

Centropa Lesson

Schindler's List: Another Perspective

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Type of school: Jewish Day School, US
Course: Holocaust
Lesson Category: Holocaust
Grade level: High School
Academic time needed: one lesson (45 minutes)

Summary

Using Centropa's film, *So Memory Doesn't Die*, about the life of Teofila (Toska) Silberring – a Schindler Jew - this lesson enables those using Steven Spielberg's film *Schindler's List* in class to explore a) the different perspectives from which one can tell a story; b) the impact of different perspectives on our understanding of history. This lesson assumes a working knowledge of *Schindler's List*.

Background Lesson Information

1. **Context:** for use in connection with viewing Steven Spielberg's film *Schindler's List*.
2. **Enduring Understanding.** The perspective from which any story is told depends on the storyteller and, when the story is based in historical events the narrative perspective shapes our understanding of those events and the people in them.
3. **Big Questions:**
 - a. How important is Schindler in Toska's story?
 - b. Does your understanding or appreciation of Schindler's actions change after hearing Toska's story?
 - c. Is the portrayal of the Poles in Toska's story consistent with their portrayal in the Spielberg film?
4. **Goals/Objectives**
 - a. Students will complete this lesson with a better understanding of the role of narrative perspective in storytelling.
 - b. Students will understand the difference between history and oral history or memory.
 - c. Students will understand the role of perspective when speaking about history.
5. **Resources Needed:**
 - a. Projector, screen, speakers and computer with *So Memory Doesn't Die* downloaded (or burned onto a DVD). Note: It is possible to stream Centropa films from the Internet, but we do not recommend this since Internet connections may be slow or unreliable.
 - b. *Schindler's List* – DVD

- c. The film, *So Memory Doesn't Die*, which can be downloaded from [http://centropa.roromedia.at/node/60518?subtitle language=](http://centropa.roromedia.at/node/60518?subtitle_language=).
- d. The article "Re-examining Spielberg's Portrayal of Polish-Jewish Relations," at <http://www.neweasterneurope.eu/node/380>.
- e. Students will need pens and paper to write answers to questions.

The Lesson

Motivating the students/the hook (5-10 minutes)

Ask the students:

- 1) When thinking of the film *Schindler's List* who are the heroes, and who are the villains? **Write on the board students' answers.**
- 2) Where was Schindler's factory and where did most of the film take place? **Students should be able to answer Krakow or at least Nazi occupied Poland; write on the board.**
- 3) What does the film say about the Poles during the war and their attitude towards the Jews? **Here the teacher may have to remind the students of a few episodes** (the teacher should read the article Re-examining Spielberg's portrayal of Polish-Jewish relations by Mazurczak, attached to this lesson plan).

Teacher: the film *Schindler's List* is based on a novel and on evidence of survivors but it is still a work of historical fiction, and we need to be aware of the fact that the portrayal is not historically accurate in all its aspects.

Teofilla Silberring worked in Schindler's factory and was on his list, but her story is somewhat different from that portrayed in the film.

Watching the film (15 minutes) – the part of the film I am recommending is 10 minutes

Due to the timeframe for this lesson, we suggest watching only part of the film.

Start at 4:02 (the outbreak of the war)

End at 13:05 (Toska's return home)

Teacher: explain that only part of the film is being shown and the full film can be seen on the Centropa website. Give a brief summary of Toska's life up to the war: Teofilla was born into a middle class Jewish family in Krakow. She lived in the Kazimierz district with her parents, an older brother whom she admired and servants. Teofilla was 14 when the Nazis invaded Poland.

Prepare students for watching the film by writing the following questions on the board and telling the students that they should think about these questions as they watch the film clip (they will have a hard time taking notes as they watch since they will need to read subtitles):

- How important is Oskar Schindler in saving Toska's life?
- Does your understanding or appreciation of Schindler's actions change after hearing Toska's story?
- Is the portrayal of the Poles in Toska's story consistent with their portrayal in the Spielberg film?

After the film (10 minutes)

After watching the film, ask the students to write down their answers to the questions. Follow this with a class discussion in which students share their answers and have an opportunity to ask questions.

Conclusion (10 minutes)

"Oral history is 100% correct and 100% false." (Halik Kochansky, a British-Polish historian)

Ask the students their opinion on the above statement. Does it affect the way we now look at the film *Schindler's List*? Explain.

Concluding activity / evaluation

Write a brief guide for students who will watch *Schindler's List* for the first time. What do you want to share with them about how much they should trust the historical accuracy of this Hollywood film? Use what you have learned in today's class in your brief guide.

This lesson plan is built for a 45 minute class.