



## Wunderkinder

This film tells the tale of two Jewish musical prodigies living in Ukraine in 1941 and their friendship with a German girl who shares their love for classical music. Their friendship is tested when Hitler invades the Soviet Union, violating the terms of the Nonaggression Pact between the two nations. The three children and their families try to help each other survive the terrifying aftermath of the German invasion. The movie builds to a harrowing climax where their very survival depends upon their musical gifts.

**Recommended for ages 13+**

(Holocaust setting with threatening situations, implicit violence and deadly outcomes.)

**Themes:** coming of age; creative expression; discrimination; friendship; grief/loss; human rights; identity; inequality; music; religion; violence; war

**Director(s):** Marcus Rosenmuller | **96 min** | **Live Action** | **2011** | **Country:** Germany | **Language:** German w/English subtitles

**Official film website:** <https://www.globalscreen.de/cinema.family/content/show/81240>



## SET THE STAGE | THOUGHT-STARTERS

### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

This movie takes place in Ukraine in 1941, when Ukraine was part of the Soviet Union. Stalin, the Soviet leader during this time period, was known for his brutality and his extensive network of secret police called the NKVD. In 1939, the Soviet Union and Germany made the Nonaggression Pact, an agreement between the two countries not to go to war. But Hitler, the German leader, had an insatiable desire to gain more land, so he violated that agreement and invaded Ukraine. Hitler believed the German people were racially superior to the rest of the world and that racially inferior people, particularly Jews, had to be killed. During his reign, he murdered at least six million Jews in concentration camps. That number doesn't include the hundreds of thousands of Ukrainian Jews killed during the German occupation. Although Stalin disapproved of all religious practices—Jewish and Christian—he did not particularly target Jews during his regime.

### WORDS TO KNOW

- **Anti-Semitism:** Prejudice against, hatred of, or discrimination against Jews as an ethnic, religious, or racial group.
- **Foreshadowing:** To show or indicate beforehand; prefigure.
- **Foreboding:** A feeling that something bad will happen.
- **Holocaust:** The mass murder of Jews under the German Nazi regime during the period 1941–45. More than six million European Jews, as well as members of other persecuted groups, such as gypsies and homosexuals, were murdered at concentration camps such as Auschwitz

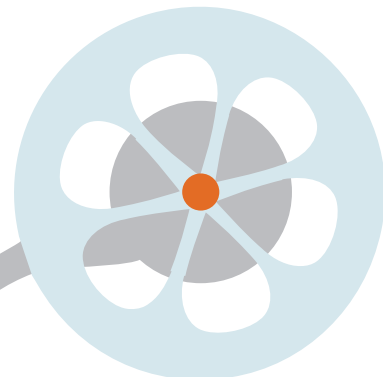
For more film terms, refer to the PCFF Film Glossary ([pcfri.org/FilmHub](http://pcfri.org/FilmHub)).



Clues  
and  
Cues

### Pay attention while watching

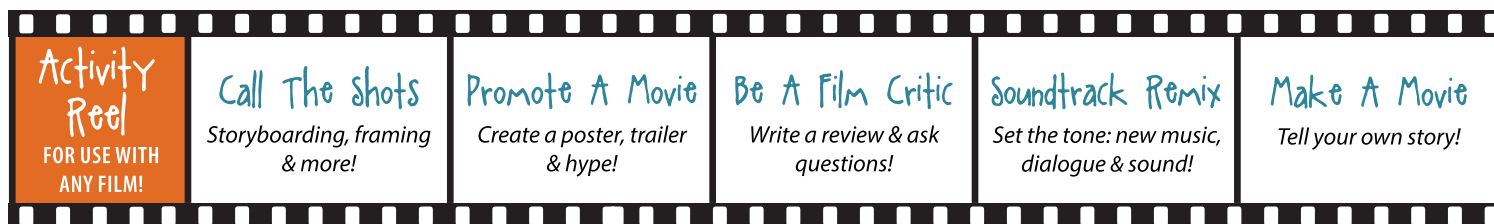
- Notice the perspective or point of view of the camera. Which character's point of view are we seeing?
- Listen to the background music in the film. How does it create the mood?



## TALK ABOUT IT | DISCUSSION

- Throughout the movie, adults take advantage of the children's musical talent for their own agendas. How are Larissa and Abrashka controlled by both the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany?
- Who are the "good" guys in this film and who are the "bad" guys? Is anyone a mixture of the two? Do any characters change over time?
- How do the camera angles change once the war begins? [hint: think about still shots vs. shaky shots]
- This movie is told from the perspective of children. How do the camera angles reflect a child's perspective?
- Although the early part of the movie is relatively happy, the filmmaker manages to create a sense of foreboding. What clues are there that something bad is going to happen? [hint: think about the soundtrack]
- What are the main themes of the movie? What message does the filmmaker want to communicate?
- The filmmaker often represents the horror of war through tiny details. Can you think of some moments when we understand the violence of war even if no people were involved? [hint: think of the aftermath of the scene at the hospital. What is burning? And when war is declared, what happens to the jug of milk?]
- In one of the climactic scenes a character says, "The fascists [the Germans], the Bolsheviks [the Soviets], the political system devour people. Individual struggle is all that's left." What did the speaker mean?
- If you were in the situation the children were in, do you think you would have managed to play perfectly or do you think you would have cracked? How well do you perform under pressure?

