Suggested Reading List to accompany Elie Wiesel's *Night*
Compiled by Rita Wynn, Librarian

Night is the first part of a trilogy written by Wiesel in the late 1950's. The other two titles are fiction: Dawn, and The Accident. The Night Trilogy is a series of three short works that were originally (and separately published forty years ago. The first book, Night, is Elie Wiesel's masterpiece, a candid, horrific, and deeply saddening autobiographical account of surviving the Holocaust while a young teenager. It is considered a classic of Holocaust literature, and was one of the first texts to be recognized as such. Set in a series of German concentration camps, Night offers much more than a litany of the daily terrors—the unspeakable yet commonplace occurrences, the everyday perversion and rampant inhumanity—of life inside a death camp. However painful this memoir is to read at times, it also keenly and eloquently addresses many of the philosophical as well as personal questions implicit in any serious consideration of what the Holocaust was, what it meant, and what its legacy is and will be.

Dawn is a short novel about a young Jewish man who has survived the Holocaust and is now living as a terrorist in British-controlled Palestine. Elisha, the narrator of Dawn, finds himself caught between the manifold horrors of the past and the troubling dilemmas of the present when he is ordered to kill a British officer whom his comrades have taken hostage. Elisha wrestles with guilt, ghosts, and ultimately God as he waits hour after hour for the arrival of dawn, the appointed hour for his act of assassination. This novel can—and should—also be read as a meditation on the compromises, justifications, and sacrifices that human beings make when they murder other human beings.

As is the case with Dawn, The Accident is a novel that profiles a hero with a disturbingly tragic past—again, our protagonist has survived the Holocaust—caught in the midst of an existential crisis. At the outset of the action, the anonymous narrator of this novel, a successful newspaper journalist, gets hit by a taxi cab while walking in Times Square. Consequently, much of the plot of The Accident transpires in the hero's mind—in the thoughts, daydreams, and memories he has while recovering in a hospital bed for several weeks. The hero looks back on his many difficult relationships with friends, family, and current or former lovers. Time and again, these reveries point to a single yet vital concern: Is it really possible for Holocaust survivors to create new lives for themselves without remembering their old ones?

Number the Stars by Lois Lowry: Number the Stars is told from the point of view of ten-year-old Annemarie Johansen. The story is set in the city of Copenhagen, Denmark in September 1943, the third year of the Nazi occupation of Denmark. Annemarie and her best friend Ellen, who is Jewish, are stopped by soldiers on their way home from school. The two girls, who go to the same school and live in the same building, are unsettled by their first direct encounter with the Germans. Mrs. Johansen and Mrs. Rosen are concerned and ask the girls to take a new route to school. The encounter makes Annemarie reflect on what her father has taught her about Denmark and also about her older sister Lise's death a few years before the start of the novel. Later in the fall, Annemarie and her younger sister Kirsti discover that Mrs. Hirsch's neighborhood shop has been closed. This event further alarms Mrs. Johansen, though Annemarie does not understand why. Through Annemarie's eyes, we see the Danish Resistance as they manage to smuggle almost the entire Jewish population, nearly 7000 people, across the sea to Sweden. In this story of a nation's heroism, there is a reminder that there is pride and human decency in the world even during a time of terror and war.

The Book Thief by Markus Zusak:—It doesn't get much worse than World War II for sheer bloody-minded carnage, destruction, and hate -- it takes a lot of art to bring something wonderful out of that. Yet such is the heroic and subtle job author Markus Zusak does here, that the reader, for
instance, feels nothing but pity when the most virulent Nazi on the block loses both her sons to the war. This is not a novel of how awful the Germans were and how wonderful the Allies were -- it's a novel of how complex and rich and human everyone is. And having Death tell the story emphasizes the soul that is inside everyone, that he sees clearly, but that we poor humans only glimpse from time to time. This is a very long book, and the author takes his sweet time getting on with it. In the beginning the reader can be forgiven for thinking that the art is awfully self-conscious and the Death narrator is a ham-handed gimmick, and wish that the author would quit mucking about. But Zusak is sneakier than you realize, and once he gets rolling along, the participation of Death is first seamless -- and then essential, as his care for the humans who haunt him comes shining through. This is a devastatingly powerful book that bears several rereadings, and it should become a staple of literature discussion groups for sophisticated teen and adult readers.

