

Description: This film depicts the heroic actions of Oskar Schindler, a German war profiteer who, because of his fundamental humanity and great courage, saved more than 1,100 Jews from death in the Holocaust. The film is based on an exceptional “novel,” Schindler’s List by Thomas Keneally. The word “novel” has been applied to this book only because the dialogue and certain details are fictional. Mr. Keneally based the book closely on events reported to him by the “Schindlerjuden,” people whose lives had been saved by Schindler and who were eye-witnesses to Schindler’s heroic actions.

<http://www.teachwithmovies.org/guides/schindlers-list.html>

Teach with Movies:

Schindler’s List

Benefits and Possible Problems:

SERIOUS. This movie vividly describes the horror of the Holocaust. Schindler’s List may cause viewers to cry, feel ill and have nightmares. But people must know about the Holocaust and experience it in some measure because there have been so many instances of mass atrocities since that time, including: the Kmer Rouge killings in Cambodia, the genocide against the Tutsis in Rwanda; and the dirty wars in Argentina and Chile. The recent “ethnic cleansing” in Bosnia-Herzegovina and in Kosovo is fresh evidence of the need of all mankind to remind itself of the holocausts of the past.

Discussion Questions:

1. At the beginning of the war Schindler was a greedy high living war profiteer anxious to profit from the misfortune of the Jews. By the end of the war, what was his attitude toward money? What made him change?
2. There was a theme that ran through most of Schindler’s actions: his delight in women; his interest in good times and high living; his friendliness with everyone (including the Nazis); and his protection of the Jews who came to work in his factory. Can you describe what this was?
3. Can you describe the personal relationship that developed between Itzhak Stern and Schindler?
4. Why is this film shot mostly in black and white? What were the advantages to filming these events in black and white? Color is used four times in the film. Why are certain scenes shot in color?
5. What was Schindler doing when he talked to Amon Goeth about power and told him that refraining from imposing it? Did Schindler’s tactic work? Why not? What was the film trying to tell us through this series of incidents?
6. In this film almost none of the Jewish characters that we get to know well are killed. Why is that? Given the power of this film, what would have been the effect on the audience, particularly those whose relatives were murdered in the Holocaust, had this occurred? How does your answer to this question relate to the decision to use black and white rather than color film?
7. There have been many atrocities committed throughout history. The Holocaust was not the first or the last. Why is the Holocaust recalled with such horror?
8. Has the Holocaust changed the actions of political leaders in the time since it occurred? How does this relate to the actions of NATO and the United Nations in Begonia and Kosovo?

9. Why didn't the Allied Powers, who knew that mass killings were taking place, focus their firepower on the ovens and the killing operations? The answer has something to do with one of the major reasons that President Truman decided to drop atom bombs on Japan, an action which led to the deaths of many civilians.

10. How does the concept of "alien" or "other" work in the psychology of the perpetrators of the Holocaust and other atrocities and mass killings?

11. How does the idea that the victim is somehow regarded as "evil" affect all atrocities and mass killings?

12. Define the concept of the "good German." Identify the "good Germans" in the film. Explain the psychology of compartmentalization.

13. Schindler's wife, Emilie, who was very much his partner in his heroic efforts, said, "We only did what we had to do." How do you reconcile this statement with the actions of most of the German people who lived during the Second World War and who permitted the Holocaust to occur without protest.

16. Elie Wiesel, a survivor of the Holocaust, has said that "indifference" is the greatest sin and punishment of the Holocaust. Can you explain what he meant by this? How does this concept relate to the scene in which Schindler arranges to have the condemned Jews in the overheated box cars hosed down with water? Why does this act amuse the Commandant and other SS officials as they sit in the shade and sip their iced drinks?