

2021 Recommended Holocaust Films

Years 5 - 12

The titles profiled in this recommended are a select list recommended by the JHC education team.

The films we have listed should be readily available to purchase as DVDs, to purchase or rent through an online service or to watch via a streaming service. We have listed these services below.

Available to purchase/rent:

[Google Play](#)
[Amazon Prime Video](#)
[YouTube](#)
[Apple TV](#)
[The Classic at home](#)

Available to stream:

[SBS OnDemand](#)
[ABC iview](#)
[Netflix](#)
[ClickView](#)

Using film to teach students about the Holocaust

Film has unique qualities as a communication and teaching medium, while enhancing the learning process in ways that are not as powerful in other media. It can bring flexibility into the English or History classroom and is an excellent resource for visual learners as it enables students to understand concepts without the other barriers that can sometimes hinder learning.

Film allows insight into the lives of the characters, puts events into context enabling students to identify theme, style and genre and to better grasp more difficult concepts in a medium that is more familiar to them.

Although Holocaust films are a powerful way to engage students with this topic, even the most violent film could never depict accurately the horror of the Holocaust. The film would be unwatchable and not suitable to use safely with students or any viewer.

With this in mind, teachers need to let their students know that Holocaust films are a reconstruction and have been sanitised to make them viewable. The films on the list are those that we know can work well in the classroom from our own experience or that of other teachers.

The JHC team has considered a number of criteria when creating this list of recommendations.

This included as close to historical accuracy, authenticity and characterisation of the Jewish victims. Films even entirely imagined are all based on historical research and try to convey a faithful portrayal of the historical reality. Those on our list explore important themes, such as propaganda, acts of courage, whether it is propaganda in *Jojo Rabbit* or acts of courage in *The Book Thief*.

Film, being a visual experience, can be very powerful, so teachers should be prepared for a variety of responses. Students often react to the Holocaust with sadness, anger, disbelief, or frustration, yet many students do not have a visible emotional response. When using film to teach the Holocaust it is crucial to consider how, as teachers, we might form a thoughtful, respectful and caring classroom community while engaging with this topic.

The JHC education team has taken great care to recommend which films are suitable for varying year levels. We advise teachers to carefully preview the films before showing them to their classes.

Historical films based on Holocaust survivors

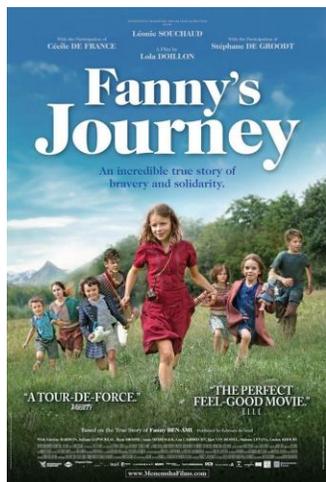
About adapting memoirs to film

The personal stories of survivors provide insights into the human impact of the Holocaust and illuminate the human response.

However, the history of an event and the retelling of it are not the same thing; we need to be mindful of this when using these films.



Historical Films based on Holocaust survivors



Watch the film trailer

[HERE](#)

Fanny's Journey

Recommended for viewers age 14+ (Years 9 -12)

Director: Lola Doillon

Year:

Duration: 1 hour 34 minutes

Language: French with English subtitles

Rating: M

Synopsis:

This film is based on the true story of Fanny and her younger sister who are hiding in a French orphanage. In 1943, when it is no longer safe for the Jewish children taking refuge in the orphanage from the Nazis, they try to flee over the border to Switzerland.

Themes introduced:

- Friendship
- Courage
- Resistance

Why we recommend:

- ✓ Good introduction to the Holocaust without graphic content.
- ✓ The Nazis and the Holocaust provide a menacing backdrop without the historical context explained.
- ✓ The possibility of the children being caught creates suspense.
- ✓ Fanny's Journey highlights many of the events that our child survivors have recounted in their testimonies, such as: loss of childhood, taking responsibility for younger siblings and the constant fear of its being discovered that they were Jewish.

