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My Name is Asher Lev
Chaim Potok



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Response Journal

To The Student

Although we may read a novel, play, or work of non-fiction for enjoyment, each time we read one, we are building and practicing important basic reading skills. In our ever-more complex society, in which reading has become more and more crucial for success, this, in itself, is an important reason to spend time reading for enjoyment.

Some readers, however, are able to go beyond basic reading techniques and are able to practice higher thinking skills by reflecting on what they have read and how what they read affects them. It is this act of reflection—that is, stopping to think about what you are reading—that this journal is attempting to encourage.

To aid you, we have included writing prompts for each section; however, if you find something that you wish to respond to in the book more compelling than our prompts, you should write about that. We hope you enjoy reading this book and that the act of responding to what you have read increases this enjoyment.

After you read the indicated sections, choose the questions to which you will respond. Keep in mind that there are no right or wrong answers to these prompts, and there is no one direction in which you must go.

BOOK ONE
ONE

1. Chaim Potok, the author of *My name Is Asher Lev*, takes you right into the heart of his story in the first two paragraphs. In his use of the words “Brooklyn,” “Crucifixion,” “Jew,” and “Christian,” you know that New York and religion will play a prominent part in the life of the central character Asher Lev. To help you with the background to this novel, do the following activities:
 - A. Look up the meanings of the terms above in a dictionary or encyclopedia. Then write in complete sentences three facts about each of the terms in your own words.
 - B. Write an explanation of the difference between a cross and a crucifix.

2. Asher certainly does know a great deal about his Russian great-great-grandfather. You may find it a bit unusual for a person to know about his forebear in such detail. Think about how much you know about your great-great and great grandparents. Complete the following format with as much information as you know about your own forebears. Do not worry if you don't know too much—that is normal in this day and age.
 1. What I know about my mother's mother (called one's *maternal* grandmother):_____
 2. What I know about my mother's father (called one's *maternal* grandfather):_____
 3. What I know about my father's mother (called one's *paternal* grandmother):_____
 4. What I know about my father's father (called one's *paternal* grandfather):_____

T W O

6. One of the indications that Chaim Potok is an excellent writer is his ability to convey the essence of Asher's experiences over time and back to his childhood in a clear, interesting way. The first two pages of this chapter bring his early school days to life. He continues to vividly describe one of Asher's summers as a child in the Berkshire Mountains of Massachusetts. Try writing like Potok. Choose either A and write about your school days as a young child, or B and write a memorable summer when you were young. After finishing, compare your descriptive paragraph to Potok's on the same subject. Begin your paragraph as follows:
- A. When I was in the early grades I remember.....
- OR
- B. I remember one summer in particular from when I was a young (boy/girl). It was...
7. By the end of chapter two, you have met many of the characters who live in Asher's world. In complete sentences, write a brief description and of each person listed below; then explain how each one affects Asher. The first one is given as an example.

<u>Character</u>	<u>Description and Effect on Asher</u>
Aryeh Lev	Aryeh is Asher's father, who travels for the Rebbe. He is away a great deal on Hasidic business, and is always gentle and kind with Asher.
Rivkeh Lev	
Uncle Yaakov	
Yudel Krinsky	

FOUR

15. Asher is now ten years old. Almost despite himself, he has decided to take up drawing again and become very troublesome to his parents. Determined not to go to Vienna, he demands to continue to live in Brooklyn with his Uncle Yitzchok after his parents go to Vienna. He becomes more and more defiant in his determination to have his own way. Asher could use some good advice. Think seriously about the correctness of his feelings and behavior, and write Asher a long letter. In it, tell him as convincingly as you can, what you think he should do, being clear about why you think your suggestions are the best for his long-term happiness and that of his family. You could begin your letter in the following manner or use an opening of your own:

Dear Asher,

You certainly are in an unhappy place right now. Perhaps...

16. As this chapter makes clear, being a gifted young person is a mixed blessing. Even in our own times, we know of the difficulties talented young people have by seeing Jennifer Capriati as a teen tennis star, Michael Jackson as a child pop star, and Macaulay Culkin as a child film star. Imagine you are a reporter for People magazine. Your editor has sent you to interview Asher Lev because word of his artistic abilities has gotten around. Write a series of insightful questions. Next, imagine Asher's answers to them, and use them as the basis for an article about him. The title of your article could be, "Drawing Stalin in Brooklyn."
17. You have read previously in this novel about the treatment of the Jews in Russia under Stalin. This chapter also contains a recounting of cruelty to the Jews in Uman in 1938. Imagine you wanted to tell a younger brother or sister about the decades of the Jewish oppression in Communist Russia under Stalin. Choose one of the stories about these events, related by any one of the characters in the chapters you have read so far. Then tell it in your own words on a level that you think a young person would understand.

**BOOK TWO
SIX**

25. Asher is very sad about his father's absence. Even though he is responsible for the separation from his father, Asher still misses him a great deal. Most people, even children, have had an experience with missing someone or even something. Write a paragraph about your feelings with missing someone or something as vividly and honestly as you can, using Asher's description of missing his father as an example. It is not necessary for you to use real names, but you can if you desire to do so.
26. This novel is really the story of the evolution of an artist from childhood. Knowing about the different media in which an artist can express him or herself is helpful to understanding the book's artistic theme. After research, write a brief summary of the characteristics of the different painting media below. The first one is given as an example:

Oils: where the original pigments (colors) are mixed in oil (usually linseed) and used to paint pictures on a canvas.

Pastels:

Charcoal:

Watercolors:

Acrylics:

Crayon:

27. You will remember that the Lev family are members of the Hasidic branch of Judaism which is "observant" (and very "conservative"). In this chapter, Asher's mother says, "Painting is for goyim [a non-Jew], Asher. Jews don't draw and paint." This conflict, the tension between Asher's driving need to paint and his Jewish religion, is at the heart of this novel. Imagine that you are Asher, and with those words of your mother, you finally become completely aware of what this concept means to you. Write an entry in the secret journal that he would make about this awareness and how that awareness makes him feel. Complete the entry below:

Date _____

It can't be true! Why...