

Analyzing Schindler's List

The Filmmaker as Reporter (Station 1)

Steven Spielberg says that in making Schindler's List, he tried to be "more of a reporter than a passionate, involved filmmaker." He has also said that he wanted to place the viewer "inside the experiences of Holocaust survivors and actual victims as close as a movie can."

1. Identify decisions that reflect Spielberg's desire to place the viewer "inside the experiences of Holocaust survivors and actual victims as close as a movie can." Think about artistic choices like the use of color, characters, plot, and camera angles.

2. What effect do those artistic choices have on the viewer? On the overall message of the film?

Characterization (Station 2)

Think about the characters in the film, such as Oskar Schindler, the Nazi commandant Amon Goeth, Schindler's accountant Itzhak Stern, Amon Goeth's servant Helen Hirsch, or the mother and daughter Chaja and Danka Dresner.





Oskar Schindler











Helen Hirsch



Chaja Dresner

1. How are the different main characters portrayed in the film? What characters' stories stood out to you?

2. How might these characters' stories humanize and personalize the history of the Holocaust?

Film as History (Station 3)

Elie Wiesel, a Holocaust survivor and Nobel Peace Prize winner, said about the Holocaust: "The experience lies beyond our reach. Ask any survivor, he will tell you: he who has not lived the event will never know it."

1. How does Spielberg's film address the barrier that Wiesel describes: that the Holocaust is "beyond our reach" of comprehension?

2. How might film or other art forms provide a window into the history of the Holocaust that traditional historical accounts cannot?

Snapshots of Jewish Life (Station 4)

Spielberg includes many snapshots of Jewish life in the ghettos and concentration camps. For instance, when the Nussbaums (a wealthy Jewish family) prepare for their move to the ghetto, Mrs. Nussbaum packs the candlesticks she would light at sunset every Friday to mark the beginning of the Sabbath. Before leaving the apartment that Oskar Schindler would eventually occupy, Mr. Nussbaum removes a mezuzah from the doorpost. It is a small tube that contains a quotation from the Bible calling upon Jews to make their homes worthy of God's presence. Later, Spielberg shows a wedding taking place amid the horrors of the Plaszów labor camp.

1. Why do you think Spielberg chose to highlight the preservation of Jewish traditions—like the mezuzah and a Jewish wedding—in the ghettos and concentration camps? What message was he trying to send?

2. What is resistance? What is resilience? To what extent do you think these snapshots capture moments of either resistance or resilience?

Spielberg's Use of Color (Station 5)

Writers use detail to draw attention to a particular person or event. Filmmakers use color
motion, and sound to accomplish the same thing.

1. What scenes in Schindler's List are in color?

2. Why do you think Spielberg chose to film these scenes in color but not others?