

# *Schindler's List* Study Guide

## **A Chronicle of Key Events in *Schindler's List***

This timeline provides a summary of *Schindler's List* by relating key events in the film to the unfolding of the Holocaust. The center of gravity of this mass murder was Poland, where in March 1942, despite two and a half years of terrible hardship, deprivation, and persecution, every major Jewish community was still intact; eleven months later, only remnants of Polish Jewry survived.”

**September, 1939** Germany conquers Poland in less than a month; World War II begins in Europe; Polish Jews are ordered to register and relocate.

**October 26, 1939** Krakow becomes the capital of German-occupied Poland.

**December, 1939** Oskar Schindler takes over the enamelware factory in Krakow, meets Itzhak Stern, and with Stern's help, begins using Jewish workers in his plant.

**1940-early 1941** Germans expel some Jews in Krakow to other towns.

**March 3, 1941** Germans establish a ghetto in Krakow.

Jan 1942: Final Solution come to at Wannsee Conference

**March, 1942** *About 20 to 25 percent of the Jews who would die in the Holocaust have already perished.*

**June, 1942** The Germans build a forced labor camp at Plaszow.

**June-October, 1942** Deportations and shootings terrorize the Krakow ghetto.

**February, 1943** Amon Goeth takes command of Plaszow. *About 80 to 85 percent of the Jews who would die in the Holocaust have already perished.*

**March 13-14, 1943** The Germans liquidate Krakow ghetto.

**March 1943** Schindler sets up a branch of his factory at Plaszow.

**August, 1944** Schindler's factory is closed and his Jewish workers are taken back to Plaszow.

**October, 1944** Schindler creates a list of Jewish workers for his new plant in Brennece, Czechoslovakia; workers are transferred from Plaszow via Auschwitz.

**January, 1945** Plaszow is closed and the remaining prisoners are sent to Auschwitz.

**May 8, 1945** World War II ends in Europe. **The Holocaust is over.**

**May 9, 1945** The Soviet army liberates the camp at Brennece.

**September 13, 1946** Goeth is found guilty of war crimes and is hung in Krakow.

**October 9, 1974** Oskar Schindler dies in Frankfurt, Germany.

## Pre-watch:

1 Why is it important that a child be taught to conform? To obey? What is the difference between *obedience* and *blind obedience*? What arguments would you use to convince a young Nazi that obeying is not always the right thing to do?

Notes:

2. What should the goals of education be? Compare their responses to those collected by classmates. How hard is it to reach a consensus? Would students in Nazi Germany have had the same difficulty?

Notes:

1. The movie begins in color, but almost immediately fades to black and white. Why do you think that is?
2. The men in uniform are SS officers. Why do you think Schindler keeps buying drinks for them?
3. What deal does Schindler make with Stern, the Jewish official of the Judenrat?
4. Describe the contrast as Schindler moves into his home and the Jews move into the ghetto.

5. Why would the Jews want to work in Schindler's factory?
6. What is the purpose of the scene in which Schindler is confronted with the gratitude of the one armed man?
7. Why did Schindler save Stern from the train?
8. What is happening with the Jews' luggage?

*A.) How is Oskar Schindler characterized in the first hour of the film as a flawed and sometimes even despicable human being? What are the key things that he says or does that depict him in a negative light? What changes Schindler? Do you think that witnessing such an event could really change a person's values so drastically?*

9. What does Goeth say about the history of Krakow? What does he mean when he says, "Today is history"?

10. What happens to Jews who resist the liquidation?

*B.) One of the few colors used in the film is the clothing of the unnamed "Girl in Red." Why do you think that Spielberg chose to use color for this character? Why red?*

11. Schindler observes the liquidation from the hilltop. How does it affect him?

12. Describe the point of the piano scene:

*C.) At one point during the film, Amon Goeth's lover calls him "a [bleeping] child." In what ways is it true that this monster of a human being resembles a bratty child? Why would Spielberg decide to characterize a notorious Nazi in this manner?*

*D.) In his own sick way, Amon Goeth clearly comes to care about his Jewish maid, Helen. What do you think Spielberg is trying to convey through the relationship between them?*

13. What is the significance of the scene in which the man making hinges is almost killed?

*E.) In a compelling conversation between Schindler and Goeth about real power, Schindler tries to convince Goeth that true power lies in giving mercy when you do not have to. Why do you think that Goeth tries out but then quickly abandons the power of pardoning? Schindler “in normal circumstances, he wouldn’t be so bad” “war brings out the bad in people”*

14. What is the purpose of contrasting the scene of the Jewish wedding with the scene of Schindler’s birthday party and the scene of Goeth beating Helen?

15. Why are the women pricking their fingers and slapping themselves before the selection?

16. How is the music playing during the selection an example of irony?

17. The women are overjoyed when they realize they will not be deported. What changes their minds?

18. Where can you infer the Jews in striped uniforms will be headed?

19. How does Schindler help the Jews in the cattle cars?

20. Why is Schindler arrested?

21. In Krakow, it appears that snow is falling. However, it is not snow. What is it?

22. For what reason would the Nazis want to dig up the bodies and burn them?

23. What does Schindler notice on one of the wheelbarrows?
24. What does Schindler tell Stern he is going to do now that the workers are being deported to Auschwitz?
25. Why does Stern say he'd better have his drink now?
26. Schindler ends up writing down almost 1,100 names. For whom does he save the last space?
27. The men's train is sent to Czechoslovakia. Where is the train with the women accidentally sent?
28. How are the women dehumanized when they first enter the camp?
29. When the women are walking away from the showers, they see another line of people. What can you infer will happen to these people?
30. How does Schindler convince the guards to let the children on his train?
31. What do you learn about Schindler when he tells Stern he would rather purchase shells to pass off as his own than make them in his factory?
32. Why doesn't Schindler have any more money?
33. What does the radio broadcast explain?
34. Why does Schindler tell the Jews that he has to leave?

*F.) Towards the end of the film, Schindler claims that much of the credit and thanks should go to the Jewish survivors themselves and to Itzhak Stern in particular rather than to himself. To what extent do you think this is true or false?*

*G.) In making Schindler's List, Spielberg says he tried to be "more of a reporter than a passionate, involved filmmaker—because I wanted to communicate information more than I needed to proselytize and convert. That vision influenced many of his decisions as the film's director. **Identify and describe 3 scenes** that reflect Spielberg's desire to place the viewer "inside the experiences of Holocaust survivors and actual victims as close as a movie can."*

## Part 2: Compare and Contrast

Representing the tragedy of the Holocaust in a fictional film is an incredibly difficult task. *Schindler's List* and *Life is Beautiful* are two of the most famous and critically acclaimed attempts at doing so. **Compare and contrast** the approaches that each of the film takes in depicting the Holocaust. In what ways are these approaches similar and in what way are they different?

Create a **POINT by POINT outline** with **SPECIFIC EXAMPLES** that back up each topic (have at least 3 main points of similarity and / or difference)

Possible points of comparison:

- The protagonist of each film
- The life of Jews before the camps
- The Nazis
- Life in the camps
- The violence done to Jews / images or symbols of those killed
- Methods used to keep Jews alive
- Acts of heroism / personal sacrifice
- Overall tone

**Closing Question:** Overall, which of the films does a better job of conveying the tragedy of the Holocaust? Why?