

**WORLD WAR II (1939-  
1945): HOLOCAUST:  
OSKAR SCHINDLER  
AND THE LIST**



# **WORLD WAR II (1939-1945): HOLOCAUST: OSKAR SCHINDLER AND THE LIST**

## **Description**

Through an analysis of primary and secondary sources, students in this lesson will identify, understand and be able to explain the true story behind the “Schindler Jews” and the famed “list”, how Oskar Schindler’s actions on behalf of his Jewish workers put the businessman in grave danger and cost him his fortune, and how the story of the list came to light for the public.

## **Subjects**

European History  
World History

## **Grade Level**

11-12

## **Duration**

Multiple Classes

## **Tour Links**

- Schindler Museum, Krakow, Poland
- Schindler Memorial, Svitavy, Czech Republic
- Schindler Memorial, Frankfurt
- Schindler’s Grave, Jerusalem
- Jewish Museum, Berlin
- Auschwitz Concentration Camp

## **Essential Questions**

- What was the “Jewish Question”? What was the Nazi “Final Solution”?
- Who was Oskar Schindler? How was he involved in the “Jewish Question”?
- How was Schindler’s story brought to light? What role did the Spielberg 1993 film have in bringing it to the public around the world?

# Academic Summary

## **Letter Written and Signed by the Schindler Jews, 08 May 1945**

Brothers!

We, the undersigned Jews from Krakow, inmates of Plaszow concentration camp, have, since 1942, worked in Director Schindler's business. Since Schindler took over management of the business, it was his exclusive goal to protect us from resettlement, which would have meant our ultimate liquidation. During the entire period in which we worked for Director Schindler he did everything possible to save the lives of the greatest possible number of Jews, in spite of the tremendous difficulties; especially during a time when receiving Jewish workers caused great difficulties with the authorities. Director Schindler took care of our sustenance, and as a result, during the whole period of our employment by him there was not a single case of unnatural death. All in all he employed more than 1,000 Jews in Krakow. As the Russian frontline approached and it became necessary to transfer us to a different concentration camp, Director Schindler relocated his business to Bruennlitz near Zwittau.

There were huge difficulties connected with the implementation of Director Schindler's business, and he took great pains to introduce this plan. The fact that he attained permission to create a camp, in which not only women and men, but also families could stay together, is unique within the territory of the Reich. Special mention must be given to the fact that our resettlement to Bruennlitz was carried out by way of a list of names, put together in Krakow and approved by the Central Administration of all concentration camps in Oranienburg (a unique case). After the men had been interned in Gross-Rosen concentration camp for no more than a couple of days and the women for 3 weeks in Auschwitz concentration camp, we may claim with assertiveness that with our arrival in Bruennlitz we owe our lives solely to the efforts of Director Schindler and his humane treatment of his workers. Director Schindler took care of the improvement of our living standards by providing us with extra food and clothing. No money was spared and his one and only goal was the humanistic ideal of saving our lives from inevitable death.

It is only thanks to the ceaseless efforts and interventions of Director Schindler with the authorities in question, that we stayed in Bruennlitz, in spite of the existing danger, as, with the approaching frontline we would all have been moved away by the leaders of the camp, which would have meant our ultimate end. This we declare today, on this day of the declaration of the end of the war, as we await our official liberation and the opportunity to return to our destroyed families and homes. Here we are, a gathering of 1100 people, 800 men and 300 women.

All Jewish workers that were inmates in the Gross-Rosen and Auschwitz concentration camps respectively declare wholeheartedly their gratitude towards Director Schindler, and we herewith state that it is exclusively due to his efforts, that we were permitted to witness this moment, the end of the war.

Concerning Director Schindler's treatment of the Jews, one event that took place during our internment in Bruennlitz in January of this year which deserves special mention was coincidentally a transport of Jewish inmates

that had been evacuated from the Auschwitz concentration camp, Goleschow outpost, and ended up near us. This transport consisted exclusively of more than 100 sick people from a hospital which had been cleared during the liquidation of the camp. These people reached us frozen and almost unable to carry on living after having wandered for weeks. No other camp was willing to accept this transport and it was Director Schindler alone who personally took care of these people, while giving them shelter on his factory premises; even though there was not the slightest chance of them ever being employed. He gave considerable sums out of his own private funds, to enable their recovery as quick as possible. He organized medical aid and established a special hospital room for those people who were bedridden. It was only because of his personal care that it was possible to save 80 of these people from their inevitable death and to restore them to life.