In My Hands: Memoirs of a Holocaust Rescuer by Irene Gut Opdyke--"You must understand that I did not become a resistance fighter, a smuggler of Jews, a defier of the SS and the Nazis all at once. One's first steps are always small: I had begun by hiding food under a fence." Through this intimate and compelling memoir, we are witness to the growth of a hero. Irene Gut was just a girl when the war began: seventeen, a Polish patriot, a student nurse, a good Catholic girl. As the war progressed, the soldiers of two countries stripped her of all she loved -- her family, her home, her innocence -- but the degradations only strengthened her will. She began to fight back. Irene was forced to work for the German Army, but her blond hair, her blue eyes, and her youth bought her the relatively safe job of waitress in an officers' dining room. She would use this Aryan mask as both a shield and a sword: She picked up snatches of conversation along with the Nazis' dirty dishes and passed the information to Jews in the ghetto. She raided the German Warenhaus for food and blankets. She smuggled people from the work camp into the forest. And, when she was made the housekeeper of a Nazi major, she successfully hid twelve Jews in the basement of his home until the Germans' defeat.

We Are Witnesses: Five Diaries of Teenagers who died in the Holocaust edited by Jacob Boas—each section of the book reveals the voice of one teenager coping with the impossible. None of the diarists survived the war, but their writings did. Each section is not as extensive a work at the better known "Diary of Anne Frank" but it is easily as compelling. "Hitler could kill millions, but he could not destroy the human spirit."—Jacob Boas.

The Hiding Place by Corrie Ten Boom--Published in 1976, a bestseller, and still in print, this is the famous autobiography of Corrie Ten Boom who lived through the Nazi occupation of Holland in WWII and formed part of the Dutch resistance in Haarlem. It tells how the Ten Booms smuggled Jews, and others sought by the soldiers, out into the countryside and abroad. Eventually Corrie and her sister Betsie were caught and sent to Ravensbruck concentration camp. Corrie miraculously survived to tell the tale and help in the post-war reconstruction of Holland and work tirelessly for reconciliation in Europe. Betsie died in the camp, not hating anyone. A powerful and moving story, this was released as a successful film and video and forms the middle part of her life story with 'In My Father's House' being the early part of her life, and 'Tramp For The Lord' being the latter part. Her story begins when she is a child, but quickly progresses to her adulthood. The main plot is Corrie's work helping Jews. She took them into her home, usually for a short time, and then helped them find a better hiding place. She supplied them with false papers and ration cards. Corrie worked with a group of Dutch Christians and built a network in Holland to help whoever needed help. Her older sister hid Jews as well, and her brother ran a nursing home and was able to help Corrie. Unfortunately, the Nazis find out that Corrie is active in the resistance and she, her sister, her father and many others are arrested in a night raid (miraculously, the Jews in her home are hidden so well they aren't found and all but one live through the Occupation).

Summer of My German Soldier by Bette Greene--Patty's life changes when a group of German POWs arrives by train to be taken to the new prison camp just outside of town. She is struck by the fact that they look no different from anyone else. When the soldiers are brought into town to purchase
hats to shield them from the Arkansas sun, one prisoner who speaks English is singled out to make their purchases. After procuring hats for the men to wear while working in the fields, he approaches the stationery counter to buy writing supplies. Patty is at the counter, and he introduces himself to her. That is the beginning of an unlikely friendship.

*The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* by John Boyne—This powerful book about the Holocaust stands out in part because of the unusual perspective: It's told through the eyes of the 9-year-old son of the Commandant at Auschwitz, a boy who has no clue as to what is going on around him. This perspective allows readers to feel a strong sense of foreboding, long before they know the extent of the terror surrounding Bruno's world. Readers will be struck by the contrast between Bruno's normalcy and naivety, and the extreme horrors of the time. The high fence, desolate grounds, smokestacks, and dirty, unhealthy people in striped pajamas that Bruno sees from his window mean that his new room overlooks a concentration camp and that "Out-With" is Bruno's mispronunciation of Auschwitz. Readers will quickly relate to the 9 year old, who is uprooted from his home and moved somewhere "nasty and cold" where he has no friends. He is lonely, his sister bugs him, and adults treat him as if he's not there. He wants to study art and read fantasy books rather than history and geography. He wants to get outside and explore. At one point Bruno even covets the life of the boy on the other side of the fence because at least he has other boys with whom he can play.

