

Study Guide for THE STORY OF BLIMA: A Holocaust Survivor by Shirley Russak Wachtel

Biographical Note

Shirley Russak Wachtel, American (1951–)

COMPREHENSION SKILL QUESTIONS- 10 questions, 2 points each= 20 pts Main Ideas

1. A central idea in *The Story of Blima: A Holocaust Survivor* is
 - a. the Nazis were successful in destroying the Jewish people.
 - b. Blima's ordeals have given her a deep appreciation for her family and Jewish traditions.
 - c. the German people were, without exception, hostile to the Jews.
 - d. Holocaust survivors tried to live in the past as a way of escaping grim post-war realities.

2. The main idea of the passage below is that
 - a. Blima envies her nieces for having Victor as a father.
 - b. Victor worked in a coffee company when he was younger.
 - c. Victor has a belly as large as a pregnant woman's.
 - d. Victor is a happy, intelligent, and hard-working family man.

Victor's round belly proclaims his love of both food and life. Straight out, like a woman five months pregnant! I often envy my nieces having Victor as a father, for his generosity, high spirits, and good nature help make his home a happy one. And Victor has been rewarded with an abundance of good fortune. People say that he was born with a gold spoon in his mouth, but that is probably just their way of denying his genius for business. As a boy, Victor took a job pouring ten-pound bags of coffee and tobacco into smaller metal cans. Then he quickly worked his way up to assistant manager of that business. He now owns a small china store.

Supporting Details

3. When Blima becomes frustrated at not being able to find her new shoes, her mother
 - a. comments that she should worry about bigger things.
 - b. criticizes Blima's disorganized nature.
 - c. tells her that her father will be very angry with her.
 - d. advises her that the shoes didn't look good, anyway.

4. The barracks commandant at Grunberg enjoys
 - a. teaching the girls how to properly sew German uniforms.
 - b. praising the girls for doing a good job.
 - c. eating an apple in front of the hungry girls.
 - d. whipping the girls who fail to complete their quota of uniforms.

- 5.. At the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, Blima reunites with Ruschia, who
 - a. suffers from typhus.
 - b. has leg problems.
 - c. thinks that her two daughters are probably dead.
 - d. all of the above.

- 6.. Gizella helps save Blima's life by
 - a. giving her bread and apples.
 - b. showing her how to sew and secretly giving her extra bread.
 - c. removing her from a transport train bound for Auschwitz.
 - d. giving her an easier job in the labor camp kitchen.

7. A few days after being liberated, Blima and her remaining family find satisfaction in
 - a. attacking their former captors with sticks and clubs.
 - b. immediately setting out for a new life in America.
 - c. traveling to Israel.
 - d. celebrating Yom Kippur on the soil of their enemies.

Conclusions

8. Based on the passage below, we can conclude that
 - a. it will soon begin to rain.
 - b. the Jews will probably feel much better in the days to come.
 - c. Blima and her aunt fear that worse things may soon happen.
 - d. Blima's aunt doesn't want Blima to work too hard for the *goyim*.

“Go home now, Blimala. The *goyim* [non-Jews] will be too arrogant or too afraid to come in now. And the Jews, well, I don't think they will feel much like buying cookies today. Best to go home.” I nod and move as if to stand. But sitting next to Aunt, her light cotton jacket against the sleeve of my dark woolen coat, her rough hand atop my own small, rounded knuckles, I am unable to move further. And so we sit, for a long time, like two gray pebbles watching giant clouds roll across the darkening sky.

9. Based on the passage below, we can conclude that
 - a. it is important that the girls keep up with the rest of the group.
 - b. Blima and the girls are enjoying the forest scenery.
 - c. Blima has already forgotten about life with her family.
 - d. green buds are as nutritious as potatoes and stew.

The sun pierces a path of bright yellow through the forest, and we follow it. It must be past noon now, for I can see the remnants of the heavy winter snow have begun to melt, leaving circles around emerging twigs. Some of the girls have begun bending and quickly plucking the twigs, hoping the soldiers will not notice. They push the bits of green into their mouths, then munch slowly, eyes on the yellow path. They never miss a step. I forget the round white potatoes and warm stew from my mother's table, and think only of my empty yearning stomach and how delicious those green buds look.

