

## OSCAR WINNER 1993:

Best Picture	Best Film Editing
Best Director	Best Original Score
Best Screenplay Adaptation	Best Art Direction
Best Cinematography	

## TEACHERS' NOTES

This study guide is aimed at students of History at Key Stage 3, GCSE and A Level, but would also be useful to those studying Media, Religious and General Studies at these levels. This guide will examine some of the background to the film Schindler's List and will also look at the challenges involved for the filmmaker when tackling events which actually happened.

Schindler's List: Certificate 115. Running Time 195 minutes.

## MAJOR CREDITS FOR SCHINDLER'S LIST

Schindler's List 1993 (Amblin/Universal)

Producers: Steven Spielberg, Gerald R. Molen, Branko Lustig

Director: Steven Spielberg

Screenplay: Steven Zaillian

Director of Photography: Janusz Kaminski

Editor: Michael Kahn

Music: John Williams

Art Director: Allan Starski

Cast: Liam Neeson

Ben Kingsley

Ralph Fiennes

Caroline Goodall

Jonathan Sagalle

Embeth Davidtz

Oscars 1993: Best Picture

Best Director

Best Screenplay Adaptation

Best Cinematography

Best Film Editing

Best Original Score

Best Art Direction

Oscar Nominations 1993: Best Actor (Liam Neeson)

Best Supporting Actor (Ralph Fiennes)

Best Costume Design

Best Sound

Best Make-up

## **INTRODUCTION BY DEREK MALCOLM**

Many filmmakers would say that there's no such thing as a movie capable of shaking the world. But some still attempt to make them. Those who succeed are rare, and the strange thing is that even the lucky ones don't appear to know they are doing it at the time. In fact, it sometimes takes years to realise what really is a great film or what may have looked wonderful at the time but was just a momentary flourish.

Most of the films on this particular list didn't so much shake the world as become memorable because, when you look back on them, they seem so much better than we may have thought at the time. But memories are short and the opportunity to see the full flowering of cinema history is denied to all but a few. So the list looks a little unbalanced to me, who has been luckier than most in looking further into the past and at world cinema rather than just Hollywood.

What we get here are films which were certainly important in their time, and still look good today

- movies that have remained in people's affections ever since they first saw them. If there aren't really enough from the first two-thirds of cinema history, no matter. It's good at least to know that some of the greatest directors in the world are represented and that their artistry, often the equivalent of any great playwright, painter, author or composer of the 20th century, continues to be appreciated. Most of these films will live longer than we do.

## **SCHINDLER'S LIST**

Whether this film will stand the test of time is questionable. It seems to me that Schindler, saviour of the Jews, had more flaws than Spielberg dares to suggest and that the absence of them weakens this otherwise undoubtedly moving and honest epic. The fact that he was in many respects no hero would have made his transformation even more affecting. Even so, this is a considerable achievement from a director many thought was merely the seductive muse of American suburbia. Much more than Holocaust, the television series that also shook the world by making a soap opera out of one of the most carefully thought out, and successful, pieces of ethnic cleansing of all time, Spielberg's film mirrors the terrible banality of evil as well as its horror. No-one looking at Schindler's List can possibly fail to be moved, even if its parts are greater than its whole.

*Today is history*

*Today will be remembered.*

*Years from now, the young will ask with wonder  
about this day.*

*Today is history and you are part of it.*

*Six hundred years ago when, elsewhere,  
they were footing the blame for the Black Death -  
Kazimierz the Great, so called, told the Jews  
they could come to Cracow.*

*They came.*

*They trundled their belongings into the city -*

*They settled, they took hold, they prospered.*

*In business, science, education, the arts.*

*They came here with nothing,*

*and with nothing they flourished.*

*For six centuries, there has been a Jewish Cracow.*

*Think about that.*

*By this evening, those six centuries are a rumor.*

*They never happened.*

*Today is history.*

If you have seen the film SCHINDLER'S LIST then you might recognise the words printed above. They are spoken by the commandant of the Plaszow Concentration Camp at Plaszow, Amon Goeth, a central character in the story of Oskar Schindler. Goeth actually existed and was the commandant of Plaszow Concentration Camp in Poland.

