Discovering motifs   Names _____

Motif (moh-TEEF): a recurring object, concept, or structure in a work of literature. A motif may also be two contrasting elements in a work, such as good and evil. A motif is important because it allows the reader or viewer to see main points and themes that the author is trying to express, in order that the audience might be able to interpret the work more accurately. Often times motifs develop into key symbols within a work. Often they work to illustrate the key theme of a work. Many times they support both symbols and themes.

Directions:

Step 1: On your own paper, list each of the following separately. Using your journals, find figurative language (similes, metaphors, personification, sensory imagery) that are used to describe each of the words/phrases. Make a list of the figurative language for each word/phrase. See example in A below. The more thorough your list, the better.

        A. Eliezer himself
            Ex: I was a body. Perhaps even less than that: a starved stomach.
        B.   Any other Jew or Jews in general.
        C. Germans, Nazis
        D. Another image that becomes a motif: We selected _____

Step 2: Look at each list under A,B,C,D above. Do you see any pattern to the imagery? Does some of the imagery repeat itself?   If yes, write down the repeated imagery for each category:

    Category   Repeated imagery

        A. Eliezer himself
        B.   Any other Jew or groups of Jews.
        C. Germans, Nazis
        D. Other: _____

Step 3: What do you think the repeated imagery —your motif — reveals about the category it is used to describe? [How are the traits of the image related to the traits of what is being described?]

        A. Eliezer himself
        B.   Any other Jew or groups of Jews.
        C. Germans, Nazis
        D. Other: _____

     What message — theme — is Wiesel conveying to his readers through the use of each motif?
        A. Eliezer himself
        B.   Any other Jew or groups of Jews.
        C. Germans, Nazis
        D. Other: _____

Step 4: Bonus step. Look at the figurative language/imagery remaining in your journals. Do you notice any other recurring objects, concepts, or structures? If yes, repeat Steps 1-3 for that motif.