10. Based on the passage below, we can infer that
- the girls are proud to have been selected to work in the labor camp.
 - the girls have a lot of energy.
 - Blima envies the girls standing opposite her group.
 - something bad may happen to the girls who don't appear healthy.

Four a.m. A shrill whistle shocks us awake. We jump from our bunks and line up for roll call. "Pinch your cheeks," someone whispers, and word goes down the line. We pinch until it hurts and pray that the look of health we had only days ago will return. When the woman commandant turns to inspect the others, we wait, shoulders back, standing tall. Looking at the girls opposite us, I know that we are a sorry bunch.

ESSAY QUESTIONS – 5 pts each = 20 pts

- How does Blima's attitude toward her appearance change over the course of the story? What events contribute to this change?
- Why do you think Blima discusses the loss of her new party shoes? How does this incident relate to what later happens in the story?
- Discuss the character of Gizella. Why do you think she behaved one way in private with Blima, and another way in public? Do you think she did all she could have to help the inmates, or do you think she could have done more? Support your opinion with evidence from the book.
- Do you think it would be possible for an extremist group to take power in the United States and persecute minorities the way the Nazis did in Germany—in other words, could a Holocaust happen here? Explain why you think as you do.

GUIDED PARAGRAPH ASSIGNMENT 20 pts (7, 7, 6 pts per supporting details)

Write a paragraph in which you provide supporting evidence to back up the following point:

Point: In *The Story of Blima: A Holocaust Survivor*, three characters quietly defy the Nazis.

[*Note:* The characters may be prisoners or non-prisoners.]

How to Proceed:

Here are the steps to take in writing your paragraph.

Decide which three defiant characters you would like to discuss. List them here:

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____

1 Freewrite for five minutes or so about each character—that is, just write down whatever comes to mind about the way(s) that character defies the Nazis. Don't worry at all about spelling, punctuation, or grammar at this early stage.

2 Next, look over your freewriting and maybe go through the story to get more information about each character. Add more supporting details.

3 Now write a rough draft of your paragraph. The box below shows how you can organize your paragraph.

Three Defiant Characters

In *The Story of Blima: A Holocaust Survivor*, three characters quietly defy the Nazis. One character who defies the Nazis is _____. (Add supporting details.) A second character who stands up to the Nazis is _____. (Add supporting details.) Finally, a third character who disobeys the Nazis is _____. (Add supporting details.)

Hint: Be sure to use **transitions** to help organize your paragraph. Transitions include words such as *one*, *second*, and *finally*, as shown above. Transitions are word signals that make clear to the reader where each new part of your paragraph begins.

1 Set the paragraph aside for a while so you can take a fresh look at it later. See if you have provided enough supporting details to back up your point that each character defies the Nazis. See if you can add more details, or even better details. Rewrite the paper, trying to make your support as convincing as possible.

2 Now it's very important to *read your paper aloud*. Chances are that you will find grammar or punctuation mistakes at every spot where your paper does not read smoothly and clearly. Make the corrections needed so that all of your sentences read smoothly. If necessary, write a final draft before handing in your paper.

GUIDED ESSAY ASSIGNMENT- 20 pts (4 pts per paragraph, 5 paragraphs)

Below are the introductory and concluding paragraphs of an essay, along with the topic sentences of the three supporting paragraphs. The final sentence of the introductory paragraph (underlined below) is the *thesis*, or central point, of the essay.

Three Supportive Women

Introductory Paragraph (4)

In *The Story of Blima: A Holocaust Survivor*, author Shirley Russak Wachtel presents scenes depicting the worst that human beings are capable of, and the best. She skillfully contrasts her mother's suffering at the hands of the Nazis with the loving treatment that Blima receives from three strong women. In the course of the story, Blima receives loving support from her mother; from the labor camp guard, Gizella; and from her sister-in-law, Ruschia.

Supporting Paragraph 1 Topic sentence (4): Blima's mother, "Mama," demonstrates her love and support for Blima on several occasions. (Add supporting details.)

Supporting Paragraph 2 Topic sentence (4): Gizella, the labor camp guard at Grunberg, also shows compassionate caring toward Blima. (Add supporting details.)