Supporting Resources:

- JHC Holocaust survivor: **Paul Grinwald**
- JHC Holocaust survivor: **Floris Kalman**
- JHC Holocaust survivor: **Sonia Kempler**
- JHC Holocaust survivor: **Henri Korn**

[Eyewitness Testimony](#)

[Eyewitness Testimony](#)

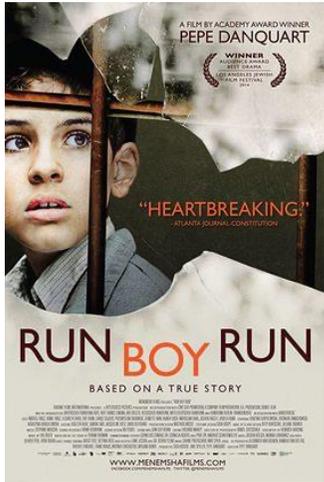
Memoir – *The Wheels of Memory* (purchase a copy [HERE](#))

[Eyewitness Testimony](#)

Memoir - *Saviour: Story of Jewish Altar Boy* (purchase a copy [HERE](#))



Historical Films based on Holocaust survivors



Run Boy Run (Based on a True Story)

Recommended for viewers age 15+ (Years 10 -12)

Director: Pepe Danquart

Year: 2014

Duration: 1 hour 52 minutes

Language: Polish, Yiddish, Hebrew, German with English subtitles

Rating: M

Synopsis:

This film is an adaptation of Uri Orlev's 2004 novel about the survival of Yoram Friedman. It tells the remarkable true story of Srulik who escaped the Warsaw ghetto in 1942 and learned to survive in the wilderness until winter forced him to seek shelter. Then, after changing his name to Jurek, he passed himself off as a Christian orphan and survived the war under incredible circumstances in Nazi occupied Poland, always under the threat of being discovered and killed.

The film is full of suspense, in the style of a thriller, and teachers will need to be sensitive to students who find this type of genre challenging.

Before viewing the film, students should have some understanding of the context in which a young boy could be sent by his parents into the woods and fends for himself.

Themes introduced:

- Resilience
- Courage
- Prejudice
- Fear

Why we recommend:

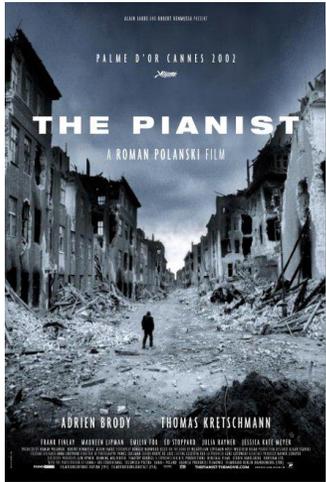
- ✓ Told from a child's point of view, *Run Boy Run* broaches the topic of the Holocaust in a manner that is accessible to students.
- ✓ Though the film does have some disturbing scenes, the horrors of the concentration camps are not part of the narrative.
- ✓ Highlights the challenges of non-Jews helping to save Jewish people during the Holocaust.
- ✓ The challenges and difficulties of surviving the Holocaust.

Watch the film trailer

[HERE](#)



Historical Films based on Holocaust survivors



Watch the film trailer

[HERE](#)

The Pianist

Recommended for viewers age 16+ (Years 11 -12)

Director: Roman Polanski

Year: 2002

Duration: 2hrs 30 min

Language: English

Rating: MA 15+

Synopsis:

The movie The Pianist was adapted from the autobiography of Wladyslaw Szpilman, a Polish Jew who detailed his survival during World War II. He and his family are forced into the Warsaw Ghetto. He was saved from deportation to the death camps, although the rest of his family were not. From this time, he survives by hiding in various locations among the ruins of Warsaw.

