

The Elie Wiesel Living Archive
STORYTELLING HANDOUTS – Middle Schoolers
Stories & Truth Handout

Stories & Truth (Minutes 1-3 in recording)

Not so long ago I was in Israel. And I went to see the man who used to be my rebbe. He survived. He's the Rebbe of Vizhnitz, famous Hasidic dynasty. And when I came to see him 22 years after we parted, he recognized me. And he said, "Well, it's you, the grandchild of Dovid Feige." And I said, "Rabbi, for the last 22 years I am working very hard to get myself a name, and here with you I am still the grandchild of Dovid Feige."

To which he answered, "So that's what you were doing for 22 years?" Well, that's what I try to do. Then he asks, "What do you do?" And at that moment, of course, I really lost all my powers, and I said, "I really don't know." He said, "But yet, what are you doing?" I say, "I am writing." He said, "That's what you are doing?" I said, "I am trying."

"And what are you writing?" "Well," I said, "stories." "What kind of stories?" "Stories." "True stories?" I say, "Rabbi, what do you mean by that?" And he said, "Stories that really happened?"

And here I caught him. And I said, "**Rabbi, you see, it's not so simple. Some stories did not happen but are true. Others did happen but are not.**" So he looked at me sadly, and he said, "Well, that's what you were doing for 22 years."

CONSIDER THIS:

- What might Professor Wiesel mean by "some stories did not happen but are true"?
- How might storytelling help us get closer to the truth that Professor Wiesel is speaking about?

Power of Words Handout
(about 35-36 minutes into talk)

Today other books hold me in their grip, and I try to learn from other storytellers how to pierce the meaning of an experience and how to transform it into legend. But most of them talk too much. The song is lost in words, like rivers in the sand. The Selishter Rebbe told me one day, "Be careful with words. They are dangerous. Beware of them. They beget demons or angels. It's up to you to give life to one or the other. Be careful, I tell you. Nothing is as dangerous as to give free rein to words."

Consider the following:

- When have TRUE words caused pain for you?
- When have TRUE words caused happiness for you?
- When have FALSE words caused pain for you?
- When have FALSE words caused happiness for you?
- How and why did the two experiences differ – if at all?

There is a Jewish tradition of telling a bride that she looks beautiful on her wedding day.

How might someone's words to a bride impact her special day? How might someone's words impact your day at school, on the sports' field, in the theater, or anywhere else where it might matter?