



Introduction

Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List* is one of the most significant endeavors in the history of cinema. Winner of seven Academy Awards®, including Best Picture and Best Director, this incredible true story follows the enigmatic Oskar Schindler (Liam Neeson), who saved the lives of some 1,200 Jews during the Holocaust. It is the triumph of one man who made a difference and the drama of those who survived one of the darkest chapters in human history because of what he did. Meticulously restored from the original film negative in pristine high definition and supervised by Spielberg, *Schindler's List* is a powerful story whose lessons of courage and faith continue to inspire generations.

NOTE: Due to mature subject matter, this film is recommended for older students.

The [Companion Resource to Using *Schindler's List* in the Classroom](#) identifies a variety of materials that will help students understand the film within the proper context and that are aligned with the [Pedagogical Principles for Effective Holocaust Instruction](#) developed by Echoes & Reflections.

Additional discussion questions and activities are intended to promote thoughtful discussion about complex topics including antisemitism, Nazi ideology, the ghetto experience, the “Final Solution,” and choices individuals made during the Holocaust.

Preparing to View the Film

To maximize students' understanding of events depicted in the film, review the materials outlined below prior to viewing and discussing the film, and encourage students to revisit these resources as needed.

Glossary

Introduce students to the [Audio Glossary](#) where they will find the definition and, in some cases, the pronunciation, of many terms and phrases used in the film.

Timeline of the Holocaust

The events in *Schindler's List* take place primarily between 1938 and 1945. Provide students with an overview of what took place prior to when the film begins by having them review events before 1938 using the [Timeline of the Holocaust](#). Encourage students to revisit the Timeline for additional information about the years and events depicted in the film, for example, what else was taking place in 1941 when the Krakow ghetto was sealed, or in 1943, when the Krakow ghetto was liquidated?

Setting

Schindler's List takes place primarily in and around Krakow, Poland. Introduce students to the city by showing them the attached [map](#) and having them read the [Krakow during the Holocaust](#) handout prior to watching the film.

Introduction to Major Characters

Individual character bios found below can also be accessed [here](#).

Oskar Schindler was born in 1908, in Zwittau (today Svitavy), in what is now Moravia in the Czech Republic. He grew up in a Catholic well-to-do family that was German-speaking. Before the Germans occupied a section of

Czechoslovakia in 1938, he collected information on railways and troop movements for the German government. He was arrested for espionage by the Czech government but was released under the terms of the Munich Agreement in 1938. In 1939, Schindler became a member of the Nazi Party, relocated to Krakow, and acquired a run-down enamelware factory that had been owned by a Jew. He transformed it into an extremely successful enterprise with the help of a Jewish financial advisor, Abraham Bankier, and Schindler amassed a fortune. At the factory's peak in 1944, he employed about 1,750 workers, of whom 1,000 were Jews. The classification of the factory as a "business essential to the war effort" and his connections helped Schindler protect his Jewish workers from deportation and death in the Nazi camps, but as time went on, Schindler had to give Nazi officials large bribes and gifts of luxury items obtainable only on the black market to keep his workers safe.

By July 1944, when Germany was losing the war, the SS began closing down the easternmost concentration camps and deporting the remaining prisoners westward. Many were killed in Auschwitz and the Gross-Rosen concentration camp. Schindler convinced *SS-Hauptsturmführer* Amon Goeth, commandant of the nearby Kraków-Plaszów concentration camp, to allow him to move his factory to Brünnlitz (today Brno) in the Sudetenland, thus sparing his workers from almost certain death in the gas chambers.

Using names provided by Jewish Ghetto Police officer Marcel Goldberg, Goeth's secretary Mietek Pemper compiled and typed the list of 1,200 Jews who travelled to Brünnlitz in October 1944. Schindler continued to bribe SS officials to prevent the execution of his workers until the end of World War II in Europe in May 1945, by which time he had spent his entire fortune on bribes and black-market purchases of supplies for his workers.

