felt abandoned, forgotten." (Paragraph 13)
 - D. "Have we really learned from our experiences? Are we less insensitive to the plight of victims of ethnic cleansing and other forms of injustices in places near and far?" (Paragraph 21)

3. PART A: What is the meaning of "plight" in paragraph 10? [RI.4]
 - A. anguish
 - B. problem
 - C. loneliness
 - D. situation

4. PART B: Which quote from paragraph 10 best supports the answer to Part A? [RI.1]
 - A. "Indifference is not a beginning; it is an end."
 - B. "the friend of the enemy, for it benefits the aggressor"
 - C. "whose pain is magnified when he or she feels forgotten"
 - D. "by offering them a spark of hope"

5. PART A: Why does Elie Wiesel believe indifference is the most dangerous emotion? [RI.3]
 - A. because it creates prejudice and hatred
 - B. because it allows suffering to continue
 - C. because it is the root of all violence
 - D. because it cannot be completely destroyed

6. PART B: Which detail from the text best supports the answer to Part A? [RI.1]
- A. "A strange and unnatural state in which the lines blur between light and darkness" (Paragraph 5)
 - B. "It is so much easier to look away from victims... Their hidden or even visible anguish is of no interest." (Paragraph 6)
 - C. "For us to be ignored by God was a harsher punishment than to be a victim of His anger." (Paragraph 8)
 - D. "Even hatred at times may elicit a response. You fight it. You denounce it. You disarm it." (Paragraph 9)

7. How do paragraphs 15-16 contribute to the development of the text's central idea? [RI.5]

Discussion Questions

Directions: *Brainstorm your answers to the following questions in the space provided. Be prepared to share your original ideas in a class discussion.*

1. In your opinion, why didn't the United States intervene once it became aware of the Nazi concentration camps? Can you think of other conflicts that the United States has acted indifferently towards?
2. In the context of the text, what can we learn from tragedy? What does Elie Wiesel believe we can take away from the numerous tragedies that have occurred throughout the century? How can this knowledge impact the future? Cite evidence from this text, your own experience, and other literature, art, or history in your answer.
3. In the context of the text, what is good and how do we know? How does Elie Wiesel determine what is right and how people should act in the speech? Do you think his beliefs apply specifically to war, or can they be applied more generally? Cite evidence from this text, your own experience, and other literature, art, or history in your answer.
4. In the context of the text, what are the effects of following the crowd? How were the actions of the Nazi Party, as well as the indifference that the United States showed Jews, examples of following the crowd? Cite evidence from this text, your own experience, and other literature, art, or history in your answer.