*Schindler's List* by Thomas Keneally—Schindler's List recreates the true story of Oskar Schindler, the Czech-born southern German industrialist who risked his life to save over 1,100 of his Jewish factory workers from the death camps in Nazi-occupied Poland. Thomas Keneally's "documentary novel," based on the recollections of the Schindlerjuden (Schindler's Jews), Schindler himself, and other witnesses, is told in a series of snapshot stories. It recounts the lives of the flamboyant profiteer and womanizer Schindler; Schindler's long-suffering wife, Emilie; the brutal SS (Nazi secret service) commandant Amon Goeth; Schindler's quietly courageous factory manager, Itzhak Stern; and dozens of other Jews who underwent the horrors of the Nazi machinery. At the center of the story, though, are the actions and ambitions of Schindler, who comes to Kraków, Poland, seeking his fortune and ends up outwitting the SS to protect his Jewish employees. It is the story of Schindler's unlikely heroism and of one man's attempt to do good in the midst of outrageous evil. The book explores the complex nature of virtue, the importance of individual human life, the role of witnesses to the Holocaust, and the attention to rules and details that sustained the Nazi system of terror.

*I Have Lived a Thousand Years* by Livia Britton-Jackson—The author, Livia Bitton-Jackson, who was imprisoned in the Nazi death camp Auschwitz as a teenager, describes her terrible experiences as one of the camp's few adolescent inmates and the miraculous twists of fate that enabled her to survive the Holocaust. This is a book for those who really feel they need to know what happened to Jews in Nazi Europe during the Holocaust. It is written by one of the very few who survived a term in the death camp Auschwitz. Her story is told in the form of the memoir of Elli Friedmann, who was thirteen years old in March 1944 when the Nazis invaded her homeland, Hungary. The first part of the book deals with the invasion and occupation of Hungary. Slowly, and in calculated detail, the Nazis strip the Jews of all their status in society, and their possessions. For Elli, this means having to take her brand new birthday bicycle down to the Town Hall to hand over to the German authorities. It means having to wear a yellow star of David sewn onto her jacket. It means having to hand in all spare clothing. The second part of the book takes Elli, with her mother and brother and Aunt Serena, to the dreaded concentration camp, Auschwitz. At the gates, they are sorted: Aunt Serena goes to the gas chamber. Elli's brother, Bubi, goes off with the men. Elli and her mother are put to work.
Save a Pencil for Me: Love Letters from Camp Bergen-Belsen by Jaap Polak and Ina Soep—Jaap and Ina Polak's intimate love story is intertwined with their experiences during internment in two Nazi concentration camps. These disclosures, here in their original form, were written and sent clandestinely on whatever scraps of paper were available. These letters provide vivid images of daily concentration camp life and describe their growing love story based on tenacious hope and a powerful faith in the future. Translated from the Dutch.

...I never saw another butterfly... edited by Hana Volavkova—Could be one of the most powerful books ever produced. It is a collection of drawings and poems done by the children of Terezin (Theresienstadt) between the years of 1942-1944. Terezin was the 'model' camp, the one which was shown to outside observers such as the Red Cross. In fact, it was called a 'ghetto' instead of a camp, and was built to convince foreigners that life for the children there was good. Actually, life for the children in Terezin was good, or at least better than for many others. For a short time, the children of Terezin were encouraged to write, to draw, to act and sing in children's operas, to use their imaginations. There were teachers in the children's section of the camp, teachers who used their skills to make life more normal and bearable for the children in their care. These children loved to paint and to draw, just like children anywhere, at any other time. There are many drawings and paintings in this book of scenes from nature - flowers, trees, gardens, and butterflies. Apparently these were the things which most interested the girls. However, the boys reportedly drew more realistic pictures of life in Terezin - pictures of SS men, pictures of children being deported to Oswiecim (Auschwitz), pictures of people pulling carts loaded with dead bodies, pictures of executions. Most of those pictures were omitted from this book, but are described in the epilogue. The pictures in this book are mostly nature scenes, but are filled with an obvious longing to be in a much happier place.