I WATCHED other hangings. I never saw a single victim weep. These withered bodies had long forgotten the bitter taste of tears.

Except once. The Oberkapo of the Fifty-second Cable Kommando was a Dutchman: a giant of a man, well over six feet. He had some seven hundred prisoners under his command, and they all loved him like a brother. Nobody had ever endured a blow or even an insult from him.

In his "service" was a young boy, a pipel, as they were called. This one had a delicate and beautiful face—an incredible sight in this camp.

(In Buna, the pipe were hated; they often displayed greater cruelty than their elders. I once saw one of them, a boy of thirteen, beat his father for not making his bed properly. As the old man quietly wept, the boy was yelling: "If you don't stop crying instantly, I will no longer bring you bread. Understood?" But the Dutchman's little servant was beloved by all. His was the face of an angel in distress.)

One day the power failed at the central electric plant in Buna. The Gestapo, summoned to inspect the damage, concluded that it was sabotage. They found a trail. It led to the block of the Dutch Oberkapo. And after a search, they found a significant quantity of weapons.

The Oberkapo was arrested on the spot. He was tortured for weeks on end, in vain. He gave no names. He was transferred to Auschwitz. And never heard from again.

But his young pipel remained behind, in solitary confinement. He too was tortured, but he too remained silent. The SS then condemned him to death, him and two other inmates who had been found to possess arms.

One day, as we returned from work, we saw three gallows, three black ravens, erected on the Appelplatz. Roll call. The SS surrounding us, machine guns aimed at us: the usual ritual. Three prisoners in chains—and, among them, the little pipel, the sad-eyed angel.

The SS seemed more preoccupied, more worried, than usual. To hang a child in front of thousands of onlookers was not a small matter. The head of the camp read the verdict. All eyes were on the child. He was pale, almost calm, but he was biting his lips as he stood in the shadow of the gallows.

This time, the Lagerkapo refused to act as executioner. Three SS took his place.

The three condemned prisoners together stepped onto the chairs. In unison, the nooses were placed around their necks.

"Long live liberty!" shouted the two men.

But the boy was silent.

"Where is merciful God, where is He?" someone behind me was asking.

At the signal, the three chairs were tipped over.

Total silence in the camp. On the horizon, the sun was setting. "Caps off!" screamed the Lagerälteste. His voice quivered. As for the rest of us, we were weeping.

"Cover your heads!"

Then came the march past the victims. The two men were no longer alive. Their tongues were hanging out, swollen and bluish. But the third rope was still moving: the child, too light, was still breathing...

And so he remained for more than half an hour, lingering between life and death, writhing before our eyes. And we were forced to look at him at close range. He was still alive when I passed him. His tongue was still red, his eyes not yet extinguished.

Behind me, I heard the same man asking:

"For God's sake, where is God?"

And from within me, I heard a voice answer:

"Where He is? This is where—hanging here from this gallows..."

That night, the soup tasted of corpses.
Words in Contrast: Denotation and Connotation

Anticipatory Set

Working individually, read the sentence below and answer the questions.

In the first sentence, Elie writes, “These withered bodies had long forgotten the bitter taste of tears” (63).

1. What connotations are associated with the word withered? List them below.

2. What connotations are associated with the word tears? List them below.

3. How do those two terms contrast? Write 1-2 sentences.

Characters in Conflict: Contrasting Images to Describe Characters

Step 1: Individually read the paragraph starting with “Except once” and ending with “from him.” Underline the specific words that indicate there is a contrast within the character of the Oberkapo.

Step 2: Compare what you underlined with a partner. Come to consensus on the words that describe the Oberkapo. Then work together to answer the following questions:

- What does this contrast indicate about the character of the Oberkapo?

- What does this contrast indicate about the power structure within the camps?

Step 3: Individually read the paragraph beginning “In his service” and the following paragraph which ends with “angel in distress.” Underline specific words that indicate there is a contrast between the young boy in the Oberkapo’s service and the other pipel.

Step 4: Compare what you underlined with a partner. Come to consensus on the words that show the contrast. Then work together to answer the following questions:

- What does this contrast indicate about the character of the “young pipel”?

- What does this contrast indicate about how the camps impact people living within them?
Unit: Reflections: Past to Present
Text: *Night* by Elie Wiesel, Chapter 4, in which the young pipel is hanged

**Emotions in Conflict: Understanding how the soup “tasted of corpses”**

Elie Wiesel ends the passage with the sentence: “That night, the soup tasted of corpses” (65).

1. What does the soup symbolize within the novel?

2. What do corpses symbolize within the novel?

3. What does the soup tasting of corpses symbolize for Elie as a character?

**Considering the contrast between the soup and corpses**

Prior to this section of text, Elie Wiesel describes the hanging of a boy who stole food. He ends that section with the line, “I remember on that evening, the soup tasted better than ever....” He then ends the section of text about the young pipel being hanged with the line “That night, the soup tasted of corpses.”

**Key Question: Why does the soup suddenly taste of corpses? In order to answer this question, answer the following questions:**

- Why do the men cry when they see the young boy hanged? (Remember they did not cry the last time they saw a boy hanged.)

- Why is crying an important action for the men in the camps?

- What does the young pipel symbolize for Elie and the other men?

- What changed for Elie in the time he watched the young pipel hang?
Unit: Reflections: Past to Present
Text: *Night* by Elie Wiesel, Chapter 4, in which the young pipel is hanged

- What does Elie's perceptions of the soup indicate about Elie Wiesel's character?

- How does Elie Wiesel's feelings about God in this scene compare with his feelings about God in other parts of the text?

- What do the contradictions in the hanging of the young pipel indicate about the nature of the camps?