



Schindler's List

Thomas Keneally



About the author

Thomas Keneally was born in Sydney, Australia in 1935. He studied to become a priest in the Catholic Church but gave this up in 1960 and became a schoolteacher. He published his first novel in 1964 and since then has written more than forty books of fiction and nonfiction, plus some plays. His family comes from Ireland and several of his books have been about that country and the Irish people. He has won top literary prizes in Australia and Great Britain and is now recognized as one of Australia's best writers. In 1983 he was awarded the Order of Australia for his services to literature. Keneally published *Schindler's Ark* in 1982 and it won one of Britain's most famous literary prizes, the Booker. The prize is for fiction and, since the book is a true story, some people thought Keneally did not deserve to win it. In 1993 Steven Spielberg filmed the book under the title *Schindler's List* and it won seven Oscars. Keneally is also a leading figure in the Australian Republican Movement and has written speeches and articles on the subject. He is married and has two daughters.

Summary

Schindler's List is an account of the life of Oskar Schindler (1908–74), a Czechoslovakian businessman who saves European Jews from the Nazis during the Second World War (1939–45). Although initially a supporter of the German National Socialist Party (the Nazis), Schindler has many Jewish friends and business partners. He is horrified when he comes to realize that the Nazi party plans to eradicate Jews from the whole of Europe, and becomes determined to do what he can to save the people around him. Employing Jewish workers in his factory in Poland, he uses bribes and his friends in Germany to keep

his Jewish workers safe. By the end of the war, Schindler has saved many people from certain death in the Nazi concentration camps. After the war, Schindler's businesses fail and his actions are criticized in Germany. However he remained honoured by Jewish communities around the world and was buried in Jerusalem, Israel, after his death.

Chapter 1: Oskar Schindler, the privileged son of a businessman and a Catholic mother, grows up in the German-speaking Sudetenland area of Czechoslovakia. A fun-loving and popular young man, he marries young, but neglects his wife in favour of a busy social life and work that takes him on long business trips. Although not particularly political he is initially a supporter of the Nazi party and soon agrees to act as an undercover agent to help the Nazis in their bid to seize Poland. His sociable nature helps him establish good relationships among people in high places as well as among ordinary people. These relationships will prove helpful to him later in the war.

Chapter 2: When Germany invades Poland, the Jewish people living there receive particularly harsh treatment – they are not allowed to work and their homes and possessions are taken from them. Many are also killed. The Nazis believe that Jews are 'sub-human' and plan to remove them from Germany by any means, even devising a plan to use the chemical Zyklon B to kill large numbers at once. Schindler, who is working as a businessman in Krakow, does not hate Jews. He counts among his friends several Jewish business owners, who he believes may be able to help him in his own businesses.

Chapter 3: In 1939, Schindler buys up and reopens a bankrupt enamelware factory with his Jewish friend Itzhak Stern. The DEF factory initially employs 45 people, but by 1940 the business has expanded to employ 250 workers, 150 of whom are Jews. However production is often disrupted when Nazi SS soldiers detain and question Jews on their way to work. In 1941 a Jewish ghetto is established in Krakow, where all Jews are forced to live, under heavy Nazi control. Despite the growing difficulties, Schindler continues his business and continues to employ Jews.

Chapter 4: Schindler's activities are noticed by the SS, but although he is twice arrested and investigated, he is well-connected and friends in high places come to his rescue. Meanwhile, life in the Krakow ghetto becomes harder and harder for the Jews, and many are taken away on trains to so-called 'labour' camps – the Nazi concentration camps where many will die. In the summer



Schindler's List

of 1942, when Schindler learns that a group of his workers are about to be transported, he rushes to rescue them. After witnessing Jews being forced from their homes and shot by the SS, Schindler realizes that the Germans plan to murder all of the Jews in Europe and determines to do what he can to work against the Nazi system.