Teachers wanting to show this to senior students would need to view it first and assess its suitability for their students. There is graphic violence which is intended to reveal a glimpse of the real-life horrors European Jews endured at the hands of the Nazis. Maybe only certain scenes in the film could be shown to students rather than all of it.

Themes introduced:

- Resilience
- Hope
- Kindness
- Evil

Why we recommend:

- ✓ The film is historically accurate and shows events from the perspective of the victims.
- ✓ It highlights how Wladyslaw and his family become aware of the reality of their situation and the film shows their fears, their desperation, as well as the deterioration in their conditions.
- ✓ There are many aspects of the film that make it valuable for a senior student studying the treatment of Jews during the Holocaust.
- ✓ The film should inspire thought and discussion on the extremes of evil and good in humankind.

Historical Films based on the courageous acts of others

About acts of courage portrayed in film

During the Holocaust, courageous individuals put their own lives at great risk to save their Jewish friends, family, neighbours and, in many cases, strangers.

Using these titles can teach students the important message of *'being an upstander not a bystander'*.



Historical Films based on the courageous acts of others



Nicky's Family

Recommended for viewers age 13+ (Years 6 - 10)

Director: Matej Minac

Year: 2013

Duration: 1 hour 42 minutes

Language: English

Rating: M

Synopsis:

This docu-drama tells the story of Sir Nicholas Winton, a young Englishman, who in 1939 personally saved the lives of 669 Jewish Czech and Slovak children just before the outbreak of World War II. This is an incredible story and features dramatic re-enactments and archival footage, as well as interviews with many of the rescued children. Nicky arranged transport and was responsible for placing these children in English homes where they could live and be safe until the end of the war. Sadly, many of the children's parents were unable to go back to collect their children they had been murdered by the Nazis. Nicky Winton kept this story a secret for almost 50 years, until his wife found a suitcase in the attic full of documents, including plans of the transportation of the children from Czechoslovakia. Nicky's family today has grown to almost 6,000.

Themes introduced:

- Courage
- Resilience
- Discrimination/Antisemitism
- The moral and ethical dilemmas faced during times of war

Why we recommend:

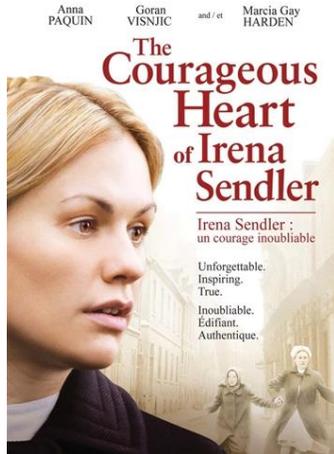
- ✓ This is an outstanding film combining the elements of documentary and dramatic re-enactment.
- ✓ It is not graphic in its presentation, yet it enables the audience to grasp an understanding of the fear experienced by both the parents who gave up their children and the children themselves.
- ✓ It focuses upon the acts of courage demonstrated by non-Jews who believed that Jews should be regarded as human beings.

Supporting Resources:

- JHC Holocaust Survivor: [Halina Zylberman](#) [Eyewitness testimony](#)



Historical Films based on the courageous acts of others



The Courageous Heart of Irena Sendler

Recommended for viewers age 12+ (Years 6 - 10)

Director: John Kent Harrison

Year: 2009

Duration: 95 minutes

Language: English

Rating: M

Synopsis:

Irena Sendler (Sendlerowa) was a social worker in Warsaw who used her position to gain access to the Warsaw ghetto. Working for Zegota, an organisation dedicated to assisting Jews, she helped smuggle thousands of babies out of the ghetto. They gave the children new identities and homes, but Irena kept the information about their real identities hidden in glass jars, so that they could be reunited with their families after the war. Almost all the parents of the children Irena saved, were murdered at the Treblinka death camp.

Themes introduced:

- Courage
- Resilience
- Prejudice/Antisemitism

Why we recommend:

- ✓ This inspiring real-life story tells a story of tragedy and triumph.
- ✓ Provides an excellent insight into the courage required to save Jewish children from inside the Warsaw Ghetto.
- ✓ Introduces students to the brutal conditions that existed inside ghetto life.
- ✓ Highlights the dilemmas faced by parents when making the decision to send their children away.