Read the speech again. Whilst such speeches may have been created for the film, in your study of History and the history of the Second World War, how do they create an impression of what happened to the Jews and the reasons for the way in which they were treated by the Nazis?

This study guide will examine some of the background to the film SCHINDLER'S LIST and will also look at the challenges involved for the filmmaker when tackling events which actually happened.

### **The Background**

SCHINDLER'S LIST presents only one incident in the history of the Holocaust. How are we, as members of the audience, left to 'fill in the gaps'? Are we expected to know the background to the events that we are shown? How do our own attitudes shape the ways in which we understand the film?

It is worth looking at some evidence in order to try to explain some of the events which are presented in the film.

#### **Task 1**

Look carefully at the following sources:

#### **SOURCE A**

*Their synagogues should be set on fire and whatever does not burn up should be covered or spread over with dirt so that no one may ever be able to see a stone of it. ... Their homes should be broken down and destroyed passport and travelling privileges should be absolutely forbidden to the Jews ... all their cash and valuables should be taken from them. To sum up ... if this advice of mine does not suit you, then find a better one and we may all be free of this insufferable devilish burden - the Jews.*

## **SOURCE B**

*I must certainly regard the Jewish race as the born enemy of pure man and of all nobility in them and am convinced that we Germans in particular will be destroyed by them.*

## **SOURCE C**

*This world wide Jewish conspiracy for the overthrow of civilisation and for the reconstitution of society on the basis of arrested development ... has been steadily growing.*

## **SOURCE D**

*Should the Jew ... triumph over the people of this world, his crown will be the funeral wreath of mankind, and this planet will once again follow its orbit through ether, without any human life on its surface, as it did millions of years ago. And so I believe that my conduct is in accordance with the will of the Almighty creator. In standing guard against the Jew I am defending the handiwork of the Lord.*

One of these four sources comes from Hitler's book "Mein Kampf" (My Struggle) published in 1925. Can you tell which one? The others were written in - 1543, 1881 and 1920. Can you sort out the different sources into their correct order? Finally, one of them appeared in an English newspaper. Can you tell which one? (For answers see page 18).

The fact that nearly 400 years span the four quotations yet all four of them seem to be saying the same thing should point out that anti-Semitism was nothing new when Hitler came to power in 1933. Yet until Hitler there had been no attempt at the total extermination of the Jewish race in Europe.

Paul Hilberg, an historian, has described the treatment of Jews as follows:

*"Since the fourth century after Christ there have been three anti-Jewish policies: conversion, expulsion and annihilation. The second appeared as an alternative to the first, and the third emerged as an alternative to the second"*

But why should this hatred of the Jews have been in existence for so long? Since before the birth of Christ, Jews have been either admired or hated. Why should one religious group have been so selected for hatred and finally, for the brutal extermination which we glimpse in SCHINDLER'S LIST?

## **Task 2**

For you to try and research the complete history of Jewish persecution would be impossible. In order to understand both the myths that have circulated over the centuries about the Jews and also some of the ways in which they have been treated, you should try to find out about the following:

1. The Diaspora
2. The Blood Libel
3. Treatment of Jews by the Spanish Inquisition
4. The Settlement of the Pale
5. Pogroms.

These five areas, covering a wide period of history, should give you the sense that anti-Semitism was not simply confined to Germany in the 1930's - 40's but was spread across Europe over many centuries. What it is now crucial to examine is the situation in Germany which gave rise to Hitler's desire to exterminate all Jews and the development towards what is termed 'The Final Solution'.

### **The move towards the Holocaust**

From the moment that Hitler came to power, persecution of the Jews began. One of the main doctrines that Hitler had always had was that the Jews should be removed from the Aryan state of the Third Reich. But it is important to realise that although the Jews were persecuted from the outset, there does not seem to have been an immediate policy to exterminate them.