We sincerely plead with you to help Director Schindler in any way possible, and especially to enable him to establish a new life, because of all he did for us both in Krakow and in Bruennlitz he sacrificed his entire fortune.

Bruennlitz, May 8, 1945.

Schindler's List...

It has one of the most recognizable movie theme songs of all time, where haunting notes from a violin's solo cut through not only the air, but also through humanity's collective soul and perhaps even through time itself, back to what might be the darkest chapter in human history: the Holocaust.

Students and scholars have studied the Holocaust as an academic endeavor since the end of the Second World War, but when the Stephen Spielberg film Schindler's List debuted in December 1993, viewers around the world flocked to theaters to see a new tale on the cruelty, one that promised to put a human face on the barbarism. Yet the film also told a story of hope: the moving portrayal of Oskar Schindler and the "Schindler Jews."

Schindler (played by Liam Neeson in the film) was a businessman and a member of the Nazi party originally from Zwittau, Moravia (in today's Czech Republic). After the German invasion of Poland in 1939, Schindler, who had spent his life to that point as an opportunist always looking to make a quick pile of cash, moved to Cracow, Poland, where he quickly took over what had been a Jewish enamelware factory. Schindler renamed the factory Duetsche Emaillewaren Fabrik (German Enamelware Factory or DEF). Looking to exploit his business to the fullest extent possible, Schindler initially hired Jews because he could pay them less than Polish workers. With the need for DEF enamelware increasing daily with the German army fighting on two fronts, Schindler's business quickly prospered and he began making more money than even he could imagine.

Over time, as Schindler began to understand the true nature of Nazi policies towards the Jews of Eastern Europe, he began hiring more and more Jewish workers for his factory regardless of their true usefulness or cost. He even convinced (through bribery and favors) Nazi commanders to let him build his own concentration camp within the walls of DEF that would house his Jewish workers. Life inside Schindler's camp, while far from ideal, stood in stark contrast to brutal conditions endured by other prisoners in the regular camp only a few kilometers away. The breaking point for Schindler came on 13 Mar 1943 when he witnessed the brutality and horror of the liquidation of the Cracow ghetto, a scene vividly depicted in Spielberg's movie.

In 1944, when German authorities decided to close DEF and the concentration camps around Cracow as Russian troops advanced across Poland, Schindler bribed those authorities to allow him to take over 1100 of his workers to Bruennlitz, Czechoslovakia,

where he set up a new factory designed to make artillery shells for the German army. It was a ruse. As an insider, Schindler knew his workers would have been taken to Auschwitz and executed. Moved by incredible compassion and putting himself at great financial and personal risk, Schindler opened the new factory specifically to save his workers from the gas chambers. Schindler and his wife Emile spent the remainder of the war caring for and helping his Jewish workers. They even set up a hospital and care center on the factory grounds.

By the end of the war, the Schindlers were broke, having spent a fortune paying bribes and buying black market goods. After spending a brief period in Argentina after the war, Schindler left his wife and returned to Germany where he spent the remainder of his life living off contributions and donations from the surviving "Schindler Jews" living around the world. (Emile stayed in Argentina until 2001 when she returned to Berlin in the last weeks of her life.) In 1963, Oskar Schindler was declared a righteous man by the State of Israel. Over the next 10 years, he traveled regularly to Israel. He died of a massive heart attack in 1974 at age 66 at his home in Frankfurt. Schindler Jews around the world paid to have his body brought to Israel, and he was buried in a Christian cemetery on Mount Zion in Jerusalem.

Schindler's story may have lay buried to the pages of history if it were not for a chance encounter between Holocaust survivor Poldek Pfefferburg (also known as Leopold Page) and Australian writer Thomas Keneally in Pfefferburg's Beverly Hills luggage store. Keneally took up the story in his book Schindler's Ark. The bestselling novel was adapted by Spielberg into the groundbreaking and award winning movie. Today, Oskar Schindler's name is known by people around the world.

Through an analysis of primary and secondary sources, students in this lesson will identify, understand and be able to explain the true story behind the "Schindler Jews" and the famed "list", how Oskar Schindler's actions on behalf of his Jewish workers put the businessman in grave danger and cost him his fortune, and how the story of the list came to light for the public.