Chapter 5: That same summer, a young chemist called Bachner escapes from a death camp and returns to the ghetto to tell about the gas chambers, which can kill up to 10,000 people per day. The true horror of the situation finally becomes clear to everyone in the ghetto and those connected to them in the outside world. Sympathetic citizens begin to try to help smuggle Jews or their children out of the ghetto. Schindler increases his effort to employ as many Jewish workers as he can in his factory, explaining to the German authorities that they are doing important war work and cannot leave. By the end of that year, his factory employs 550 Jews. In December, after a visit from an Austrian dentist, Dr Sedlacek, a man who can travel freely and is trying to help the European Jews, Schindler visits Budapest to tell the outside world about the fate of the Jews in German occupied territories. Slowly the outside world becomes aware of what is really happening.

Chapter 6: When Schindler returns to Krakow, a cruel Nazi SS commandant Amon Goeth has been put in charge of closing the Krakow ghetto. The ghetto was split into two sections, one of which housed 2,000 Jews deemed 'not useful' who were to be transported to the death camp at Auschwitz. The other section housed 10,000 'useful' Jews who were to be sent to a nearby work camp at Plaszów, which is also under the control of Amon Goeth. On 13th March 1943, Krakow is cleared of Jews and in the process many are killed. Although Schindler's workers are moved to Plaszów, they are allowed to continue to come to work in his factory, which remains outside of the camp.

Chapter 7: At Plaszów, life is hard and workers who become sick or weak are sent to the death camps or killed. Others are killed arbitrarily by Goeth for sport. As Schindler's factory, workers often arrive late, which causes disruption to the production work. For this reason, and because Schindler knows these people live in fear for their lives every day at the camp, he seeks permission to build a sub-camp near his factory to specially house his workers. Although this camp looks much the same as other work camps, the Jews housed there are treated more humanely and no longer have to fear for their lives.

Chapter 8: Under Goeth's command, the atrocities continue at Plaszów. Trying to find more ways to help the Jews, Schindler encourages his friend Itzhak Stern to write a report about the treatment of people in Plaszów and other labour camps in Poland. He plans to give the report to Dr Sedlacek, who can pass it to influential people outside of Germany. At the same time, Raimund Titsch, another German who is horrified at what he sees happening around him, records events in the camp with his camera. However, as Titsch fears being branded a 'Jew-lover', his photographs are not developed until the 1960s, after Titsch's death.

Chapter 9: By the spring of 1944, the Russians are advancing into German occupied Poland. To prevent their actions being uncovered, the Nazis start to close down some of their production factories and labour camps, transporting prisoners to other camps or simply getting rid of them. As the DEF factory and sub-camp are among those that are to close, Schindler's workers are first transported to Plaszów. But as Plaszów is also due to be shut down, the authorities make plans to send the inhabitants to the death camp at Auschwitz or to a hard labour camp. Schindler asks for permission to move his factory and his workers to Zwittau, his hometown in Czechoslovakia. In order to save his workers, he draws up a list of 1,100 essential Jewish workers that he will need to take with him.

Chapter 10: Amon Goeth's excessive lifestyle comes to the attention of the authorities and he is arrested. Meanwhile, with the help of a man named Sussmuth, Schindler gets permission to move his factory, sub-camp and his workers to an abandoned factory building in Brinnlitz, near Zwittau in. At his own expense, he re-establishes himself in his homeland. Despite the fact that his list of workers goes missing on the journey from Plaszów, 800 of Schindler's men are transported safely to his new camp.

Chapter 11: The 300 women on Schindler's list are mistakenly sent to Auschwitz-Birkenau instead of to the camp in Brinnlitz, and it takes several months of worry before they eventually arrive at their destination. In the meantime Schindler is arrested and taken back to Krakow for questioning about his friendship with Goeth. This is the third time that Schindler has been arrested by the Nazis. On the two previous occasions, influential friends came to his rescue and he escaped punishment. Although he is worried that this time he may not be able to escape the Nazis, again his friends come to his rescue. While



Schindler's List

Schindler is under arrest in Krakow, his wife once again becomes part of his life, helping to look after his workers in the Brinnlitz camp.