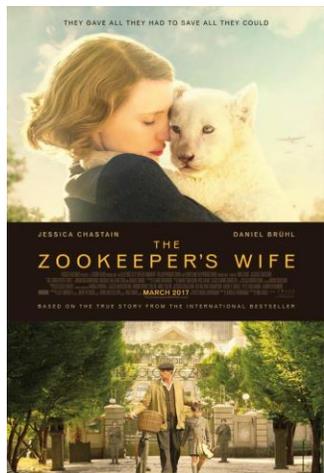
Supporting Resources:

- JHC Holocaust Survivor: **Maria Lewitt**

Memoir - *Come Spring* (purchase a copy [HERE](#))
[Eyewitness testimony](#)



Historical Films based on the courageous acts of others



Watch the film trailer

[HERE](#)

The Zookeepers Wife

Recommended for viewers age 15+ (Years 10 -12)

Director: Niki Caro

Year: 2017

Duration: 127 minutes

Language: English

Rating: M

Synopsis:

The real-life story of one working wife and mother who became a hero to hundreds during World War II.

In 1939 Poland, Antonina Żabińska and her husband, Dr Jan Żabiński, have the Warsaw Zoo flourishing under his stewardship and her care.

When their country is invaded by the Germans, Jan and Antonina are stunned and forced to report to the Reich's newly appointed chief zoologist, Lutz Heck.

To fight back on their own terms, the Żabińskis covertly begin working with the Resistance and put into action plans to save lives out of what has become the Warsaw Ghetto, with Antonina putting herself and even her children at great risk.

Teachers should be mindful of some explicit scenes.

Themes introduced:

- Resistance
- Courage
- Survival against all odds

Why we recommend:

- ✓ Provides an excellent insight into the courage required by ordinary people to help save Jews .
- ✓ Captures the feelings of power and fear that Nazi's used to control the people.
- ✓ Highlights the extraordinary lengths Jews went to survive against all odds .
- ✓ Provides an insight to the lasting trauma faced by survivors.

Supporting Resources:

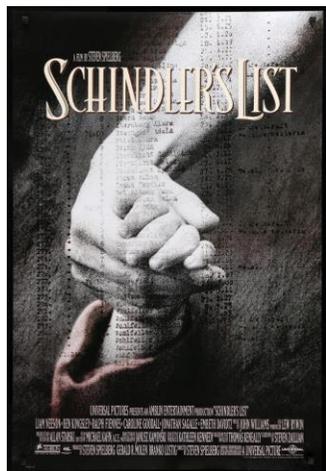
- JHC Holocaust Survivor: **Maria Lewitt**
- JHC Holocaust survivor: **Halina Zylberman**

Memoir - *Come Spring* (purchase a copy [HERE](#))
[Eyewitness testimony](#)

Memoir – *Swimming Under Water* (purchase a copy [HERE](#))
[Eyewitness testimony](#)



Historical Films based on the courageous acts of others



Watch the film trailer

[HERE](#)

Schindler's List

Recommended for viewers age 15+ (Years 10-12)

Director: Steven Spielberg

Year: 1994

Duration: 3hr 17 min

Language: English, Hebrew, German, Polish

Rating: MA 15+

Synopsis:

This film is based on the true story of Czech-born Nazi businessman Oskar Schindler who tries to make his fortune in German occupied Poland, by exploiting Jewish slave labour. Over time however, he becomes increasingly concerned for his workers after witnessing their increasing persecution by the Nazis and as the fate of the Jews becomes more and more clear. Oskar becomes an unlikely humanitarian turning his factory into a refuge for Jews ultimately saving a approximately 1100 Jews from almost certain death.

Teachers using this film should be prepared to teach emotionally challenging content especially with the graphic depictions of violence.