## Objectives

1. Students will identify, understand and be able to explain the true story behind Oskar Schindler and the "Schindler Jews" (Schindlerjuden).
2. Students will identify, understand and be able to explain how Schindler's actions on behalf of his Jewish workers put the businessman in grave danger and ultimately cost him his personal fortune.
3. Students will identify, understand and be able to explain how the story of Schindler's "list" came to light for public consumption.

# Procedures

## I. Anticipatory Set

- Writing / Question: What images come to mind when you think of the Holocaust? (5 min)
- Handouts – Copies of documents and readings from the websites listed. (5 min)

## II. Body of Lesson

- Lecture / PPT – Oskar Schindler and the Schindler Jews (20 min)
- Video – Oskar Schindler Documentary (50 min)
- Independent Activity – Students read the articles and sources on Oskar Schindler and the Schindler Jews, taking notes as appropriate. (30 min)
- Suggestion: Have the students read some of these articles and sources for homework.
- Suggestion: AP / Advanced students should focus on primary sources.
- Suggestion: Showing the 1993 movie Schindler's List in class is appropriate for all students.
- Suggestion: For AP / Advanced students, reading Wiesel's book Night is appropriate for this lesson plan. Wiesel, a Hungarian Jew, was Prisoner #A-7713 at Auschwitz from May 1944 to Jan 1945 (until his transfer to Buchenwald). The book is about his experiences in the camps.
- Group Activity – Socratic Seminar: Discussion on Oskar Schindler and the Schindler Jews (20 min)

## III. Closure

- Assessment – Essay: Explain in detail the true story behind the “Schindler Jews” and the famed “list”, how Oskar Schindler’s actions on behalf of his Jewish workers put the businessman in grave personal danger and cost him his fortune, and how the story of the list came to light for the public.

## Extension

### On tour: Schindler Factory in Cracow

While on tour in Cracow, students will visit Schindler’s enamelware factory, where they can see for themselves a museum dedicated to Oskar Schindler and the Schindler Jews. The museum has permanent exhibitions on Krakow under Nazi occupation and the History of Jews in Krakow. Teachers are encouraged to browse the museum’s website ([www.mhk.pl/branches/oskar-schindlers-factory](http://www.mhk.pl/branches/oskar-schindlers-factory)) before visiting the factory.

# Web Links

## Lesson Plan Websites

- [www.auschwitz.dk/Schindlerletter.htm](http://www.auschwitz.dk/Schindlerletter.htm)  
Letter from the Schindler Jews, 08 May 1945 (primary source) – from the Auschwitz official website
- <http://auschwitz.dk/schindlerslist.htm>  
List of Schindler Jews (primary source) – from the Auschwitz official website
- [www.auschwitz.dk/id2.htm](http://www.auschwitz.dk/id2.htm)  
Oskar Schindler (primary and secondary sources) – from the Auschwitz official website, this web page contains links to both primary and secondary sources on Oskar Schindler, his wife Emile and the Schindler Jews. Highly recommended as a good starting place for all students and teachers.
- [www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/righteous/stories/related/stern\\_testimony.asp](http://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/righteous/stories/related/stern_testimony.asp)  
Testimony of Yitzhak Stern at a meeting of Schindler's survivors with their rescuer in Israel (primary source) – from Yad Vashem, a Jewish organization dedicated to preserving and teaching the memory of the Holocaust.
- [www.schindlerjews.com/](http://www.schindlerjews.com/)  
Oskar Schindler and the Schindler Jews (website)
- [www.holocaust-history.org/auschwitz/](http://www.holocaust-history.org/auschwitz/)  
Auschwitz – The Death Camp (primary sources). This website has links to selected primary and secondary sources on Auschwitz and the Final Solution. Highly recommended for AP / Advanced students.
- [www.oskarschindler.com/index.htm](http://www.oskarschindler.com/index.htm)  
Oskar Schindler: His List of Life (website)
- [www.eiu.edu/~eiutps/holocaust\\_auschwitz.php](http://www.eiu.edu/~eiutps/holocaust_auschwitz.php)  
Teaching the Holocaust with Primary Sources (website) – from Eastern Illinois University
- [www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005787](http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005787)  
Oskar Schindler (website) – from the US Holocaust Memorial Museum
- [http://home.wlu.edu/~patchw/His\\_214/photogallery/1941\\_Endoesung.ppt](http://home.wlu.edu/~patchw/His_214/photogallery/1941_Endoesung.ppt)  
The Final Solution (PowerPoint) – from William Patch, Professor of History at Washington and Lee University (VA)
- <http://faculty.spokanefalls.edu/InetShare/AutoWebs/ingaj/FINAL%20SCHINDLER.ppt>  
Oskar Schindler (powerpoint)
- [www.teachingchannel.org/videos/choosing-primary-source-documents?fd=1](http://www.teachingchannel.org/videos/choosing-primary-source-documents?fd=1)  
Reading Like a Historian: Primary Source Documents (video). Great 2-minute video on how to incorporate primary sources into the Common Core and History classes. From Shilpa Duvoor of Summit Preparatory Charter High School in Redwood City, CA. Highly recommended for teachers.
- [www.youtube.com/watch?v=y9\\_sDp1PGYg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y9_sDp1PGYg)  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=XhI59JqTHBY](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XhI59JqTHBY)  
BBC – The World at War: The Final Solution (videos) -- The two videos above, Parts 1 & 2, are perhaps the greatest documentary on the "Final Solution" ever undertaken. Both parts together are almost 3 hours total in length, making it difficult to use this video for in-class showings, but it is worth it. Highly recommended for all students, especially AP / Advanced.
- [www.youtube.com/watch?v=gz9TF\\_IXmG8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gz9TF_IXmG8)  
Auschwitz the Nazis and the Final Solution (video) -- This 47-minute video is probably too long for most in-class showings, but it is well worth it. Highly recommended for all students, even if it's done as an out-of-class assignment.
- [www.youtube.com/watch?v=WRn2DASgu5s](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WRn2DASgu5s)  
Days of Remembrance: A Child on Schindler's List (video) – 2010 video