### Task 3

Find out all that you can about the following:

1. The Nuremberg laws
2. Kristalnacht
3. Jewish emigration from Germany 1930-9.

Even up until 1941 it was possible for Jews to leave Germany and what had been Austria. Many were imprisoned, many were killed, but there was no policy to attempt to exterminate them. It is believed that Hitler planned to move the entire Jewish population of Europe to a place at the extreme of Russia, once he had conquered it.

However, the invasion of Russia in 1941 marked a watershed in the treatment of Jews. From this moment on the organised murder of Jewish communities in the eastern territories occupied by the Germans began.

When Poland was conquered in 1939 it was divided into two parts, one of which was to be a “dumping ground” for Jews, Gypsies and “Poles unsuited to the Reich”. The policy, carried out by Heydrich, was simple and applied to 2,000,000 Jews:

1. Move all Jews as fast as possible into cities
2. Move all Jews out of the German Reich into Poland
3. Move the remaining 30,000 Gypsies into Poland
4. Eject all Jews from German territories in freight cars.

The operations were carried out by special duty groups called ‘Einsatzgruppen’ in a particularly brutal way.

However, the local populations would also be invited to participate both in the rounding up of Jews and in the treatment meted out to them.

## Task 4

Look at the two sources below:

### SOURCE A

*Members of the Police were, with a few exceptions, quite happy to take part in the shooting of Jews. They had a ball! Obviously they won't say that today. Nobody failed to turn up ... I want to repeat that people today give a false impression when they say that the actions against the Jews were carried out unwillingly. There was great hatred against the Jews; it was revenge, and they wanted money and gold. Don't let's kid ourselves, there was always something up for grabs during the Jewish actions. Everywhere you went there was something for the asking. The poor Jews were brought in, the rich Jews were fetched and their homes were scoured.*

*Polish Police official, Krakow District 1941*

### SOURCE B

*All the men coped with the tough physical stress well. No less considerable were the extreme psychological demands made on them by the large number of liquidations. The morale and self possession of the men was kept up by personally reminding them constantly of the political necessity of what they were doing.*

*Day book of Einsatzgruppe One, 31 July 1941*

In what ways are the motivations of the two groups involved in the persecution of the Jews different?

From random killings and massacres, a new policy developed which would finally lead to the extermination of millions of Jews from across Europe.

## Task 5

Read the text of the Wannsee Conference which refers to the Final Solution. How does this mark a change in the proposed treatment of Jews?

## EXTRACTS FROM WANNSEE DOCUMENT

*In view of the dangers of emigration in war-time, and the possibilities in the East, the Reichsführer SS and Chief of the German Police (Himmler) has forbidden the emigration of Jews.*

*Emigration has now been replaced by evacuation of the Jews to the East, as a further possible solution, with the appropriate prior authorization of the Führer.*

*However, this operation should be regarded only as a provisional option; but it is already supplying practical experience of great significance in view of the coming final solution of the Jewish question.*

*The Jews are to be utilized for work in the East in an expedient manner in the course of the final solution. In large (labour) columns, with the sexes separated, Jews capable of work will be moved into those areas as they build roads, during which a large proportion will no doubt drop out through natural reduction. The remnant that eventually remains will require suitable treatment; because it will without doubt represent the most (physically) resistant part, it consists of a natural selection that could, on its release, become the germ-cell of a new Jewish revival (witness the experience of history).*

*Europe is to be combed through from West to East in the course of the practical implementation of the final solution. ... The evacuated Jews will first be taken, group by group, to so-called transit ghettos, in order to be transported further east from there.*

Until 1941 Jews had been used for forced labour in camps or taken from the ghettos in forced labour details. The camps from this time onwards, however, developed a more sinister character - they became death camps, converted for the ultimate destruction of the Jewish population of Europe.

How is this reflected in the treatment of the Jews of Krakow as seen in SCHINDLER'S LIST?