Themes introduced:

- Dehumanisation
- Courage
- Resistance
- Triumph of the human spirit

Why we recommend:

- ✓ While the film has received criticism for its focus on the Nazi perpetrators rather than the victims, it is regarded as a realistic depiction of the brutality of the Nazis and the suffering of those they persecuted.
- ✓ Allows the audience to empathise with the victims as individuals rather than statistics.
- ✓ Illustrates that the actions of one person can make a difference to the lives of others.
- ✓ An exploration of the human capacity for enormous evil as well as extraordinary courage and compassion.
- ✓ It highlights that history is about individual choices made and that these choices matter.
- ✓ Humanity can combat inhumanity and upstanders have choices.

Supporting Resources:

- JHCHolocaust survivor: **Willy Lerner**
- JHCHolocaust survivor: **Kitia Altman**
- Facing History

Memoir – *From Hell to Salvation: Surviving the Holocaust* (purchase a copy [HERE](#))

[Eyewitness testimony](#)

Memoir – *Memories of Ordinary People* (purchase a copy [HERE](#))

[Eyewitness testimony](#)

(<https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/teaching-schindlers-list>)

Historical Fiction

About using Historical Fiction

Our recommended films, even entirely imagined, are all based on historical research and try to convey a portrayal of the historical reality, even if comedic devices are used as a way to communicate the futility of the Nazi regime.

The ones on our list explore important themes, such as propaganda and acts of courage.



Historical Fiction



Watch the film trailer

[HERE](#)

The Book Thief

Recommended for viewers age 13+ (Years 7 -10)

Director: Brian Percival

Year: 2013

Duration: 2 hours 11 minutes

Language: English

Rating: PG

Synopsis:

Set in Nazi Germany, just before and during World War II, which began on 1 September 1939, when the Nazis invaded Poland. World War II bombers did not have precise targeting and civilians were always potentially in harm's way. This indiscriminate bombing of innocent civilians is shown throughout the film. 'Death' narrates the story of young orphan Liesel, who in 1938 arrives at the Dresden home of her new foster parents, Hans and Rosa. When Hans realises that Liesel cannot read, he teaches her the wonders of the written language. Liesel grows to love books, even rescuing one from a Nazi bonfire. Though Liesel's new family barely have enough food to survive, their situation becomes even more precarious when they secretly shelter a Jewish boy whose father once saved Hans' life. Liesel begins to 'borrow' books and shares them with Max, the refugee being sheltered in the cellar of her home. They become the best of friends, and the various relationships that are developed throughout the film are both meaningful and uplifting.

Themes introduced:

- The power of words
- Both sides of humanity - kindness and cruelty
- The dualities of Nazi Germany

Why we recommend:

- ✓ A beautifully scripted and acted film, introducing many concepts as it progresses throughout the years of World War II.
- ✓ A coming-of-age story.
- ✓ Children endeavouring to cope with death, grief and loss that is associated with war.
- ✓ 'Death' is the narrator, highlighting the various aspects of war from the German point of view.

Supporting Resources:

- JHC Holocaust survivor: **Henri Korn**

[Eyewitness Testimony](#)

Memoir - *Saviour: Story of Jewish Altar Boy* (purchase a copy [HERE](#))



Historical Fiction



Watch the film trailer

[HERE](#)

Jojo Rabbit

Recommended for viewers age 13+ (Years 7 -10)

Director: Taika Waititi

Year: 2019

Duration: 1 hour 48 minutes

Language: English

Rating: M (Mature Thematic Content - JoJo has strong violence, language and themes of war, death, loss and antisemitism)

Synopsis: *Jojo Rabbit* is a satirical depiction of the experience of a 10-year-old Hitler Youth trainee, as he discovers the truth about Nazism and the Jewish people. Jojo Betzler is a young German boy, who discovers to his great horror that his anti-Nazi mother is hiding a Jewish girl in their attic while his father is reportedly fighting with the Resistance in Italy. Jojo is a fanatical Nationalist, whose imaginary friend, Adolf Hitler, encourages him to continue his journey as an active member of the Hitler Youth. World War II continues to rage on, with the Nazis retreating and the Allied forces beginning their unrelenting bombing campaign. As Jojo struggles with his Nazi fanaticism and his mother's identified 'betrayal' of Germany, he goes on a journey that opens his eyes to the truths of the war as well as the ideals he has so passionately defended.

