

Video Guide

The Wave (video, 1989, BF633.W38 1989)

Introduction:

“*The Wave* powerfully recreates the classroom ‘experiment’ in which a high school teacher formed his own “Reich” to show why the German people could so willingly embrace Nazism. It raises critical questions about individualism and conformity: How can peer pressure usurp individual rights? When does dedication to the group cross the line from loyalty to fanaticism?”

• Main characters:

Mr. Ross

Mr. Ross is a high school history teacher in California. When experiencing difficulty in answering questions about a film he had shown on the Third Reich and the concentration camps, he devises a classroom experience to delve into human nature and the idea of *group think*. He, himself, becomes caught up in the experiment and has difficulty distancing himself until his wife, the principal, and a couple of his students object vehemently when it seems to be getting out of control.

Mrs. Ross

She is the wife and fellow teacher of Mr. Ross. She is the voice of reality and reason for Mr. Ross when he seems to get overly involved.

Laurie

Laurie is a bright and inquiring student in Mr. Ross’s class. At first she accepts what is happening, but after talking it over with her parents and thinking critically about it, she becomes a critic of *The Wave* and lets her boyfriend and classmates know of her concern by talking to them and writing an editorial about it.

David

David is Laurie’s boyfriend, a member of Mr. Ross’s class and an athlete. He has a tendency to be a follower, but due to a variety of reasons, especially his feelings for Laurie, he is able to break free of the all-consuming influence of *The Wave*.

Amy

Amy is a friend of Laurie’s, a student in Mr. Ross’s class and a worker in the school library. She is bright and influential. She embraces *The Wave* and is unhappy that Laurie is against it.

Robert

Robert is the “nerd” of the class. He is always teased by his classmates prior to becoming a part of *The Wave*. *The Wave* helps him to fit in with his peers. He is a staunch believer/supporter. He wants to become Mr. Ross’s bodyguard; it would make him feel even more important and show Mr. Ross how much he appreciates Mr. Ross’s raising his status with his peers.

Laurie's parents

Laurie's parents have mixed feelings about the experiment, but her mother has serious objections based on her belief in individual rights. She feels that it could be sending a dangerous message and she would prefer that Laurie not take it lightly. Her father thinks that any program that gets kids to study harder and get good grades, as in David's case, cannot be a bad thing. Her mother's remarks stay with Laurie as she examines her beliefs and decides for herself that *The Wave* represents something harmful.

Eric, Peter, Brad, Andrea and Brian, et al.

Other students in Mr. Ross's history class. All seem to buy into *The Wave* 100%; some are fanatical about their participation.

Scenes in the Video

1. Exterior of a Palo Alto, California, High School
The voice of Mr. Ross, a history teacher at the school, comes on...“I remember *The Wave*...”
2. History Classroom
Students are watching a film about Germany and scenes from the death camps. Their teacher, Mr. Ross, gives a historical perspective of the period, but students are still confused about how the German people could have let the situation develop in the first place.
3. Lunch in the schoolyard
“The film really got you didn't it?”
4. School library
Mr. Ross and his wife meet. He is absorbed with Third Reich books. This is also true back at home later that night.
5. History Classroom, the next day
Mr. Ross talks about the strength that the student's can gain through learning to discipline themselves. He promises it will be as exciting as “power” and “success”. He begins the process of demonstrating how to achieve this discipline. He starts slowly, with proper posture (uses Robert as an excellent example) then moves on to orderliness. He uses a stopwatch to time their progress; praises their improvements; gives three more rules. Students responses are “What a rush” and that was “fun”.
6. Men's Restroom
Robert practices his posture.
7. The Ross Home
Mr. Ross cannot believe that they bought the “discipline” thing.

8. History Classroom, next day
Mr. Ross finds his class quiet and “disciplined”. He begins to extemporize and add on to the previous day’s discipline lecture/practice. Now includes “community”. “Strength through community”. Develops a symbol. The wave is born. It is a pattern of change with movement, direction and impact. Mr. Ross introduces a salute. He models; they practice.
9. Laurie’s dining room with her parents
Laurie’s mother warns about brainwashing (coercive persuasion) and other dangers of this type of movement. “Don’t you think you’re taking this too seriously?”
Laurie and her dad defend the idea. If the activities of the history teacher can get someone like David to study, who can complain?
10. The Ross’s kitchen
Mrs. Ross comments that he is “becoming a guinea pig in his own experiment.”
11. Outside
Laurie and David are walking and talking about Laurie’s mother’s reaction. David defends *the Wave* vehemently. A stranger in a car gives the wave salute.
12. Mr. Ross’s classroom
Membership cards are distributed; monitors are named. The idea of a membership drive and rally is formulated. Students give testimonials. The class begins to chant, “Strength through discipline; strength through community; strength through action.” Laurie’s skepticism grows.
13. In hallway, near lockers
Laurie decides she is not going to rally. David tells her that she needs to be there because she is influential, others look up to her. She retorts that “... the wave is taking over everything.” They have a heated disagreement and break up.
14. Hallway
Membership drive is on. Robert follows Mr. Ross and asks to be his bodyguard.
15. School grounds, outside
A fight breaks out between Wave members and others.
16. School library
Laurie is writing an editorial opposing the wave. She shows it to Amy, who asks that she not print it. Laurie decides to go ahead and print it.
17. Parking lot
Robert acts as bodyguard for Mr. Ross
18. The Ross Home
Mrs. Ross tells her husband that the wave has become too disruptive at school. She tells him about the concern others have, especially the principal, who wants to see him. She

reminds him of his original goals--to teach a lesson about the power of the group. She says that she doesn't know him anymore--that he has become his role.

19. Outside

A group of students are walking and reacting to Laurie's editorial. "She's a threat." "She must be stopped." David and his friend say they will take care of Laurie.

20. In the school that night

Laurie is getting ready to leave the building; she hears noises and sees shadows; she becomes frightened and runs out of the building.

21. Outside during the evening

David and a friend follow Laurie in the van. David gets out to speak with her to try to convince her that she is the problem and that many others are upset with her. She says people are getting hurt; it is a serious problem. They argue, David gets physical, and Laurie is knocked to the ground. David feels remorse and starts listening to Laurie.

22. Mr. Ross's Home

Laurie and David go to see Mr. Ross at his home. They share their concerns about how the activity has gone too far and that kids are scared. They share the problem between them over the wave. Mr. Ross assures them that he will take care of it *his way*.

23. Mr. Ross's classroom, the next day

"The wave is upon us." Mr. Ross tells the class that there will be a very important meeting at 5:00 in the gym and only loyal followers may attend. A national youth brigade is forming and the National Leader will address them. Laurie and David are dumbfounded and try to object. Mr. Ross quiets them and eventually removes them from the room. However, the other students are excited and begin to make plans to wear blue shirts and arm bands.

24. By the ocean

Laurie and David decide to break into the rally.

25. Gym: 5:00 p.m. Rally

Doors are closed to outsiders. There is high level of attendance and everyone wears blue shirts and arm bands. TVs are turned on; they wait...and wait...and wait. Laurie and David look for a way in. Someone in the room yells, "There is NO leader!" Mr. Ross says, "Here's your leader" and a film with Hitler speaking to his followers is shown.

Mr. Ross dispels lies and explains how the group formed and how many gave in to the power of the group. He asks them to take responsibility for their actions; to encourage; to question rather than blindly follow a leader; and to never let the group will overtake their individual rights.

Students take off their **armbands** and slowly and somberly leave the auditorium.

Laurie and David smile; Robert cries. Mr. Ross walks out with his arm around Robert.