Purpose:
The idea behind Socratic questioning is that there is no correct answer or way to interpret a piece of literature. Instead the students themselves construct meaning from the piece. This meaning is not assumed to be set, but rather a flexible solution that can change and modify itself as information is gathered and discussed. This strategy causes students to engage in discussions which allow them to identify their thoughts about a subject. It is not meant to be a debate, but more of an open-minded consideration of all ideas and perspectives. The process involves questioning, answering and reflecting with the end goal of creating a deeper understanding of the topic.

Rationale:
I would use this strategy through the middle of the novel as Eliezer is undergoing a transformation of belief and thought as a result of his experiences in the various concentration camps. It could also be used at the end of the novel to synthesize understanding. I chose to use this strategy because it enables students to articulate and evaluate their stances on issues in the novel such as what humanity is and the confrontation between learned values and real life experience. There are no set answers to these questions which makes the Socratic questioning method a perfect one to use.

Steps:
For the purposes of these questions, I focused specifically on the chapter in the novel that discusses Eliezer’s arrival and departure from Auschwitz-Birkenau.

STEP 1
Have students read pages 27-32 (Bantam Books edition © 1982) asking them to focus on the emotions that Eliezer and the other characters experience.

STEP 2
Hand out the Socratic Question Starters to students. Explain that you as the teacher will be facilitating a discussion about what they will be reading today. They should feel free to raise their own questions and/or respond to the questions or responses of others. Review proper discussion behavior (allowing others to fully complete their response, respecting others opinions and responses, no making fun of what others say, etc.) Then ask one or more of the following questions. I have included some possible answers to the questions also.

• On page 29 some of the prisoners tried to promote a revolt. Why do you think this “wind of revolt” disappeared?
  ▪ Because they thought the guards would hurt them, revolting wasn’t the Jewish way, they listened to the advice of the elders…
• Eliezer suggests that rather than dying by fire, he will run into the electric fence. How can a person resolve to kill themselves rather than let another person do so? What would you choose?
  ▪ Possibly because they thought it would be less painful, they didn’t want to suffer, they didn’t want to live when others were dying…
• Why is the phrase “Never shall I forget…” so powerful? What do you think Eliezer is trying to tell us?
  ▪ Eliezer is saying that his experience has been burned into his soul and that everything he does in his life is colored by this experience. He will spend eternity trying to reconcile this horrific experience with the religious truths he has been taught…

STEP 3
Have students read pages 32-43 looking for how the prisoners are treated and what their responses are to this. Then ask one or more of these questions.

• Why doesn’t Eliezer react to the guard clouting his father? What would you have done?
  ▪ He doesn’t want to be punished, he has no more feeling,…
• What does the phrase “Work is liberty!” represent?
  ▪ It is supposedly the motto of Auschwitz, but in reality it is a cruel taunt to the prisoners because no matter how hard they work, they will never be free. It also represents the lies of the Nazi government.
• What are the prisoners’ feelings, especially Eliezer’s, toward God? Why is this important to the novel?
  ▪ In the beginning of the novel Eliezer has a devout faith in God, but when he sees what is happening in the concentration camp he begins to doubt God’s love and justice. Others in the camp clung to their faith in God, while some completely rejected it. This is important to the novel because the novel is about the death of innocence and faith and calls for us to restore it.

STEP 4
Conclude the discussion by asking the students to get into partnerships and define what humanity means. Then individually they should write down their conclusions and any possible questions they may still have to turn in at the end of class. (These should be just a quick jotting down, not a paragraph essay.)

Assessment
Learning can be assessed in various ways. First of all, the discussion time is a period for assessment to see what they are thinking about the literature and the possibilities that it holds. You can also assess their ability to articulate their thoughts in the pairs’ discussions and in the brief response. If class time doesn’t allow for the written response, you could also begin the next day’s discussion with it.

Karma Sue Mitchell, 2005