## GET CREATIVE | EXTENSION ACTIVITIES



For Activity Reel details, downloadable storyboard template and more, visit the the Film Hub website: [www.pcffri.org/FilmHub](http://www.pcffri.org/FilmHub)

### • Writing Prompt

The children in this movie are generous and kind while many of the adults are selfish and cruel. Is this characterization true in your experience? Can you describe a situation when you found that children were more compassionate than adults? Can you describe a situation when adults were more compassionate than children? Typically, adults have the power and are in charge. What would the world be like if youth were in charge? Better? Worse? The same?

### • Make A Butterfly Project

All over the United States kids have been reading the poem "I Never Saw Another Butterfly" written by a Jewish boy sent to a concentration camp. Then they create butterflies out of paper which represent the children who died in the Holocaust. These butterflies are collected by the Houston Holocaust Museum. Students can participate in the butterfly project by reading the poem below and making a butterfly, or they can write their own poem from the perspective of Abrashka or Larissa.

[www.hmh.org/UPLOADS/PDF/Lesson%20Plan%20for%20the%20Butterfly%20Project.PDF](http://www.hmh.org/UPLOADS/PDF/Lesson%20Plan%20for%20the%20Butterfly%20Project.PDF)

### • Pack A Suitcase

Hana's Suitcase: Many years after the Holocaust, a Japanese curator [a person who works in a museum] asked for an object that would tell the story of children in the Holocaust. She ended up with a suitcase which had belonged to a young girl named Hana Brady. This suitcase was taken from her when she arrived in Auschwitz, the concentration camp where she eventually died. The characters in this movie all grabbed suitcases when they fled, holding onto them while they ran through the woods and forests. Ask students: What would you take if you could only fill one suitcase with your most important belongings? What do you think would have been in Abrashka or Larissa's suitcase? Then instruct students to draw a picture of what the inside of Abrashka or Larissa's suitcase would have looked like. If you have time and materials you can make different versions of their suitcases, recreating in clay or paper/cardboard the objects that might have been inside. Or for a quicker and more low-tech version, make collages of the inside of these suitcases.

### • Make A Memorial

Providence recently built a Holocaust memorial, commemorating the millions of people who died at Adolph Hitler's hands. If you were to create a memorial to Abrashka, Larissa, and their families and friends, what would it look like? You can design this memorial in groups using just pencil and paper or you can build a tiny version of it if you have time! To get your ideas flowing here are some links to other Holocaust memorials:

- [www.providencejournal.com/article/20150826/NEWS/150829455](http://www.providencejournal.com/article/20150826/NEWS/150829455)
- [www.garystravels.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Holocaust-Memorial-Miami-Beach.jpg](http://www.garystravels.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Holocaust-Memorial-Miami-Beach.jpg)
- [upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/3/3f/Israel-Yad\\_Vashem\\_Sculpture.jpg](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/3/3f/Israel-Yad_Vashem_Sculpture.jpg)
- [www.vosizneias.com/wp-content/uploads/2008/10/holocaust-memorial-at-grosse-hamburger-st-in-berlin.jpg](http://www.vosizneias.com/wp-content/uploads/2008/10/holocaust-memorial-at-grosse-hamburger-st-in-berlin.jpg)  
[anonw.files.wordpress.com/2009/10/dscn0045.jpg](http://anonw.files.wordpress.com/2009/10/dscn0045.jpg)

## MAKE CONNECTIONS | ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The following resources complement the film and inspire further discussion or programming.

### BOOKS

- **Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl**  
by *Anne Frank*  
The diary of a young girl, living in hiding in Nazi occupied Holland during the Holocaust.
- **Hana's Suitcase – a True Story**  
by *Karen Levine*  
This book tells the story of the Japanese curator who found Hana's suitcase and her quest to discover the life story of the girl who owned it.
- **Number the Stars**  
by *Lois Lowry*  
Lois Lowry's classic account of a Jewish family escaping from Copenhagen during World War II.

### FILMS

- **Almost Friends** (2014)  
A documentary about two Israeli girls—an Arab and a Jew—who live only 40 miles away but in many ways live worlds apart.
- **Belle and Sebastian (Belle et Sébastien)** (2013)  
A boy and his dog try to foil a Nazi plan to capture French resistance fighters.
- **Inside Hana's Suitcase** (2009)  
A film chronicling Hana's story and the story of the Japanese curator who found her suitcase.
- **Europa Europa** (1990)  
The account of a young Jewish boy who poses as a German to survive the Holocaust.

### LOCAL CONNECTIONS

- **The Holocaust Education and Resource Center of Rhode Island**  
[www.hercrri.org](http://www.hercrri.org)
- **Wunderkinder** screenwriter, **Stephen Glantz**, is originally from Providence, Rhode Island.

 Indicates PCFF festival selection

## BEYOND THE FILM | RELATED INTERNET LINKS

- **Map of the 1941 German invasion of Ukraine:**  
[cdn-0.worldwar-2.net/world-war-2-battle-plans/eastern-europe/barbarossa-draft-291140.jpg](http://cdn-0.worldwar-2.net/world-war-2-battle-plans/eastern-europe/barbarossa-draft-291140.jpg)
- **Article about the Providence Holocaust Memorial:**  
[www.providencejournal.com/article/20150826/NEWS/](http://www.providencejournal.com/article/20150826/NEWS/)

