

The Wave

2008/Certificate 15

Synopsis of the film

The Wave is a 2008 German film about a social experiment that takes place in a classroom. When Rainer Wenger convenes his week-long class on autocracy, he is shocked to discover that his students do not believe a dictatorship could ever again rule Germany. To challenge their belief, he imposes a system of disciplined obedience to his leadership by instructing the pupils to wear the same uniform as him and to stand whilst addressing their teacher. The response from the children is overwhelmingly positive as they find that their new-found collective unity gives them the confidence to assert themselves. However, the students' commitment to their new found group identity quickly begins to grow out of control. As well as moving to exclude and punish those who do not follow their rules, some of the students begin to treat the experiment as far more than a school project.

HMDT Review

Please note that the review may act as a spoiler for the film.

Much of the film's success is its portrayal of the ease with which a contemporary society can be influenced by the same methodology of hatred used by the Nazis. Despite being well aware of Germany's Nazi past, the previously cynical students eagerly adopt symbols and a salute into their collective unit. The director, Dennis Gansel, presents how extremist politics can seduce marginalised individuals by promising to give them a platform. In particular, there is the character of Tim who is an outsider at the beginning of the film, but becomes committed and popular in the experiment. By challenging the notion that democracy is taken for granted, *The Wave* is a powerful reminder that politics based on hate and exclusion can still threaten our present and future. The fact that the film is based on a real experiment, which took place in California in 1967, demonstrates just how important this reminder is.

Potential issues and reflection points

The Wave shows a unique process which demonstrates how quickly hatred can spread, and viewers should approach the film with caution, and not try to emulate any scenes from the

film in their own HMD activities. We have provided some questions which would work well as a discussion after viewing the film for HMD.

1. what is the importance of Rainer Wenger's past as an anarchist?
2. does the fact that the students adopt the name of their sports team as the name of their movement suggest anything about the way that group identities are formed in contemporary society?
3. how does the changing relationship between Marco and Karo reveal the nature of exclusionary politics?
4. does the ultimate responsibility for what happens in *The Wave* lie with the teacher, or are other factors responsible?

Use HMDT resources to find out about the rise of the Nazi Party

<http://www.hmd.org.uk/genocides/the-holocaust/the-rise-of-the-nazi-party>.