

Short Answer Questions

- 1. What was the initial reaction of Szpilman when the German officer asked him to play the piano?**
Answer: Szpilman was hesitant and did not move immediately, likely due to fear, physical weakness, and lack of practice for over two years.
- 2. Why did Szpilman refuse to leave the city with the officer?**
Answer: Szpilman refused because, as a Jew, he was in hiding and leaving the city would expose him to the risk of being captured or killed.
- 3. What did the German officer provide to Szpilman during his visits?**
Answer: The officer provided food (bread and jam), a warm eiderdown, and advice to hide in the loft above the attic entrance.
- 4. What made Szpilman believe the war was nearing its end?**
Answer: The decrease in artillery fire and the officer's assurance that the war would be over by spring suggested the conflict was winding down.
- 5. Why was Szpilman mistaken for a German by the woman and the Polish soldier?**
Answer: Szpilman was wearing a German military overcoat given to him by the officer, which caused the misunderstanding.
- 6. How did Szpilman confirm his identity to the Polish soldiers?**
Answer: He shouted repeatedly, "Don't shoot! I'm Polish!" and the soldiers verified his identity after examining him closely.
- 7. What role did Szpilman plan to resume after surviving the war?**
Answer: Szpilman planned to return to working for Polish Radio, where he had been employed before the war.
- 8. What emotions did Szpilman experience during the Christmas and New Year of 1945?**
Answer: Szpilman felt extreme loneliness, despair, and nostalgia, as it was his sixth and worst wartime holiday, spent alone in the attic.
- 9. Why did the German officer feel ashamed of being German?**
Answer: He was ashamed because of the atrocities committed by the Nazis during the war, which he witnessed and opposed.
- 10. What was the significance of the radio announcements Szpilman heard on January 15?**
Answer: The announcements broadcasted the defeat of Germany and the liberation of Warsaw, signaling the end of the war in that region.

Essay Questions

- 1. How does the relationship between Szpilman and the German officer reflect themes of humanity and compassion in the midst of war?**
Answer:
The relationship between Władysław Szpilman and the German officer, later revealed as Wilm Hosenfeld, is a profound example of humanity and compassion shining through the darkness of war. In the midst of the Holocaust, where Jews faced systematic persecution and extermination, Hosenfeld's actions stand out as a beacon of empathy. Upon discovering

Szpilman's identity as a Jewish pianist hiding in the ruins of Warsaw, Hosenfeld does not turn him in but instead offers assistance. He encourages Szpilman to play the piano, perhaps to affirm his humanity or to find a moment of shared cultural appreciation through music, as evidenced by Szpilman's performance of Chopin's Nocturne. Hosenfeld's subsequent actions—providing food, a warm eiderdown, and a safer hiding spot in the loft—demonstrate a deep sense of compassion and moral courage. His statement, "Yes, I am [German]! And ashamed of it, after everything that's been happening," reveals his personal rejection of Nazi ideology and his guilt over his country's actions. For Szpilman, this unexpected kindness fosters a bond of trust, culminating in his heartfelt offer to help Hosenfeld in the future, a gesture that reflects mutual respect and gratitude. Their relationship underscores the idea that even in the most dehumanizing circumstances, individual acts of kindness can transcend enmity, offering hope and affirming the enduring power of human connection.

2. **Discuss the role of music in Szpilman's survival and identity in the narrative.**

Answer:

Music plays a pivotal role in Władysław Szpilman's survival and sense of identity in "In the Attic." As a pianist and composer, Szpilman's identity is deeply tied to music, which serves as both a lifeline and a symbol of his humanity during the horrors of the Holocaust. When the German officer discovers Szpilman in hiding and asks him to play the piano, it is a critical moment. Despite his hesitation—stemming from physical weakness, unpracticed hands, and fear of exposure—Szpilman's performance of Chopin's Nocturne in C sharp minor becomes a turning point. The act of playing rekindles his identity as an artist, momentarily lifting him from the despair of his circumstances. The music also humanizes him in the eyes of the officer, who, moved by the performance, chooses to help rather than betray him. This moment suggests that music serves as a universal language, bridging the divide between a Jewish fugitive and a German officer. Furthermore, Szpilman's pre-war and post-war connection to Polish Radio, where he worked as a musician, symbolizes his hope for a return to normalcy and his cultural roots. Music, therefore, is not only a means of survival but also a source of resilience, preserving Szpilman's sense of self amidst the dehumanization of war and reinforcing his determination to endure until liberation.

3. **How does Szpilman's memoir contribute to our understanding of the Holocaust as a survivor testimony?**

Answer:

Władysław Szpilman's memoir, "The Pianist," from which "In the Attic" is adapted, is a powerful example of survivor testimony that significantly enriches our understanding of the Holocaust. As a firsthand account, it provides a detailed, personal perspective on the brutal realities faced by Jews in Nazi-occupied Poland, particularly in the Warsaw ghetto.

Szpilman's narrative vividly captures the physical and emotional toll of displacement, starvation, and constant fear of death, offering readers an intimate look at the dehumanizing conditions of the ghetto and the hiding that followed. His encounters with death, such as the mass deportations to concentration camps and gas chambers, highlight the scale of the genocide, while his survival underscores the role of luck, resilience, and unexpected human kindness, as seen in his interactions with Wilm Hosenfeld. As a survivor testimony, Szpilman's memoir preserves historical truth, ensuring that the atrocities of the Holocaust are documented and remembered. It also humanizes the statistics, giving voice to

individual suffering and courage. In literature, such testimonies add emotional depth and authenticity, fostering empathy and moral reflection. By detailing both the horrors and rare moments of compassion, Szpilman's account enhances our understanding of the complexities of human behavior during crises, emphasizing the importance of remembrance to prevent future atrocities.

4. **Analyze the significance of hope and resilience in Szpilman's survival during the war.**

Answer:

Hope and resilience are central to Władysław Szpilman's survival in "In the Attic," serving as the psychological and emotional anchors that sustain him through unimaginable hardship. Living in hiding amidst the ruins of Warsaw, Szpilman faces starvation, loneliness, and the constant threat of discovery, yet he clings to the hope of survival. This hope is reinforced by external factors, such as the German officer's assurances that "the war will be over by spring at the latest" and the decreasing sounds of artillery, which signal the approaching end of the conflict. The officer's acts of kindness—providing food, warmth, and a safer hiding place—bolster Szpilman's belief that survival is possible. Internally, Szpilman's resilience is evident in his refusal to leave his hiding place despite the officer's offer to take him to a safer village, a decision driven by his understanding of the dangers he faces as a Jew. His mental fortitude is further shown in his ability to endure monotonous, hopeless weeks in the attic, surrounded by rats and silence, without losing his will to live. Szpilman's memories of his pre-war life and his determination to return to Polish Radio reflect his unwavering commitment to reclaiming his identity and future. These elements of hope and resilience, combined with moments of human kindness and sheer luck, enable Szpilman to survive the Holocaust, illustrating the extraordinary strength required to endure such extreme adversity.