Schindler moved to West Germany after the war, where he was supported by assistance payments from Jewish relief organizations. After receiving a partial reimbursement for his wartime expenses, he moved with his wife, Emilie, to Argentina, where they took up farming. When he went bankrupt in 1958, Schindler returned to Germany alone, where he failed at several business ventures and relied on financial support from *Schindlerjuden* ("Schindler Jews")—the people whose lives he had saved during the war.

Oskar Schindler and his wife, Emilie, were named Righteous Among the Nations by Yad Vashem in 1993. He died in October 1974 in Hildesheim, Germany, and was buried in Jerusalem.

Itzhak Stern was born in 1901 in Krakow, a city in southern Poland. He was an important leader in the Jewish community, vice president of the Jewish Agency for Western Poland, and a member of the Zionist Central Committee. During the war, Stern was imprisoned in the Krakow ghetto and later the Plaszow labor and concentration camp, where he was forced to work in the office and had contact with the camp's commandant, Amon Goeth. While still in Plaszow, Stern supplied information to Schindler about conditions in the camp and Schindler in turn provided money to improve them.

Stern and the surviving members of his family were placed on the famous list to be transferred to Brünnlitz, in then Czechoslovakia; however, his mother died of illness when the female prisoners were transferred to Auschwitz before Schindler could intervene. In Brünnlitz, Stern worked directly with Schindler and became one of the leaders of the workers. After the liberation of Brünnlitz by the Russian Army, Stern moved to France and eventually immigrated to Israel where he lived with his wife, Sophia, until his death in 1969.

Stern's role in the film is expanded. While he was an accountant for Oskar Schindler, he serves as a composite of several Jewish men Schindler had working for him, notably Mietek Pemper, who had been forced to work as Amon Goeth's assistant in Plaszow and Abraham Bankier, who actually worked more closely with Schindler.

Amon Leopold Goeth was born in 1908 in Vienna, Austria and was raised in a well-to-do middle class and Catholic family. In 1925, he joined the Austrian Nazi Party, was awarded full party membership in 1931, and a year later joined the SS, where he rose steadily through the ranks. In 1942, he was transferred to the staff of SS General Odilio Globocnik who was in charge of Operation Reinhard, the Nazi campaign to kill the Jews of occupied Poland. In February 1943, he was made commandant of the Plaszow concentration camp and also supervised the violent liquidation of the Krakow and Tarnow ghettos and the Szebnie concentration camp.

Goeth was known as "The Butcher of Plaszow" for his cruelty and violent treatment of prisoners. A prisoner in

Plaszow was lucky to survive more than four weeks—collective punishment became frequent, torture and death were daily events. Goeth was arrested in the autumn of 1944 in connection with an investigation of corruption and black market activities in the camps. He was also suspected of embezzlement, but before he could be put on trial the war ended. He was recuperating in an SS-sanitarium in Bavaria, when he was arrested by Patton's troops in February 1945. The Americans turned him over to the Poles.

In 1946, at the trial at the Supreme National Tribunal of Poland, in Krakow, Goeth was found guilty and convicted of the murders of tens of thousands of people. He was hanged for his crimes on September 13, 1946, not far from the site of the former Plaszow camp.

Echoes& Reflections Lessons

The following lessons and their accompanying assets will introduce students to important topics associated with the Holocaust and prepare them for the events leading up to or represented in *Schindler's List*.

[Nazi Ideology](#)

[The Ghettos](#)

[The Final Solution](#)

[Rescue and Righteous Among the Nations](#)

Activities

Below are recommended activities to engage students with the film's content. Some activities can be completed while students are watching the film, others upon completion.

