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### **Check your progress 1**

Discuss the controversy that surrounded the award of Booker prize to *Schindler's Ark*.

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## **14.6 SYMBOLS AND IMAGES**

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Kenneally has employed various images and symbols to describe the most sensitive issues surrounding the holocaust. Various objects, colours, and characters are employed to underscore the central idea of the novel. Though some of the images are recurring, these images vividly describe the events that surround the rescue of the Jews from the gas chambers. One of the most memorable scenes in the book is the appearance of little girl Genia in her red coat, red cap and red boots, while Schindler, by sitting on his horse, was observing the destruction of the Jewish ghetto. The moment he saw the little girl is the defining moment which forces him to confront the horrible life of Jews during the holocaust and his contribution to the inhuman treatment meted out to the Jews. Only after witnessing this event Schindler realizes that Jews in the ghetto are human beings with flesh and blood and he vows to defeat the system. To Schindler the little girl appears to be the embodiment of the innocence of the Jews. The "red coat" symbolizes the red flag waved by the Jews at the Allied forces during World War –II seeking their support. When the little girl is violently evacuated she avoids the horrific scenes around her as she cannot stand the carnage. This act mirrors the inaction of Allied Forces who did not help the Jews. The colour of red serves as a striking contrast to the dark activities of the Jewish prisoners' camp for Oskar Schindler and the red colour stands for the blood of the Jews. The innocence of the Jew is buried with the death of the little girl Genia whose body is spotted later amidst the pile of exhumed dead bodies by Schindler.

The other recurring images in the novel are those of Gods and Kings. Schindler is often compared with Gods as he is determined to give salvation to the Jewish workers. This raises the question about the complex nature of morality. He is not God in a customary sense whereas he can be identified more with Bacchus, the god of pleasure and revelry, who indulges in drinking and seeking pleasure, while at the same time performing a lot of good deeds. The image of the king is used while describing Goeth who always imagines himself as an emperor. He suggests power hungry rulers like the Roman emperor Caligula, who is known for his cruelty and excesses.

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## 14.7 LISTS

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Another image that dominated *Schindler's Ark* is that of the "List" that determines the lives of the Jews. The first list is the registration list of vast numbers of Jews who are forced into Krakow. This first list is the gateway to death and destruction of Jewish prisoners. Various lists categorise the Jewish prisoners to identify those who are fit to work and those who are unfit to work. Those names that are found unessential are placed in a different list from those to be evacuated to the gas chambers. The Nazis have a separate list to monitor the movement of Jews and they have a list even for the articles looted from the Jews. Stern whose name is included in the list to Auschwitz is saved by Schindler. An SS official's remark that names of the Jews who board the train are immaterial and tracking the name involves lot of paperwork symbolically conveys how Jews were dehumanized by the Nazis. During the World War II Jews were regarded as vermin and less than humans by Germans.

The systematic way of functioning through lists of the Nazi war machine conveys that they are organized in their efforts to eliminate Jews from Europe, thus reducing the Jews to subhuman levels. By repeatedly pointing out the German's style of execution of duties through lists, Kenneally asserts the Nazi's dominating attitude over Jews and also suggests that this impersonal petty bureaucracy assists in retaining the popular notion of German "civilization". Symbolically the "list" stands for dehumanization. Finally Schindler also prepares a list to draw names to save "his Jews" by relocating them to Brinnlitz factory camp, which shows that Schindler also meticulously follows the rules of Germans though he does not approve of it. Lists also throw light on the character and attitudes of people. Symche Spira, the Jewish police and other OD members have a separate "list" of ghetto dwellers who are unsatisfactory, to be sent to the SS officials, thus aiding the Nazis in annihilating their own brethren. Marcel Goldberg, another Jew and a personal clerk who is in charge of various lists accepts bribes to include the names of the Jews in their favourable list including Schindler's List and also maintains the secrecy of the names of those Jews who are supposed to be sent to Schindler's factory. Raimund Tisch who respects the individuality of people finds it difficult to remember the names of the people. People conveniently hide behind the list in the name of administrative procedures in order to escape from recognizing the crimes they might get involved in. The Nazi's "list" stands for evil and death whereas Schindler's "list" stands for good and life. Ironically the final list is the list of the signatures of all the saved Jews given to Schindler, vouching the goodness of Schindler and also to save him from being caught by the Allied soldiers. Thus the saved Jews turn savior.