## The Settings for Schindler's List

The main events of SCHINDLER'S LIST take place around the ancient city of Krakow in Poland. Krakow had been one of the most important Jewish communities in Europe since the early fourteenth century. By 1939 the Jewish population of the city was around 60,000 (out of a total population of the town of 250,000).

Between the wars the Jewish community had continued to flourish, although the increase in Polish anti-Semitism had certainly had its effects on the community.

### Task 6

What evidence are you given in SCHINDLER'S LIST of the anti-Semitic nature of some Poles?

Krakow was occupied by the German Army on September 6th 1939 and the persecution of the Jews was launched without delay. Krakow was the administrative centre of the General government, the name given to the occupied territory in the interior of Poland.

By the end of the year, terror raids had been carried out in the Jewish quarters of the city and several synagogues had been destroyed. In the following year, Jews were banned from the main streets and squares of the city. In March 1941, 40,000 Jews were expelled from the city, leaving no more than 11,000. On 3rd March 1941 the Krakow Ghetto was established in the district of Podgorze. By the end of March the ghetto was completely sealed off within a wall and a barbed wire fence.

As well as the remaining Jews of Krakow, an additional 8,000 Jews from neighbouring areas were forced into the ghetto. So, by late 1941, 18,000 Jews were crammed into an area measuring 650 yards by 430 yards.

### Task 7

When you have seen SCHINDLER'S LIST, try to say what impression was given of life in the ghetto? What were the key things needed to survive? What were the main problems that the Jewish population of the ghetto had to face?

With such a source of cheap labour, it is not surprising that the Germans quickly set up factories inside the ghetto and also hired out Jewish labour to factories outside the ghetto walls.

### **Task 8**

Oskar Schindler arrived in Krakow in late 1939. From what you have seen in **SCHINDLER'S LIST**, what seem to have been the things that attracted him to Krakow? What did he hope to do in his time in the city?

At the end of May 1942 the Germans began to deport Jews from the ghetto to the extermination camps. During the next few months further “selections” took place and thousands more Jews were sent to the camps.

On March 13th 1943, the residents of part of the ghetto (2,000 in number) were transferred to a work camp in Plaszow. The following day an “Aktion” took place in which the rest of the ghetto was closed down. Several hundred Jews were killed on the spot whilst a further 2,700 were taken to Auschwitz extermination camp and killed there in the gas chambers.

### **Task 9**

With the transfer of the Jews to the Plaszow work camp, how do we see Oskar Schindler helping his own “chosen” Jews? How does he try to ensure that they stand a chance of survival? In what ways was the final liquidation of the ghetto important as a turning point in Schindler’s life?

## Film and History

### CONSTRUCTING HISTORY

When a filmmaker makes an historical film, he or she usually puts great emphasis on the accuracy of the look of the film. Below are some images that were taken during the Second World War.



Firstly, how do you think that they would be useful to a filmmaker who has set his or her film during the period? Secondly, in what ways do they relate to images that you have seen in SCHINDLER'S LIST?

Having briefly examined the historical background to SCHINDLER'S LIST and seen how actual historical evidence is used by the filmmaker, it is now worth thinking about how the film itself is a portrait of events which took place in Krakow between 1939 and 1944.

Schindler's Ark, the book on which the film is based, first appeared in 1982.

Although based in fact, it won a prize for fiction. This caused a certain amount of controversy at the time.

Below are some excerpts from the introduction to the novel:

"This account of Oskar's astonishing history is based in the first place on interviews with fifty Schindler survivors...But the narrative depends also on documentary and other information supplied by those few wartime associates of Oskar's who can still be reached."

"To use the texture and devices of a novel to tell a true story is a course which has frequently been followed in modern writing. It is the one I have chosen to follow here...because the craft of the novelist is the only one to which I can lay claim."

"I have attempted to avoid fiction, though, since fiction would debase the record and to distinguish between reality and myths which are likely to attach themselves to a man of Oskar's stature."