Chapter 12: The DEF factory in Brinnlitz is assigned to produce bullets and weapons. However, with Schindler's approval the work is sabotaged and most of the products made at the factory are faulty. Despite the factory's growing bad reputation, and a potentially fatal outbreak of typhoid fever, which could have seen his workers sent to a death camp, Schindler's charm continues to placate Nazis in high places and help cover up the problems. Together with Sussmuth, Schindler works to get as many women as they can out of Auschwitz and into smaller, safer camps where they are more likely to survive.

Chapter 13: On 8 May 1945 the war comes to end. As the Russian soldiers approach, Schindler leaves the camp with his wife and a small group of prisoners. The remaining Jews hang typhoid signs around the camp as a protective measure to help keep Nazi SS out. Schindler and his group make it safely out of Germany, first to Austria and then to Switzerland.

Chapter 14: After the war, Goeth is tried and hanged in September 1946. Schindler and his wife live in Germany for a few years, but in 1949, with the help of a Jewish organization, and accompanied by a number of Jewish families, they move to Buenos Aires, Argentina and set up a farm. However, life on the farm does not go well and in the 1960s, after the farm has gone bankrupt, Schindler leaves his wife in Argentina and returns to Germany. Until his death in 1974, although Schindler is criticized by many Germans, he receives support from Jewish organizations and is honoured in Israel. After his death, he was buried in Jerusalem.

Background and themes

Anti-Semitism: One of the worst crimes of the 20th century was Hitler and the Nazi party's persecution of the Jews in Europe between 1933 and 1945. Many people, called anti-Semites, believed that Jews were evil people who secretly controlled money and wanted to destroy the countries they lived in. When Hitler became leader of Germany in 1933 he passed laws that stopped Jews getting jobs, living in good houses, or even mixing with non-Jews.

The Holocaust: During the Second World War the Germans occupied much of Europe and Russia. Between 1942 and 1945 they built death camps where Jews

were killed in enormous gas chambers and their bodies burned. Six million Jews were murdered in this way. Approximately five million people from other groups despised by the Nazis were also murdered in the camps.

Real lives: both good and bad: The extent of Nazi cruelty is so great that it is difficult to fully understand. When a terrible event like this happens, a good storyteller like Thomas Keneally will take a small part of it so that we can see the real lives of the people involved, and understand that they are like us. *Schindler's List* shows us that there were good and bad individuals in Germany during the War.

A test of character: In ordinary times, without the War, Schindler would simply have been a charming businessman who drank too much, was unfaithful to his wife, and was not completely honest. However, a difficult situation can sometimes bring out the best in a person. Schindler's ability to 'manipulate' the truth, offer bribes, and make friends with powerful people saved hundreds of Jews from the death camps.

Good and evil: The relationship between Schindler and Goeth recalls ancient stories where two brothers, one good and one evil, fight for control of the world. Amon Goeth, a man who also liked money, women and drink, but lacked Schindler's kindness and humanity, was eventually destroyed by his own excesses.

Discussion activities

Before reading

- Research:** Tell students that they are going to read a book about the Second World War in Europe. Ask them to research and find three key words that they feel summarize the events of the war in Europe. Get students to discuss their key words in small groups. Ask each group which three words occurred most often. Discuss the results with the whole class.
- Pair work:** Ask students to answer these questions in pairs.
 - When was the Second World War?
 - Who was Adolf Hitler?
 - Who or what is an anti-Semite?
 - What happened to the Jews in Europe during the War?
 - What is the Talmud?
 - Who won the war?
 Discuss the answers in class.
- Discuss:** Ask those students who have seen the film *Schindler's List* to summarize the plot of the film and talk about their experience of watching the film. For those that have not seen the film explain that it is



Schindler's List

about the situation of the Jews in Europe during the Second World War, and one man's attempt to save lives.

