Sample Interpretive Response Toolkit #\_\_\_\_\_\_

Based on Night by Elie Wiesel (Passage from pg 20 – 21)

Elie Wiesel uses **repetition**, **contrasting language**, **sentence length** and even **punctuation** to show that many of the characters seem to be in denial about what is happening and how costly this blindness can be. After being ordered to march then run to a smaller ghetto where the Jews will be transported to some unknown location, Wiesel describes the reaction of his parents and others. He remembers how as she is preparing a meal, his mother keeps saying, “We cannot give up, we cannot give up” (20). Wiesel’s mother **repeats** this phrase attempting to block the reality of the situation out of her mind and convince herself everything will be fine. Wiesel also describes the reaction of others who “even voiced optimism” and notes how “morale was not so bad” (20). All of these responses though are in **sharp contrast** with a visitor who “sobs” and “begs” for Wiesel’s family to leave with her. “Optimism” brings to mind hope for the future but “sobbing” is associated with despair about what is to come. And clearly there is reason for despair as Wiesel points out that “for those who had already been deported, it would be too late” (20). Yet, Wiesel’s father is insistent they stay. The **short sentences** in this scene emphasize the Jews have a choice. Wiesel writes, “The ghetto was not guarded” (20). The sentence is written simply and is brief to make the point that it would have been easy to leave. It is followed by statements like, “My father wouldn’t hear of it” (20). The shortness of this sentence emphasizes how his father refuses to consider or even listen to the possibility that it might be better for the family to leave. Similar to Elie’s mother, he is doing what he can to block out the reality of the situation.

Wiesel’s use of **punctuation** though is what helps the reader to understand the cost of this blindness. Wiesel explains how his father tells him and his sisters, “If you wish, go there. I shall stay here with your mother and the little one …” to which Wiesel responds, “Naturally, we refused to be separated” (20). The comma after “if you wish” sets this phrase off. He does not tell his children to go. He does not insist. While this may sound like Elie’s father is giving his son and daughters a choice, he really is not. This is demonstrated when Elie says, “Naturally,” again set off by a comma to emphasize this word. The word “naturally” brings to mind instinct, similar to how animals follow their natural instincts to survive. This connotation tells us that the children would never have chosen to leave their parents. By not demanding that Elie and his sisters leave, Wiesel’s father is putting them in grave danger. Wiesel uses these devices to emphasize the message that in desperate situations, deceiving or lying to ourselves can not only cost us our freedom and even lives, but also those of our children who are likely to suffer the same fate.