### **Task 10**

Reading through the words of Thomas Kenealy, the author of *SCHINDLER'S ARK*, would you say that he views his account of the life of Schindler as fact or fiction? How would you explain his idea of the difference between his novel and fiction? From what he has said, do you think that people were right to say that the book should not have been awarded a prize for fiction? How would you use what he has said to back up an argument for using both *SCHINDLER'S ARK* and *SCHINDLER'S LIST* as historical sources?

### **Filming the Holocaust**

#### **Film Style**

One of the startling things about *SCHINDLER'S LIST* is that for the most part it is filmed in black and white. Why do you think that Steven Spielberg chose to do this? What effect does it have on us as members of an audience? Can you remember how you felt after the first few minutes when the film stayed in black and white and did not go back to colour?

The fact that it is mainly in black and white means that the moments of colour that appear in the film have an impact. Can you remember all of the moments in the film where colour appeared? Why do you think that those particular moments were chosen? What was important about them?

Why do you think Spielberg chose to film the opening in colour and then fade to black and white? How does the fact that the film is in black and white relate to our experience, as an audience watching the film in 1944, of the Holocaust itself? How is the director playing on this experience?

#### **Oskar Schindler**

As we have said, the story of Oskar Schindler is a true one. Schindler arrived in Poland in 1939, following on the heels of the invading Germans. As we see in the film, he established his own enamel works which was staffed mainly by Jewish workers. The basic facts that we are shown about Schindler are all true.

## Task 11

Having seen the film, write a list of “facts” about Oskar Schindler. From what you have seen, try to write a short outline of Schindler’s activities in both Poland and later in Czechoslovakia.

What the above task should do is to point out that much has been added to the “facts”. Look back at the work that you did on “Constructing History” to give you an idea of how other details have been added to the “basic facts”.

If we look at the ways in which the character of Schindler has been constructed in the film then we might see the ways in which the story itself could have been awarded a prize for “fiction” in Great Britain.

### **CONSTRUCTING CHARACTER**

How are we first introduced to Schindler in the film? What sort of character does he appear to be? What are his main interests? Does he appear to be a sympathetic character in the opening section of the film? What do you think are his initial feelings towards the Jews that he employs? What do you think are the key moments from the early part of the film which give you this information?

If something changes Schindler, then what is it? How is this shown to us in the film? How do his interests change? Are we given any idea why they change? How is Schindler shown at the end of the film? How has he changed? How is this change shown?

You have earlier written down what you consider the “facts” about Schindler. What would you say are the most important parts of the film which tell us about him? How do these important sections relate to the facts that you have written down? Do you think that these moments are factual or only possible things which could have happened?

You have looked at how we are shown ideas about Schindler. But are we shown the changes? Would you think that it was important for us to know why he changed?

In what ways does the film explore the character of Schindler without giving us any answers?

### **Points of View**

It has been said that the historian has an obligation to relate all known evidence to his theme, not forgetting that which contradicts it. Thus, the historian has to present as many views of a particular event or subject as possible before making his or her own judgement. Can a filmmaker present many points of view?

Think about the film that you have seen? Do we see everything through the eyes of Oskar Schindler? What other “points of view” do we see? How does this affect our understanding of what is happening in the story?

If an historical film is presenting an “unbiased viewpoint” in the same way that historians should present as many different sides of the argument as possible, then how do different viewpoints appear in SCHINDLER’S LIST?

Quite often in a film we are asked to sympathise with one character - that we might term the “good guy”. Does the character of Oskar Schindler fit into our normal idea of the good guy? Perhaps he might at the end of the film but does he all the way through? What other points of view are given indicating that he might not be as nice as we may think?

Do you think that the film avoids “black and white” distinctions? Do you remember when Schindler and Stern are talking and Schindler talks about Goeth? In what ways does this give us a different perspective about the events that we see?