While reading

Introduction

- 4 **Discuss:** Ask students to discuss the meaning of the quote from the Talmud spoken by Schindler's friend Stern at the beginning of the introduction, 'He who saves the life of one man saves the entire world.'
- 5 **Pair work:** In pairs, get students to think about why Thomas Keneally and Steven Spielberg thought it was important to tell the story of Oskar Schindler. How can the story of one individual be important or meaningful for a mass audience?
- 6 **Write:** In their pairs, ask students to think of an inspiring individual who has done something worth telling to a large audience. This person may be someone they have heard about in the news or someone they know personally. Get them to write a small summary that describes what this person has done or achieved.

Chapters 1–3

- 7 **Discuss:** Put students in small groups and ask them to think about Oskar Schindler's character. Do they like him or not? Is he good or bad? Ask them to make a list of four good things and four bad things about Oskar. Why does he do these things? Which are the most important ones? Ask if they think a person can be good even though he or she does bad things. Draw the following table on the board and explain that students may find it helpful to record their thoughts in a table like this.

Oskar Schindler: Good and bad	
Good things:	Motive or reason for action
Bad things:	Motive or reason for action

- 8 **Discuss:** With the whole class, get students to think about why the Nazis wanted to create a Jewish ghetto in Krakow. Ask them to think about why some Jews in Krakow believed that the establishment of a Jewish ghetto in the city would be a good thing.
- 9 **Read carefully:** Put students into small groups. Ask them to find words from the text that describe life in the ghetto. Discuss with the class.
- 10 **Discuss:** Ask students if they can think of any other more recent conflicts in the world where similar activities have occurred or are occurring. Why do they think such things can still happen, despite the experiences of the Second World War. Why do they think other countries do not step in to prevent such behaviour from happening?

Chapters 4–6

- 11 **Write:** Put students in pairs. Ask them to think about Genia, the little girl in the red cap in Chapter 4 and to read the chapter carefully. Ask them to work together to write a short paragraph about Genia's life before she comes to the ghetto and a short paragraph about her life after she leaves it.
- 12 **Discuss:** Ask students to look at the heading of Chapter 5 and discuss the meaning in the context of what is written in this chapter.
- 13 **Discuss:** In groups, ask students to discuss the following statement, 'Oskar Schindler and Amon Goeth are twins, one good and one evil.' Get them to think about whether this is true or not and to what extent. Ask groups to look at the behaviour of these two men in these chapters. How are they different and how are they similar? Draw the following table on the board and write in some examples as follows. Explain that students should record their answers on a similar table.

Oskar Schindler:	Amon Goeth:
Similarities	
– both have many girlfriends	
– both like to drink, etc	
Differences	
saves lives	takes lives

Ask groups to write down their opinions and then compare these in class.

- 14 **Role play:** Put students into small groups and tell them they are going to act out the return of Bachner from the concentration camp to Krakow. Pick one student in each group to play Bachner. Divide the remaining students in each group into two halves, A and B. A and B students play the first ghetto residents Bachner meets on his return. A students believe what Bachner says and are sympathetic and horrified. B students are sceptical and do not believe Bachner, as they think he might be crazy. Ask students to think carefully about how the residents react to Bachner's story. Why do some believe him, while some do not? What are their responses?

Chapters 7–9

- 15 **Read carefully:** Put students into small groups. Ask them to read the chapters carefully and to find phrases that describe life in the sub-camp that Schindler built to house his factory workers. Ask them to put together a list that compares life in Schindler's sub-camp with life in Plaszów.
- 16 **Pair work:** Put students in pairs. Ask them to find the places where these three sentences about Goeth appear in the text:
 - a Such killing was just sport to Goeth ...
 - b The first time they had played, Goeth had lost within half an hour ...



Schindler's List

- c With business out of the way, Goeth wanted a game of cards.

Ask students to tell you what they think the different 'games' are that Goeth played. What is happening when Goeth is playing his games? What do they tell you about Goeth?

