

## Reading 11A

### A “NORMAL” DAY IN AUSCHWITZ

As a 15-year-old girl, you have survived the selection on the platform. You are alone—packed into a barracks with hundreds of others but with no one from your family. You share your “bunk” with three bunkmates. The word “bunkmates” is not exactly correct—there are three other frightened, emaciated victims who share the wooden board on which you sleep.

4 a.m.: *Appel* or roll call. Fall out, with only a prisoner’s striped uniform and a pair of wooden shoes, into the biting zero-degree cold. Stand. One hour passes and a *Kapo*, a prisoner in charge of the barracks, calls numbers. Your number is called. All must wait because one person is not present. Fifteen minutes later, the body is dragged to its place. Even the dead must report. The *Kapo* yells his count to the SS guard: “All present or accounted for! One hundred ninety-four are standing, five are in the sick barrack, one is dead.”

“Coffee”—dark water—and a slice of coarse bread are given to you as you stand in line. No one has been allowed to use the latrines. Three hours have passed, some people have urinated on themselves; finally, you are allowed to line up for the latrines. You are given three minutes in the large room with a mud floor and a series of cement slabs with holes in them. A prisoner is given a whip with which she beats women who take too long. An older woman confides to you that prisoners are found dead each morning—suicides or drowned in excrement by someone else. The smell is overpowering, and you feel the urge to vomit. Yet, such smells are no longer new to you: the stench in the cattle car, the sickening odor of the smoke from the chimneys, the body smells of the prisoners crammed into the barracks and now this latrine smell. The older woman tells you that almost all women have ceased menstruating—either from fear, malnutrition or disease.

Again the *Appelplatz* (roll call place), where you see women being beaten for “slacking.” You are chosen for a work detail at the *Brezhinka*, the mountain of clothing collected from victims, most of whom were gassed upon their arrival. Your job is to sort clothing. You are lucky—one can “organize,” that is, steal extra clothes from here. Should you be caught, you will probably be beaten, or worse. As you work, you watch trains arrive, the chimneys of the crematoria belching flames, the lines of people at the gas chamber, the dogs barking, women crying, children screaming and SS men shouting commands.

At noon, you are given “coffee” and another slice of bread with margarine. Ten minutes to eat. Back to work. In the distance, you see men carrying cement blocks from one place to another. Later, they are made to carry them back. Every so often you hear gunshots. Everyone around you has the stench of death, disease and excrement. All are crawling with lice. The sky is gray, trees glisten with snow, icicles form on the barracks and on the barbed wire fences.

While you work at the *Brezhinka*, you suddenly find a familiar sweater, your mother’s, and a pair of shoes—your sister’s. They are dead, you know that now. You cannot stop to mourn or

think of them. Guards are watching. You tear the sweater to pieces. It is a small act of defiance, of sabotage.

All prisoners move as in a fog. Some are beaten, some are hung, shot or tortured—they seem to show no emotion because of their starved, semi-hypnotized condition. By 6 p.m., your head swims—malnutrition, grief, fear, pain, thirst—all take their toll.

Another *Appel*. Nineteen people have died from your group—a small number for this day—in the bitter cold.

After the final “meal,” which consists of one slice of bread and a small piece of hard salami, you return to the barracks. People stare blankly. The *Kapo* grabs a young girl and beats her until blood pours from her head—the girl has not performed some simple task to the *Kapo*'s satisfaction. She moans on the wooden floor. No one moves. The *Kapo* swears at the prisoners and storms into her room at the end of the barracks.

You lay on your board with two other girls (the third has not returned) thinking of your mother and sister in your kitchen at home and fall asleep.

**THIS DAY IN AUSCHWITZ IS BASED ON TESTIMONIES FROM SURVIVORS OF AUSCHWITZ.**

Using Readings 9C, “Daily Log,” 9D, “Calorie Tally” and 11A, “A ‘Normal’ Day in Auschwitz,” answer the following questions on a separate sheet of paper.

1. What things do you control in a normal day? What does the girl control?
2. What is controlled or determined by others during your day? What is controlled or determined by others in the girl's day?
3. What do you do with “free” time? What did the girl do with “free” time?
4. At what point in your day did your activities differ from the girl in Auschwitz?
5. Using Reading 9D, “Calorie Tally,” calculate the number of calories the girl in Auschwitz consumed in a “normal” day. Then, calculate the number of calories you consume in a normal day.