Supporting Paragraph 3 Topic sentence (4): Ruschia, Blima's sister-in-law, is a third woman who gives Blima loving support. (Add supporting details.)

Concluding Paragraph (4)

In contrast to the warped "masculinity" of the Nazis, Blima's mother, the labor camp guard, Gizella, and sister-in-law Ruschia each embody the principle of woman as nurturer. Although they can't actually defeat the Nazis, these women impart to Blima positive values and wise advice that aid and inspire her to survive the Holocaust years.

Assignment: Write the three supporting paragraphs needed to complete the essay.

How to Proceed:

1. Ask yourself questions about how Blima's mother demonstrates her love and support for Blima. What issues is Blima dealing with in this early section of the story? What does Mama do for Blima? What *can't* Mama do for Blima? Write down examples of Mama's loving support. How does her mother's example help Blima to survive the Holocaust?
Then ask yourself similar questions about the other two characters and write out detailed answers
2. Now write a rough draft of each paragraph. Start each paragraph with one of the topic sentences given above. Provide plenty of examples to back up each of your points.
3. Set the paragraphs aside for a while so you can take a fresh look at them later. See if you have provided enough details to support your thesis and each topic sentence. Now write the entire essay, making your support as convincing as possible.
4. Finally, it's very important to *read your paper aloud*. Chances are that you will find grammar or punctuation mistakes at every spot where your paper does not read smoothly and clearly. Make the corrections needed so that all of your sentences read smoothly. If necessary, write a final draft before handing in your paper.

A BRIEF GUIDE TO WRITING

Remember that the two basic goals in writing are to **make a point** and to **support that point**. Here are steps to follow while working on your paper:

Step 1: Think about your topic by writing about it in one of three ways.

- *Freewrite for ten minutes.* Write whatever comes into your head about your subject. Don't worry about spelling or grammar. Just get down on paper all the information that occurs to you.
- *Make up a list of ideas and details that could go into your paper.* Pile these items up, one after another, like a shopping list, without worrying about putting them in any special order.
- *Write down a series of questions and answers about your topic.* Your questions can start with words like *what, why, how, when, and where.*

Step 2: Plan your paper with an informal outline.

- First of all, decide on and write out the point of your paper.
- Then list the supporting reasons, examples, or other details that will back up your point. Try to have two or three items of support.

Step 3: Use transitions.

Use your outline as a guide while writing the early drafts of your paper. Use transitions to introduce each of the separate supporting items (reasons, examples, or other details) you present to back up the point of your paper. Transitions include such words as *First of all, Secondly, Another reason or Another example, and Finally.*

Step 4: Always read your paper aloud.

Chances are you'll find grammar or punctuation mistakes at those places where the paper does not read smoothly and clearly. Make the corrections needed.

ADDITIONAL ESSAY ASSIGNMENT

Various Jewish rituals, such as Yom Kippur, are very important in uniting members of the Weisstuch family and ensuring that their culture survives. Write an essay in which you discuss three rituals in which your family participates. Be sure to provide enough detail so that your readers can visualize the ritual you describe and its meaning for you and your family. For example, your thesis might look like the following

Thesis: Three important rituals for my family are _____, _____, and _____.

Then, write a separate paragraph for each ritual, going into detail about just what is involved, what part each family member plays in the ritual, and what the ritual means — both to you personally and to your family as a whole.

After you develop your three supporting paragraphs, add a concluding paragraph in which you explain why these recurring family events are so important. What, for instance, do they add to your family life? If they were not continued, what would be lost?

IMPORTANT INFORMATION...

Due date: _____

Note: ALL of the assignments listed here should be handed in as one project. Do them in the order they are given. When done make a cover with a graphic for it. Hand it in like a booklet.

FORMAT:

TIMES NEW ROMAN

12 POINT FONT

DOUBLE SPACE

1 INCH MARGINS ON ALL SIDES

ANSWERS ARE TO BE WRITTEN IN YOUR OWN WORDS, NOT COPIED WORD FOR WORD FROM THE BOOK.

GRADE: THE GRADE FOR THIS PROJECT WILL COUNT AS IF IT WERE AN EXAM. IT WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED LATE UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES. THE BOOK IS TO BE TURNED IN WITH THE ASSIGNMENT.