

## Plot Overview

*Schindler's List* opens with a close-up of unidentified hands lighting a pair of Shabbat (Sabbath) candles, followed by the sound of a Hebrew prayer blessing the candles. This scene, one of only a handful of color scenes in the film, closes as the flames flicker out. The wisp of smoke from the dying flames fades into the next scene, now in black and white, and becomes a plume of smoke from a steam engine. A folding table is set up on a train platform, where a single Jewish family registers as Jews. The single table becomes many tables, and the single family becomes a large crowd. Close-up images of names being typed into lists provide a sense of the vast number of Jews arriving in Kraków.

Oskar Schindler appears in his Kraków hotel room. His face is not shown, and the focus is on his possessions. He puts on his expensive watch, cuff links, and Nazi Party pin, and takes a large wad of bills from his night table. Schindler then enters a nightclub. Once he is seated, a high-ranking Nazi official at a nearby table catches his attention. Attempting to ingratiate himself with the local Nazis in order to secure lucrative war contracts, Schindler sends drinks to the table. Before long, he is treating a large table of Nazis and their friends to expensive food and fine wine. Schindler has his picture taken with everyone important at the table, as well as with dancers at the club.

Schindler next visits the Judenrat, the Jewish council charged with carrying out Nazi orders in Kraków. He walks directly to the front of a seemingly endless line of Jews, where he finds his accountant, Itzhak Stern. Schindler tells Stern that he needs investors, "Jews," to help him buy an enamelware factory. Since Jews, by law, cannot own businesses, Schindler tells Stern that he will pay the investors in product, not money. A profiteer, Schindler knows that he will maximize his profit if he does not have to pay the Jewish investors in cash. He also wants Stern to run the business, but Stern initially refuses the offer, telling Schindler that the Jews will not be interested in investing.

Schindler, however, does not give up. Next, he visits a church where Jewish smugglers conduct business. All of the smugglers, except one named Poldek Pfefferberg, are scared off. Schindler tells Pfefferberg he will need lots of luxury items in the coming months, and Pfefferberg promises to procure them.

The scene then changes to one of masses of Jews walking over a bridge. Their armbands stand out starkly. It is March 20, 1941—the deadline for Jews to enter the ghetto. A little Polish girl in the street

shouts, "Good-bye, Jews," over and over again. While Schindler arrives at his new luxury apartment, recently vacated by the Nussbaum family, the Nussbaums themselves arrive in the ghetto with thousands of other uprooted families.

Schindler finally secures money from the Jewish investors, who agree to accept goods as payment, because, as Schindler points out, money will be worthless in the ghetto. Schindler sets up his factory with Stern's help and hires Jews, rather than Poles, because they are cheaper to employ. Workers at the factory will be deemed "essential"—a status that saves them from removal to death camps. Stern recognizes this fact immediately and fills the factory with many Jewish workers whom the Nazis would otherwise have deemed expendable.

At this point, Schindler is unaware that Stern is using his position in the factory to save people. His awareness grows, however, when Stern brings to see him a one-armed man who wants to thank Schindler for saving him by making him "essential." Schindler dismisses the gratitude and chastises Stern for bringing the man to see him. Shortly after the scolding, Schindler has to rescue Stern himself from a train bound for a death camp.

Meanwhile, construction on the Plaszów labor camp begins, and Amon Goeth appears. Goeth, a sadistic Nazi, is charged with building and running the camp. When Plaszów is completed, the Jews are evacuated from the Kraków ghetto and sent to the camp. From a hill high above the ghetto, Schindler and his girlfriend watch the destruction. He sees a little girl in a red coat—the only color in the otherwise black-and-white scene—walking through the carnage. Schindler's girlfriend tearfully begs him to go home, and Schindler is obviously moved by what he sees. Schindler convinces Goeth to allow him to build his own subcamp to house his factory workers.

Schindler begins to participate actively in saving Jews when Regina Perlman, a Jewish girl passing as a gentile, visits his office. She begs Schindler to hire her parents because she has heard that his factory is a haven. He refuses to help and sends her away. Later, he yells at Stern and tells him he is not in the

business of saving people. But when Schindler finishes his tirade, he gives Stern his gold watch and tells him to bring the Perlman's over. With this decision, he begins to actively save Jews. Over time, Schindler gives Stern more and more of his own personal items to use for bribes to bring people to his factory.

Some time later, Goeth is charged with evacuating Plaszów and exhuming and burning the bodies of 10,000 Jews killed there and at the Kraków ghetto. Schindler realizes that his workers, Stern included, face certain death at the hands of the Nazis, so he decides to spend his fortune to save as many Jews as he can. With that, Schindler begins to make his list. He persuades Goeth to sell him his workers, as well as Goeth's maid, Helen Hirsch, to work in his factory in Czechoslovakia. The men and women are transported to Czechoslovakia on two separate trains, however, and the women are inadvertently diverted to Auschwitz, where Schindler is forced to buy them again. The men and women are reunited at the factory, where they remain until the war's end.

When the war ends, Schindler tells his workers they are now free but that he will be hunted as a war criminal and must flee at midnight. When he bids his Schindlerjuden good-bye, they give him a ring made from the gold tooth work of a factory worker, engraved with the Talmudic phrase, "Whoever saves one life saves the world entire." Schindler breaks down, crying that he could have sacrificed more, saved more lives. He and his wife then flee.

The next morning, a single Russian soldier enters the camp and tells the Jews they are free. As they walk toward a nearby town, the scene dissolves into full color and reveals a group of real Holocaust survivors walking across a field. They line up, many accompanied by the actors who play them, and place rocks on Schindler's grave. The last person at the grave is Liam Neeson (Oskar Schindler). He places a rose on the tombstone.