

Run Boy Run



Teacher Resource Package Prepared By:
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Synopsis

Country of Origin: Germany/France/Poland

Release Year: 2014

Director: Pepe Danquart

Runtime: 108 minutes

Themes: Holocaust, overcoming disability, religious identity

Based on the best-selling novel by Uri Orlev, *Run Boy Run* tells the story of Srulik, a nine-year-old boy who flees the Warsaw ghetto and learns to survive in the nearby woods. When loneliness and the harsh onset of winter force him to seek shelter, a kind-hearted farmer's wife takes him in and gives him a new identity as Jurek, a Christian war orphan. Until the end of the war, this is the persona he adopts as he moves from village to village, working as a farmhand under the ever-present threat of discovery. By the time it is finally safe for him to reveal his true identity, Srulik has already come to see himself as Jurek the orphan and he must choose between resuming his former life as a Jew or rejecting his past entirely.

Curriculum Links

Run Boy Run can be used to meet the English and Media Studies component of the English curriculum from Grades 7-10. It can also be applied to the Grade 10 History course.

Related Websites

Holocaust Survivor Testimony: Yoram Friedman

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I1jDjDotWuQ>

This short video account is from Yoram Friedman, the man on whom Orlev's novel is based. The testimony is in Hebrew, but if you click on the CC button at the bottom, you can access the English subtitles.

WAYS INTO THE TEXT: STUDYING THE HOLOCAUST

Told from a child's point of view, *Run Boy Run* broaches the topic of the Holocaust in a manner that is accessible to a younger audience. Though the film does have some

disturbing scenes, the horrors of the concentration camps and mass executions are not part of the narrative. 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 fend for himself. Introducing such an overwhelming topic is a daunting prospect for any teacher, but there are many websites and resources that they can access to help them. In particular, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum is an invaluable tool for both general information and lesson plan ideas. Teachers should begin any unit of Holocaust studies by familiarizing themselves with the Museum's general guidelines to teaching the Holocaust. They can be found at <http://www.ushmm.org/educators/teaching-about-the-holocaust/general-teaching-guidelines>.

Early in the film, Srulik meets a group of other young people who are also hiding in the woods. They ask Srulik if he escaped from the Warsaw Ghetto and he admits that he did. The Warsaw Ghetto also offers teachers an entry point from which to study the Holocaust. There are numerous resources and websites available to teachers and students that can help with this topic. Listed below are a few:

A Teacher's Guide to the Holocaust

<http://fcit.usf.edu/holocaust/ACTIVITY/68plan/WARSAW.HTM>

Learning to Give

<http://www.learningtogive.org/lessons/unit16/lesson3.html>

Holocaust Teacher Resource Centre

<http://www.holocaust-trc.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/Warsawms.pdf>

Yad Vashem

http://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/education/lesson_plans/ghettos.asp

National Endowment for the Humanities

<http://edsitement.neh.gov/lesson-plan/holocaust-and-resistance>

Children in hiding offer teachers another point of entry into *Run Boy Run*. Srulik spends the war alternating between hiding in the forest and being hidden by kindly strangers. Many students would be familiar with *The Diary of Ann Frank*, another child who spent the war hiding in the home of a Dutch Christian family who risked their lives to try to save the Frank family. For more information and lesson plans about children in hiding, teachers can go to the following websites:

Anti-Defamation League

http://archive.adl.org/children_holocaust/children_main1-2.html

Yad Vashem

http://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/education/lesson_plans/index.asp

This page includes a lesson plan based on the personal story of Uri Orlev who wrote the novel on which the film *Run Boy Run* is based.

Mandel Project: In Hiding: A Choiceless Choice of the Holocaust

<http://mandelproject.us/Young2.htm>

Mandel Project: Children in Hiding During the Holocaust

<http://mandelproject.us/Younglove.htm>

Florida Centre for Instructional Technology

<http://fcit.usf.edu/holocaust/PEOPLE/children.htm>

Other Relevant Websites for Holocaust Research

Yad Vashem

http://www1.yadvashem.org/yv/en/holocaust/index.asp?WT.mc_id=ggcamp&WT.srch=1

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

<http://www.ushmm.org/education/>

Washington State Holocaust Education Resource Centre

<http://www.wsherc.org/>

USC Shoah Foundation Institute

<http://college.usc.edu/vhi/about/segmentsfortheclassroom/index.php?gclid=CiiCttuyzqcCFcW8KgodfBMmFA>

The Holocaust and the United Nations Outreach Programme

<http://www.un.org/en/holocaustremembrance/emainpage.shtml>

Breaking the Film into Segments

Run Boy Run tracks Jurek's journey from his early days in the woods to his eventual return to his hometown after the war. Each step of the journey should be discussed. Listed below are some guided discussion questions that pertain to each of the places that Jurek takes refuge along the way.