Themes introduced:

- Hatred/discrimination
- Resistance
- Power of propaganda
- Friendship/coming of age

Why we recommend:

- ✓ *Jojo Rabbit* is unlike other Holocaust films and some audiences will appreciate its very different portrayal of one of the darkest events of 20th Century history.
- ✓ Dark, satirical film introducing the various concepts of war from both the Nazi and the Jewish point of view.
- ✓ Provides an insight into the indoctrination of young children.

Supporting Resources:

- JHC Holocaust survivor: **Henri Korn**
- JHC Holocaust survivor: **Andy Factor**

[Eyewitness Testimony](#)

Memoir - *Saviour: Story of Jewish Altar Boy* (purchase a copy [HERE](#))

Memoir - *In Harmony with Pen and Pencil* (purchase a copy [HERE](#))

Documentaries

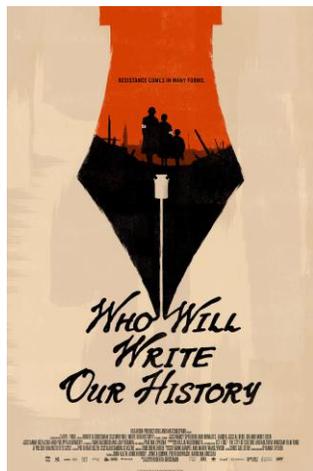
About using documentaries

Creating Holocaust documentaries can be problematic as they often use Nazi propaganda film to convey their message, are overwhelming with information and are not necessarily engaging for students to view.

The title we recommend is an excellent example of well-researched and engaging documentary that uses recreation and Jewish voices to tell the story of the Holocaust.



Documentaries



Watch the film trailer

[HERE](#)

Who Will Write Our History

Recommended for viewers age 13 + (Years 7 -12)

Director: Roberta Grossman

Year: 2018

Duration: 1 hour 36 minutes

Language: English

Rating: 13+

Synopsis:

In November 1940, a few days after the Nazis sealed almost half a million Jews inside the Warsaw Ghetto, a clandestine group of journalists, scholars and community leaders decided to resist in their own way. Led by historian Emanuel Ringelblum, the Oyneg Shabes ('Joy of the Sabbath') group vowed to defeat Nazi lies and propaganda not with fists or guns but with pen and paper. Using writings, artwork, statistics, photographs, objects of daily life, poems and songs, more than 35,000 pages was buried in tin boxes and aluminium crates. This feature documentary mixes the writings of the secret archive with interviews, rarely seen footage and dramatisations that let us see what took place inside the ghetto as well as the lives of these courageous resistance fighters. The last of the inhabitants, murdered or sent to the death camps, is the final attempt by the Nazis to erase Jewish life in Warsaw. The Nazis did not know that what was buried below the streets of the ghetto was the true story about what happened.

Themes introduced:

- Courage
- Resistance/life inside the Warsaw Ghetto
- Hope and resilience
- Human dignity

Why we recommend:

- ✓ Archival footage of life inside the Warsaw Ghetto.
- ✓ Provides insight into the brutality of the Nazi regime.
- ✓ Highlights Nazi deception and lies.
- ✓ Cultural resistance and the reasons why.
- ✓ The focus on the resilience of human dignity.

Supporting Resources:

- Facing History

<https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/video/who-will-write-our-history>

Thank you

We appreciate your time in considering our recommendations. We are passionate about supporting meaningful and appropriate resources for your students. Please do not hesitate to [get in touch with our educators](#) if you have any questions.

