
Steven Spielberg and Facing History Bring *Schindler's List* to the Nation's Schools

from the *Facing History & Ourselves* Newsletter

Schindler's List, the award winning film directed by Steven Spielberg, is becoming a significant teaching tool in high schools across the nation. Spielberg himself explained why in the Foreword to the study guide Facing History prepared through a grant from his production company, Amblin Entertainment, and Universal Films. He wrote:

There are far too many places where hate, intolerance, and genocide still exist. Thus Schindler's List is no less a "Jewish story" or a "German story" than it is a human story. And its subject matter applies to every nation. Schindler's List is simply about racial hatred--which is the state of mind that attacks not what makes us people but what makes us different from each other. It is my hope that Schindler's List will awaken and sustain an awareness of such evil and inspire this generation and future generations to seek an end to racial hatred. Facing History and Ourselves developed a study guide to inform that journey by helping students make essential connections between the past and the present.

Over one million students have already seen the film in theaters and many more will have the opportunity to view it on video. Amblin Entertainment and Universal Films are offering every high school principal in the nation a copy of the video and the study guide Facing History and Ourselves has developed to accompany the film. A copy of the guide will also go to all middle schools and junior high schools. In Illinois, Spielberg's staff and Facing History are working with the governor's office to provide staff development for interested teachers. The in-service training model developed there can be replicated in other states.

Many educators who have seen the film with their classes have been profoundly impressed with the way their students responded. As they have already discovered, the film teaches a powerful moral lesson. Through the story of Oskar Schindler, a war profiteer and member of the Nazi party who saved over 1100 Jews during World War II, *Schindler's List* explores the human capacity for monumental evil as well as for extraordinary courage, caring, and compassion.

The film turns history into a moral lesson by revealing how fragile civilization truly is. No lesson is more needed in our schools today. As Steven Spielberg recently told members of Congress, "History has to cease being facts and figures, stories and sagas from long ago and far away about them or those. In order to learn from history, rather than just about it, students need to rediscover that those people were just like us."

The 64-page study guide helps students make that discovery by providing them with an interdisciplinary framework for examining the universal themes developed in a particular history--the history of the Holocaust. Teachers can select particular readings, use the entire guide or focus on one or more sections of it. Each approach is supported by questions and other activities that encourage critical reading, reflection, research, and discussion.

Pre-View, the first part of the guide, places the film in an historical context by considering such concepts as identity, conformity, and choice. The readings also explore the ways ideas about "race" influenced individuals and nations in the years just before World War II. The second part of the guide is designed for use immediately before and after seeing the film. This section contains a map of places referred to in the film and a chronological summary of key events. It also includes a wide assortment of activities that broaden perspectives and foster critical viewing by encouraging reflection and discussion. Post-View, the last part of the guide, adds new voices and new perspectives to discussions sparked by the experience of seeing the film. It also investigates the moral and ethical questions the film raises by focusing on particular scenes from the film. In doing so, this section of the guide returns to themes and ideas introduced in the Pre-View section.

To enhance discussions of the film and the issues it raises, Facing History has also prepared a video taped interview with Rena Finder, a Holocaust survivor who was on *Schindler's List*. In the course of the interview, which will be available later this year, she tells not only of her own experiences but also responds to specific scenes in the film.

Facing History recently created a 60-second trailer that will be shown at General Cinema theaters in the Chicago and Boston metropolitan areas. If it is successful in those areas, it will be distributed to theaters across the nation. The brief film was produced by Michael Neumann, president of One World Productions, and features students from a number of Chicago-area high schools--including Lake View High School and members of the Whitney Young High School Chorus. They performed along with Gregory Alan Williams, a noted actor, author, and Facing History resource speaker.

Margot Stern Strom, executive director of Facing History and Ourselves, said of the students who participated in the trailer, "As these young men and women reveal their resilience, courage, and hope, I am convinced that their profound words and thoughtful faces will remain with audiences long after they leave the theater. And perhaps, their voices will prompt some film-goers to better understand the importance of supporting the possibilities that lie within each of our children. Furthering that potential is important to our work at Facing History."

The project, which had its origins in a discussion with Eric Cooper of the National Urban Alliance, was a joint effort that involved individuals and groups from many parts of the Facing History network. The trailer was made possible through a generous grant from Bank of Boston and Ruth Durchslag of Chicago. It also required the time, talent, and services of our Chicago office, students from participating high schools, teachers Gail Cannova from Lake View High School and Gloria Brown, the choral director at Whitney Young. Others who contributed to the project include Gregory Alan-Williams, composer Julie Shannon, arranger Dean Anderson, Harpo Studios, the Chicago Recording Center, Swell Pictures, Astro Photo Labs, and General Cinema.

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