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**“Heroes and Role Models:
Steven Spielberg”**

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Heroes are extremely brave and selfless people who help others in need. Role models are people who set a good example of how to act. A role model is someone you strive to be like, while a hero is someone who has very special qualities, which make you admire them. Although heroes are a good example of bravery and courage, role models are the ones that typically influence people to act differently. It makes choosing a role model a tough decision.

It took me a while to figure out who is a good role model for me. During my search I looked at many candidates, ranging from Andrei Sakharov to Dr. Seuss. Then, I came up with (okay my dad helped me come up), with Steven Spielberg.

Steven Spielberg is an influential movie director, producer, and the founder of the Shoah Foundation Institute, which is dedicated to Holocaust remembrance. I chose him because he is a great storyteller. I hope to be a wonderful storyteller too, someday. I also chose him because several of his movies reflect the Jewish values of justice and righteousness or *tzedek*, creating strong examples of these values for his audience. But before we can get to his movies, I should tell you a little about his life.

Steven Spielberg was born on December 18, 1946 in Cincinnati, Ohio, but spent his childhood in New Jersey and Arizona. Ever since his early teens, he was interested in film—he made short adventure films with his friends and then charged admission of a quarter, while his sister sold popcorn. He showed his talent at a very early age. At 13 (the same age as I am now), Spielberg won a prize for a 40-minute war film. Spielberg’s early movies were inspired by his father’s war stories.

When Spielberg was 22 he dropped out of the University of Southern California to accept an offer from Universal Studios as a T.V. director and thus began his career. The movie that made Spielberg a household name, not to mention a multi-millionaire, was *Jaws*. It’s a horror film based on a novel about an enormous killer shark. The film was a great success. But the filming was very difficult; it was shut down several times due to delays and budget overruns. And the very uncooperative mechanical shark that insisted on breaking down several times didn’t help much either. Despite all these difficulties, Spielberg was not deterred. The malfunctioning shark helped Spielberg in the end because it allowed room for the viewers to use their imaginations, which made the movie even scarier. It was a huge hit, which won three Oscars. The movie was a major accomplishment and gave Spielberg a lot of autonomy for his future films.

Throughout his career, Steven Spielberg has directed many movies, some of which are about World War II. One of his most famous movies is *Saving Private Ryan*. It’s an action movie about a mother whose four sons all left to fight in the war. Three of them died and one was missing behind enemy lines. To save the poor mother from further heartbreak, the US army sent out a rescue squad to save Private James Ryan. This movie is very terrifying because it shows the horrors of war VERY graphically. It was heartbreaking to see so many young soldiers dying which was what Spielberg wanted

the audience to see and feel. His own emotion of distress for these young boys was apparent throughout the movie.

Other movies that he directed were on Jewish topics. His most famous Jewish-related movies are *Schindler's List* and *Munich*. *Schindler's List* is based on a true story about a man named Oskar Schindler. Oskar is a businessman who wants to profit from the war, so he hires Jews to work for him instead of Polish people, because Jews didn't cost anything. His plan started as a self-centered ploy to become instantly rich, he didn't care at all whether Jews died or not. When he finally grasped the horrors that the Jews had to endure, he started to actively save them by disguising them as his workforce.

The peril of the Jews became a true growth experience for Schindler. By the end of the war, he didn't care about profit; he was spending all his money on rescuing Jews and became penniless. In total, he saved 1,100 Jews. Schindler's body is interred in Jerusalem.

In 1997, according to the American Film Institute, *Schindler's List* was listed as one of the 10 Greatest American Films Ever Made. Steven Spielberg used the profits to establish the Shoah Foundation that archives filmed testimonies of Holocaust survivors. In all, 52,000 testimonies were recorded so the horrors of the Holocaust wouldn't be forgotten.

After watching some of Spielberg's movies, I noticed that hope is a value that shines in a lot of them. In *E.T.* it's the hope of finding E.T.'s home. Hope is also an important theme in *Saving Private Ryan*. Everyone thought that it would be nearly impossible to find this one soldier. But the search party kept on going, until James Ryan was found and saved. In *Schindler's List*, it's the hope for a better future, more specifically the hope that the Holocaust would never happen again. Another example of hope is the Shoah Foundation. It's a collection of filmed testimony of survivors telling their stories about their experiences during the Holocaust. Spielberg did this work because he hopes that after being educated about the Holocaust, future generations could prevent such a horrific thing from happening again. One day, there won't be any more Holocaust survivors left; he wanted to capture their stories on film. We must thank Steven Spielberg for creating these testimonies.

Fairness or a plea for tolerance, another important value, is the basis of *Schindler's List*. Spielberg suffered a lot of anti-Semitism during his school years. He felt like he stood out because of his Jewish identity and was very self-conscious.

He wanted to bring the concept of hatred into his movies, to show that it's wrong. He showed that even Nazis had a choice, to either kill Jews or to show mercy and save a person's life. Everyone has a choice: to do good or evil; the real power is making the right choice.

Steven Spielberg's movies are watched by millions, thus impacting so many people. As a movie genius he takes advantage of this huge audience and makes his movies about topics that people wouldn't typically watch, like the Holocaust. That's what makes him so inspiring. I too, aspire to be an amazing storyteller and will strive to have a great impact on my audience.