presentation sponsored by the Prescott Area Jewish Community Foundation at the Yavapai College Performance Hall

- [www.youtube.com/watch?v=JdRGC-w9syA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JdRGC-w9syA)  
Schindler's List – Official Trailer (video)
- [www.youtube.com/watch?v=pDumJVv6GP8&list=PLC4B5D323A6D4F54C](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pDumJVv6GP8&list=PLC4B5D323A6D4F54C)  
Oskar Schindler A&E Biography (video) – this 50 minute video, from the A&E Network, is appropriate for all classes and is highly recommended for all students and teachers.

## **Background Information**

- [www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Final\\_Solution](http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Final_Solution)  
The Final Solution – Wikipedia article
- [www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jewish\\_question](http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jewish_question)  
The Jewish Question – Wikipedia article
- [www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cracow\\_Ghetto](http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cracow_Ghetto)  
Cracow Ghetto – Wikipedia article
- [www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oskar\\_Schindler](http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oskar_Schindler)  
Oskar Schindler – Wikipedia article
- [www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Schindler's\\_List](http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Schindler's_List)  
Schindler's List (1993 film) – Wikipedia article
- [www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Schindlerjuden](http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Schindlerjuden)  
Schindlerjuden (Schindler Jews) – Wikipedia article

## **Other Relevant Passports Lesson Plans**

- [www.passports.com/lesson\\_plans/poland/nazi-invasion-of-1939](http://www.passports.com/lesson_plans/poland/nazi-invasion-of-1939)  
World War II (1939-1945) – NAZI Invasion of Poland
- [www.passports.com/lesson\\_plans/france/world-war-ii-drancy-concentration-camp](http://www.passports.com/lesson_plans/france/world-war-ii-drancy-concentration-camp)  
World War II (1939-1945) – Occupied France: Drancy Concentration Camp
- [www.passports.com/lesson\\_plans/germany/dachau-concentration-camp](http://www.passports.com/lesson_plans/germany/dachau-concentration-camp)  
World War II (1939-1945) – Dachau Concentration Camp
- [www.passports.com/lesson\\_plans/poland/auschwitz](http://www.passports.com/lesson_plans/poland/auschwitz)  
Auschwitz
- [www.passports.com/lesson\\_plans/poland/oskar-schindler-and-the-list](http://www.passports.com/lesson_plans/poland/oskar-schindler-and-the-list)  
World War II (1939-1945) – Oskar Schindler: the List
- [www.passports.com/lesson\\_plans/thenetherlands/anne-frank-diary](http://www.passports.com/lesson_plans/thenetherlands/anne-frank-diary)  
Anne Frank: Lost Child of the Holocaust

## **Key Terms**

- Auschwitz
- Concentration Camp
- Extermination
- Final Solution
- Germany
- Hitler
- Nazi
- Oskar Schindler
- Schindler Jews