1. Review [The Ghettos](#) handout with students, encouraging them to consult the Audio Glossary and Timeline of the Holocaust for additional information and explanation about material they are reading. Explain that as they are watching the film, they should use the "Notes" section on each page of the handout to keep a list of examples that illustrate the information outlined in the handout.
2. Explain to students that the role of the ghetto was to control and confine Jews and that the situation in the ghetto led to Jews being weakened as well. Have students divide a piece of paper into three columns or create a chart on their laptop or tablet, and label the columns "control," "confine," and "weaken." As students watch the film, have them complete the chart with specific examples that illustrate how the Jews in the Krakow ghetto were controlled, confined, and weakened.
3. Provide students with the [Story Arc Graphic Organizer](#) included here, or another similar organizer, and have them identify the key components of *Schindler's List* (e.g., exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, resolution), either during or following the film. Upon completion, have students share their work in small groups and discuss differences in how they organized the film's storyline and support their choices, especially which event is identified as the climax of the action.
4. Introduce students to the phrase "Righteous Among the Nations." Explain that in 1953, the Knesset (Israeli parliament) passed the Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority Law, which created Yad Vashem. Yad Vashem received the mandate to identify and recognize non-Jews who had risked their lives during the Holocaust to save Jews in countries that had been under Nazi rule or that had collaborated with the German regime. Tell students that a committee of judges discusses each and every person who is a candidate for becoming a "Righteous Among the Nations." Have students work together to identify what they think should be the criteria for someone being honored as "Righteous Among the Nations" and then compare their list to the [criteria](#) identified by Yad Vashem. Have students discuss whether they believe Oskar Schindler deserved to be honored in this way and why or why not.
5. The actions of Oskar Schindler continue to impact people's lives long after the end of the war. Watch the clips of interviews with [Eva Lavi](#) who was the youngest girl to survive the war because of Schindler's efforts and [Nahum and Genia Manor](#), who met and married in the factory and remain together today. What do we learn about Oskar Schindler from these survivors? Have students visit [iWitness](#) for testimonies, resources, and activities to help students learn more about Oskar Schindler and other rescuers and aid providers during the Holocaust.

Discussion Questions/Writing Prompts

The questions below can be used to generate discussion to help students process the film. The questions— covering both content and the making of the film—can also be used as prompts for journaling or other writing assignments.

1. Antisemitism is demonstrated throughout *Schindler's List*. What are specific examples that you observed while watching the film?
2. *Schindler's List* is filmed primarily in black and white with a few scenes filmed in color. Identify which scenes are in color and why you think Spielberg made this artistic decision. Have students consider other artistic decisions that Spielberg made and their impact on the film. Students might want to consider such things as lighting, camera angles, music and other sounds, e.g., dogs barking, shouting in German.
3. What is the irony of Schindler telling his wife, Emilie, "They won't soon forget the name Schindler here...he did something extraordinary"? What did Schindler think he was going to accomplish in Krakow during the war? Where in the story did his goal change?
4. What were the contents of the suitcases that were emptied and sorted after the train departed? What did you learn about the people who were deported from this scene?
5. How does Goeth's speech to his officers prior to the liquidation of the Krakow ghetto serve as a clear example of Nazi ideology? What specifically did he say about that history of the Jewish people and how history will remember this moment when they were destroyed?
6. What were you thinking as you watched the ghetto massacre? What do you think Schindler was thinking as he watched what was taking place? Much has been said about the little girl in the red coat in this scene. What do you think she symbolizes? Do you think this is the turning point in Schindler's metamorphosis from opportunist to humanitarian? If not, what would you identify as the turning point?
7. What does "dehumanization" mean? How was dehumanization an essential aspect of Nazi ideology? Name specific examples of how Jews were dehumanized in *Schindler's List*.
8. While sitting on the balcony of Goeth's villa, he and Schindler have a discussion about "power." How does each man understand the concept? Is there any overlap in their understanding of power? How do each man's actions illustrate his belief about the meaning of power?
9. Have students consider the meaning of "resistance", especially as it relates to the Holocaust, and identify specific examples of resistance portrayed in the film.
10. The ring given to Schindler by Stern on behalf of the Jews in the factory is inscribed "whoever saves one life saves the world entire." The actual quote is "Whoever destroys a single life is considered by Scripture to have destroyed the whole world, and whoever saves a single life is considered by Scripture to have saved the whole world." Reflect on the meaning of these words within the context of *Schindler's List*.