Opening Segment: Winter 1942/43

1. The opening shot of the film is Jurek sleeping alone in a snowy forest and then trudging alone along a barren landscape. Why do you think the director chose this to begin with? What do we learn about Jurek from this sequence? How does it set the tone for the rest of the film?
2. What evidence do we have that Jurek has been on his own for some time?
3. As Jurek shivers in the fragile lean-to that he has built for himself, the film
4. flashes back to the moment where his father tells to never give up and to forget everything except for the fact that he is Jewish. Why does the director include this conversation at this point in the film?

Six Months Earlier

1. Why do you think that the director did not start with this segment?
2. What evidence do we have that Jurek is new to living in the woods?
3. Why is the forest the safest place for the children to hide?
4. How is the mood of this segment different to that of the opening sequence?
5. What is the difference between the children's behaviour towards Jurek during the day and at night? What advice does Jurek receive from his newfound friends?
6. How does Jurek find himself alone again? What happens to his friends?

Magda's House

1. Why do you think that Magda risks her life by agreeing to let Jurek stay with her?
2. What story does Magda tell Jurek he should tell people about how came to be on his own? Why is it so important for them to practice it?
3. Magda is a devout Catholic and her crucifix and rosary fascinate Jurek. Magda also teaches him to say that Hail Mary. Why is this significant?

4. Despite being well taken care of by Magda, what evidence do we have that Jurek is still haunted by his old life and misses his mother terribly?
5. Why does Jurek have to leave Magda's home? What does she give him before he leaves? What is the significance of this present?

Polish Family's House

1. How does Jurek convince this family to take him in? How does he convince him that he is Christian? What evidence do we have that perhaps Jurek is starting to think of himself as a Christian?
2. What is the significance of Jurek adopting an injured stray dog?
3. Why does Jurek have to leave this house?
4. Why does the family not turn Jurek over to the Gestapo when they learn that he is Jewish?

Jurek Alone in the Woods Again

1. How does this time in the forest differ from Jurek's first time alone in the woods?
2. Who shoots Azon, Jurek's dog? What evidence do we have that the one of the partisans is, in fact, Magda's son?
3. Jurek buries Azon and marks the spot with a crucifix that he makes from some sticks. What is the significance of this? Why does Jurek decide to take back the rosary that he was planning to leave at the site of the grave? Why is this significant?
4. Why does Jurek make the mistake of trusting the peasants who promise him work for food? What does this suggest about Jurek?
5. What is the Nazi's attitude towards the peasants who turn Jurek in to them?

Jurek in Nazi Captivity

1. What is Jurek's attitude towards the kindly woman who brings food to him in the cell because "after all, Jews are human too"?
2. How does Jurek keep himself calm while he listens to other people being beaten and tortured?
3. How does Jurek outsmart his captors? What piece of remembered advice that his father gave him does Jurek use to avoid detection?
4. Jurek spends the night in the forest with another fugitive. Why do they separate the next day? What does this say about the cost of survival?

Jurek at the Herman Farm and at the Hospital

1. What is the Nazi's reaction when he sees that Jurek is still alive? Why does he not kill Jurek on the spot?
2. How does Jurek injure himself?
3. Why does the first doctor at the hospital refuse to operate on him? What is Mrs. Herman's reaction to the doctor's refusal to operate? Why is the doctor not threatened when she tells him that she has connections in the SS?
4. What is the reaction of the second doctor when he sees a delirious Jurek alone in the hall? Why does he operate on Jurek even though Jurek is Jewish?
5. What is Jurek's first reaction to seeing the stump where his arm used to be? When was the last time that he had allowed himself to cry?
6. What allows Jurek to finally stop feeling angry and sorry for himself?
7. How do the nurses help Jurek to become self-sufficient despite his disability?
8. Why does Jurek have to escape from the hospital? How does he outsmart the Nazis a second time? Who helps Jurek to escape this time?