SCHINDLER *I’ve been talking to Goeth -*

STERN *I know the destination, these are the evacuation orders. I’m to help organize the shipments and put myself on the last train -*

SCHINDLER *That's not what I was going to say.... I made Goeth promise me he'll put in a good word for you. Nothing bad's going to happen to you there, you 'll receive special treatment.*

STERN *The directives coming in from Berlin mention "Special Treatment" more and more often. I'd like to think that's not what you mean.*

SCHINDLER *Preferential treatment. All right? Do we have to invent a whole new language?* STERN *I think so.*

When the ghetto is being cleared, we see a German sit at a piano. Around him Jews are being murdered. But he plays Mozart. What sort of image does this give us?

### **Selection**

In the course of the film, we often see the Nazis holding "selections", where the strong are separated from the weak, where those who can work are taken away from those whose destiny will ultimately be the gas chamber.

However, this is not the only selection that we see taking place. Itzhak Stern is also responsible for a "selection", as is Oskar Schindler. They are the ones who will choose who will go on the List, the people who will not only work but also stand a chance of survival.

Think back to the film. Stern is responsible for selecting people to work in Schindler's factory, making enamelware. But does he choose only people who have the skills required for this task? Why does he choose the man with one arm?

Try to think back to the film and remember who else is chosen. What special qualities do many of the people have? Why should Stern want to save them?

### **Naming the Unnameable**

Throughout this study guide we have used the word "Holocaust" as a description of the Nazis' attempt to exterminate the Jews, and the term the "Final Solution", because it is the term most often used in History books. However, many Jews and historians are now adopting different terms. Look at the definitions below of the three terms that are currently used to describe the events of 1939-1945:

HOLOCAUST	Sacrifice
SHOAH	Great catastrophe
CHUBAN	Destruction

Why do you think that the last two terms are now being used to describe the Final Solution? How does their meaning give a different interpretation to the events from the word “Holocaust”?

*Just as our hunger is not that feeling of missing a meal, so our way of being cold has need of a new word. We say 'hunger' we say 'tiredness' 'fear's' 'pain's' we say "winter" and they are different things. They are free words, created and used by free men who live in comfort and suffering in their homes. If the Lagers had lasted longer a new harsh language would have been born and only this language could have expressed what it means to toil the whole day in wind, with the temperature freezing, wearing only a shirt, underpants, cloth jacket and trousers, and in one's whole body nothing but weakness, hunger and knowledge of the end drawing near.*  
*Primo Levi*

How important is it to use the right word? At one moment in SCHINDLER'S LIST Schindler says to Stern that when he is sent to Auschwitz, he will make sure that Stern is given “special treatment”. Stern replies that he would rather not have this because to him it does not mean what Schindler intended it to mean. Schindler asks whether they should invent a new language and Stern says that possibly they should.

### **Conclusion**

Now that you have worked through the various tasks in this study guide, try to answer the following questions:

1. Compare the film with your own study/knowledge of the historical period shown.
  - a) Which scenes in the film illustrate areas you have explored?
  - b) How has the film added to your understanding of the period?
  - c) Are there any major areas you consider relevant to an understanding of this

period which are not addressed in the film?

2. How does the film represent the main historical characters and groups? Why do you think they were represented in the way they were?
3. What evidence does the film provide about the period in which it was made?
4. Draw up a list of the advantages and disadvantages of the film as a resource for historians.

### **Further Work**

Professor Donald Watt proposes three criteria for judging a feature film from a professional historian's position.

"Firstly, the subject must be completely covered, within the limits of programme lengths and material availability. Secondly, it must be objective as defined by historian's practice, avoiding anachronism and bias, and it must seek to understand rather than to condemn. Thirdly, the facts must be accurate, and hypothesis, reconstruction and inference must be presented under their own colours."

Bearing in mind your own study of the Holocaust, apply Professor Watt's three criteria to *SCHINDLER'S LIST*. How would you judge it as a piece of historical evidence?

Next, how would you judge it as a feature film?

*Answers to Task 1: Source A: Martin Luther 1543 Source B: Richard Wagner 1881 Source C: Illustrated Sunday Herald 1920, Source D: Adolf Hitler 1925.*

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Klee, Dressen + Reiss (Hamish Hamilton)

**For a more detailed bibliography and various information sheets on the  
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