- "The list is an absolute good. The list is life. All around its cramped margins lies the gulf." (Keneally 290)

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## 14.8 POWER

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Various kinds of Power are exhibited through different kinds of characters. The entire novel deals with the 'power' to assert who will survive. The willpower of one person Schindler to save the entire Jewish race in Germany underlies the entire novel. The ring that is gifted to him by the survivors and also the stones that are placed on his tomb as a mark of respect and gratitude resonate this theme. He also represents the power to command respect. Stern who is resilient, has

got the power to inspire Schindler's conscience to save Jews. His constant interaction and close work with Schindler has the power to turn the pleasure seeking, greedy Schindler into a saviour of Jews. Amon Goethe who always imagines himself as an emperor has got the power to kill. He takes pride in talking about his ability to kill thereby instilling fear in the minds of people. Schindler tells Goethe that true power does not come from the ability to kill, but in the willpower not to do so. Finally Goethe too after listening to Schindler pardons a Jewish boy. Nazis abuse power in order to eliminate Jews whom the Germans think of as inferior and in order to ensure that only the powerful superiors should rule. The novel also raises a question whether having power means earning respect or forcing others to obey and be subservient. The novel sends a message that power can be constructively used to help humanity instead of for selfish gains.

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## 14.9 TRAINS

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Trains form one of the recurring motifs in this Holocaust novel. Jews are stuffed inside freight trains which carry them to concentration camps. A train carries the first batch of Jews to Krakow and they are registered on the platform. As the Jews board the cattle cars, they have been instructed to leave their belongings on a platform which they are assured, will be transported in another train. But that never happens. Those belongings are carried to another room where they are categorized. The room is dumped with huge piles of personal belongings of the Jews on the train. Jewellers are forced to estimate the values of gold, silver and other valuable metals which are forcibly taken away from the Jews. The piles represent the millions of victims who have lost their lives in the holocaust. Stern is also saved from the crowded train which is bound for Auschwitz, leaving behind other Jews who are not rescued. In one of the scenes in the novel, Schindler requests Goethe to spray water on these cars which carry the Jews on a hot day to death camps. Goethe's refusal to do so citing that would give the Jews false hopes clearly indicates that the Jews are travelling towards death. The train which transports Schindlerjuden to Schindler's new factory in Czechoslovakia symbolises hope and life as the Jews are being taken to a safe haven. The train which carries only women to Schindler's camp is diverted to Auschwitz, Schindler interrupts the journey and saves the women from the jaws of death. As these women board the train of life, trains which are bound for concentration camps reach the place which symbolically suggests that death is never ending.

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## 14.10 DEATH

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Death and Fear of death that haunt the Jews pervade the novel. Death is shown through executions and gunshots again and again. The one-armed man who thanks Schindler for offering him a job is shot the next day by an SS Officer, when he is shoveling the snow. The blood that oozes from his head spreads on the snow and stains it. The woman Engineer who points out the fatal construction error is also executed by Goethe and the blood that flows from her head darkens the surrounding snow. In another instance when Goethe attempts several times to execute a rabbi in a kneeling position in a Plaszow labour camp, the gun jams and the rabbi is freed, suggesting the uncertainty that surrounds the lives of Schindlerjuden. Actually the blood that pours from the bodies of the victims metaphorically and symbolically denotes the lifeblood of the Jewish race.

## Check your progress 2

- 1) Write short notes on the symbols and images used in *Schindler's Ark*.
- 2) What is the significance of “lists” in *Schindler's Ark*?

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## 14.11 LET US SUM UP

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Keneally uses these symbols and images to encourage the readers to arrive at their own readings about the situations depicted in the novel. He also combines “story telling” (where the readers are expected to uncover the layers of meanings) and the technique of ‘History Telling’ (which drives home the point that all the events described in this novel are true and that the characters are real people). Both these techniques complement each other. *Schindler's Ark* in its chilling portrayal of inhumanity, demonstrates through Schindler’s altruism that humans can achieve true empathy for fellow humans. One of Schindler’s Jews removes his gold dental work so that it can be melted and moulded as a ring for Schindler. A profound and meaningful verse from the *Talmud* is inscribed on the ring: “He who saves a single life saves the world entire.”

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## 14.12 GLOSSARY

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Altruism - Selflessness  
Oblivious – Unaware  
Resonate – reverberate

### 14.13 UNIT END QUESTIONS:

1. Explain how Keneally combines “story telling” with “history telling” in *Schindler's Ark* to create a compelling narrative of the Holocaust.
2. How does Keneally examine the complex nature of righteousness and virtue in *Schindler's Ark* through the character Oskar Schindler?