- 17 **Write:** In pairs ask students to pretend to be Goeth talking about his fellow German Oskar Schindler. How do they think Goeth would describe Schindler? Get them to write a short passage in which Goeth describes Schindler and his behaviour in a letter to a friend. Encourage students to find passages in the text to support their writing and to use descriptive words or phrases found in the text.
- 18 **Discuss:** Ask students to discuss this sentence, 'The Nazis did not want their enemies to find any evidence of what they were doing to the Jews.' Remind students that by the time Russian forces are approaching Plaszów, it is 1944, the war has been going on for more than five years and reports of Nazi treatment of the Jews have already been smuggled out of Germany. Why do students think it was still important for the Nazis to cover up their actions?

Chapters 10–11

- 19 **Discuss:** At the beginning of Chapter 10, Keneally writes that after the war, many Jews did not understand why Schindler had tried so hard to save them, even going so far as to use his own money to build new camps. Ask students to think about this question in small groups and to discuss their ideas with the whole class.
- 20 **Pair work:** When SS officers help to get the Pfefferbergs on to Schindler's list Thomas Keneally asks, 'If this man and his wife are worth saving, why aren't the rest?' Put students into pairs and ask them to think about why the Nazis murdered so many Jews but helped small numbers of them. Ask each pair to present their reasons to the rest of the class.
- 21 **Write:** Put students in pairs. Remind them that when Henry Rozner and Dolek Hrowitz are going to Auschwitz they write letters to their wives. Tell the students to read Chapter 11 carefully and then write out what they think is in these letters. In class ask volunteer pairs to read out some of their letters.
- 22 **Role play:** Put students into pairs and label them A and B. Ask them to role play the interrogation of Schindler after his third arrest. Tell student A that they should play Schindler. Tell student B that they should play the Gestapo interrogator. The interrogator should ask Schindler about his dealings with Goeth. He should also ask him to explain why Goeth had said that Schindler had given him cash to make life easier for the Jews in his factory. Students should create a dialogue in which Schindler manages to persuade a cynical Gestapo commandant of his 'innocence'.

Chapters 12–14

- 23 **Pair work:** Put students into pairs. Get them to talk about what is meant by 'Oskar's kingdom'. Do they think that Schindler acts like a king? Ask students to find as many examples as they can of Schindler behaving in this way.
- 24 **Discuss:** Put students in groups and ask them to think about Schindler's final words to the Jews in his factory, as he leaves after the war, 'Do not commit acts of revenge or terror.' Was he right to say this? If you were one of the Jews working at Schindler's factory would you agree with him?
- 25 **Role play:** Put students into small groups. Ask them to role play the situation among the Jewish prisoners after the end of the war and after Schindler has left Brinnlitz. Some prisoners are eager to leave the camp as quickly as possible, others are afraid to leave too quickly in case Nazi troops are still around and want to stay in the camp a little while longer. Get students to imagine the types of discussions that would have taken place at this time leading up to the hanging of typhoid warnings on the fences and the arrival of the Russians.
- 26 **Discuss:** At Goeth's trial he defended himself by saying that the orders for all of the deaths he had carried out had come from his superiors and were therefore their crimes and not his. Put students into small groups and ask them to discuss their thoughts on this. Ask them to think about how they would behave if they were given orders to act in an immoral or criminal way.

After reading

- 27 **Discuss:** After the war, Schindler was honoured and respected by Jewish people around the world, although he received little respect in Germany. Ask students to discuss why they think this was. Get them to consider why it was that many Germans were unable to accept Schindler's behaviour, even after the war.
- 28 **Research:** Explain to the students that the Nazis' methodical and wide-reaching extermination of the Jews in Europe is known as the Holocaust. Put students into groups and ask them to research one aspect of the Holocaust in Germany, eg the different labour camps around Europe, the different types of people transported to labour camps along with Jews, different Jewish ghettos around Europe, etc.
- 29 **Discuss:** The film *Schindler's List* was made in 1993 and won seven Oscars. *Which awards (Oscars) did it win? Do you think this is a good story? Why? If you saw the film, do you think it deserves the awards? Why/why not?* Do research using the Internet.

Vocabulary activities

For the Word List and vocabulary activities, go to www.penguinreaders.com.