Jurek On His Own Again

1. Pawel pays a man to take Jurek down the river to safety. What is the man's attitude towards Jurek? Why does he agree to take Jurek even though Jurek is Jewish? What evidence do we have that his attitude softens by the end of the journey?
2. How does the director give us the sense of time passing and the difficulties that Jurek has to overcome?

Jurek Back at Magda's

1. How do the Nazis react to Magda refusing to hand over Jurek? Why does Magda not betray Jurek's whereabouts even after the Nazis beat her and ransack her home?
2. What is Jurek's reaction to the fire that destroyed Magda's house? How does she reassure him that it is not his fault? Do you believe her reasoning? Why/why not?
3. Why does Magda beg Jurek's forgiveness before she sends him away even after all she has done to help him?
4. How does the director give us the sense of time passing after Jurek leaves Magda's?

5. How does Jurek manage to survive this time? What evidence do we have that he has become a very accomplished liar?

Jurek with the Kowalski Family

1. Why does Alma's family agree to let Jurek stay with them?
2. What evidence do we have that the war is coming to an end?
3. What is the reaction of the Russian soldier when Jurek asks them why they aren't helping the Poles? What does this suggest about the Russians' attitude towards Poland?
4. Why does Jurek agree to take communion? Do you think that he has forgotten his promise to his father or that he no longer wants to be Jewish? Support your response with evidence from the text.
5. Why does the neighbour refuse Mr Kowalski's offer of wine after the war is over? What is his attitude towards the Russians?
6. How did the neighbour know that Jurek was Jewish all along?
7. What is Mr Kowalski's reaction to learning that Jurek is Jewish? What is Alma's reaction?
8. What does Mosche Frankiel mean when he says that "these scattered children are the future of our people. They can't be left to fate"?
9. Why does Frankiel rip the crucifix from Jurek's neck? What is Jurek's reaction to this?
10. Why does Jurek no longer want to be Jewish?
11. Why does Jurek agree to get back into the car with Frankiel?

Jurek in Blonice (his hometown)

1. Why does Frankiel take Jurek back to his hometown?
2. What is the name of the woman who works in the bakery? Why is this significant? What is her reaction upon learning that Jurek had adopted her surname as his alias?
3. Where did the name Jurek come from? Why do you think that Srulik took the name of a bully to be his alias?
4. What is Jurek's reaction to seeing his abandoned house? What does he remember as he looks into the window of his former home? Why is this memory significant?
5. The film flashes back again to the scene where Jurek's father tells him to always remember that he is Jewish? Why does the director include this scene a second time? How is the viewer's response to it different the second time around?
6. What is Jurek's reaction to reliving this moment again in his mind?

7. The final shot of young Jurek is of him in the car with Frankiel at a crossroads. Frankiel gives him the choice to go right where Warsaw and the Jewish orphanage are or left where the Kowalskis live. Why do you think that the director chose to show the car going to the right rather than hearing Jurek make the choice aloud?

Epilogue: The Real Jurek (Yoram Friedman)

1. Why does the director include the real Yoram Friedman in the film?
2. What is your reaction to seeing “Jurek” as an old man with children and grandchildren?
3. How hard do you think it would have been for him to start living his life again as a Jew after so many years of denying his Judaism? What is the significance of Yoram Friedman ending up in Israel?

General Discussion Questions/Activities

1. The characters in the film can be divided into two categories: those who help Jurek and those who betray him. Draw up a list of the characters that fit into each of these categories and discuss the motivations behind their decisions. Did those who helped Jurek always do so out of altruistic reasons or were they motivated by other factors? Did those who betray him always do so out of malice or were there other motivating factors?
2. What would make someone risk his/her life to save another person?
3. Though Jurek is forced to grow up very quickly, there are moments that betray his youth and his innocence. Provide some examples of this from this film.
4. There are only a few times in the film where Jurek allows himself the luxury of tears. What events cause him to cry?
5. Although most of the film deals is set against the backdrop of war, there are moments of levity sprinkled through a mostly tense environment. Provide some example of some of these moments. Why are they important to the film?
6. What is a stereotype? What are some of the stereotypes of Jews that are depicted in the film? How does Jurek defy these stereotypes?
7. *Run Boy Run* deals with the Holocaust. Sadly, there have been many more acts of genocide that have occurred around the world since then. Divide the class into groups and have each one research some of the genocides

that have occurred in the last century (e.g., Rwanda, Cambodia, Sudan, Yugoslavia).

8. What are some of the steps that a person can take to try to prevent any further acts of genocide from occurring?

