

Name: _____

Class: _____

The Third Wave

*In 1967, history teacher Ron Jones conducted a social experiment with the students in his history class. He was the only person who knew it was an experiment, and by the fifth day, it got out of control. As you read about the Third Wave social experiment, take notes in the margins and look for evidence to answer these important questions: **What made the Third Wave so popular at Cubberley High School?***

Background

The Third Wave experiment took place at Cubberley High School in Palo Alto, California during the first week of April 1967. History teacher Ron Jones, finding himself unable to explain to his students how people throughout history followed the crowd even when terrible things were happening, decided to demonstrate it to his students through an experiment. Jones announced that he was starting a movement aimed to eliminate democracy. Jones named the movement “The Third Wave” as a symbol of strength, referring to the mythical belief that the third in a series of waves is the strongest. One of the central points of this movement was that democracy’s main weakness is that it favors the individual over the whole community. Jones emphasized this main point of the movement when he created this catchy motto: “Strength through discipline, strength through community, strength through action, strength through pride.”



Jones’ Third Wave experiment was modeled after the way youth in Nazi Germany were manipulated to show total allegiance to their country during the 1920s-1940s. Here, German children practice the Nazi salute.

The Experiment

Jones started the first day of the experiment emphasizing simple things like proper seating, and drilled the students extensively until they got it right. He then proceeded to enforce strict classroom discipline by emerging as an authoritarian¹ figure. This resulted in dramatic improvements to the efficiency, or orderliness, of the class. The first day’s session ended with only a few rules. Jones intended it to be a one-day experiment. Students had to be sitting at attention before the second bell, had to stand up to ask or answer questions and had to do it in three words or fewer, and were required to preface² each remark with “Mr. Jones.” As the week went on, Jones’ class transformed into a group with a supreme sense of discipline and community. Jones made up a salute resembling that of the Nazi regime and ordered class members to salute each other even outside the class. They all obeyed this command.

¹ **authoritarian**: severe, controlling, all-powerful

² **preface**: begin

After only three days, the experiment took on a life of its own, with students from all over the school joining in. The class expanded from initial 30 students to 43 attendees. All of the students showed drastic improvement in their academic skills and tremendous motivation. All of the students were issued a member card and each of them received a special assignment, like designing a Third Wave Banner, stopping non-members from entering the class, or other tasks to bring honor to the movement. Jones instructed the students on how to initiate new members, and by the end of the day the movement had over 200 participants. Jones was surprised that some of the students started reporting to him when other members of the movement failed to abide by the rules.



One of Jones' goals was to teach his students that people should always be wary of blindly following orders for the sake of patriotism. He wanted them to realize how easily they all took on the sense of superiority that German citizens had in the period of Nazi Germany, which contributed to the Holocaust. Above, German police officers torture a Jew in the streets.

a blank channel. After a few minutes of waiting, Jones announced that they had been a part of an experiment to demonstrate how people willingly create a sense of superiority over others, and how this can lead people to justify doing horrible things in the name of the state's honor.

By the fourth day of the experiment, the students became increasingly involved in the project and their discipline and loyalty to the project was so outstanding that Jones felt it was slipping out of control. He decided to terminate the movement, so he lied to students by announcing that the Third Wave was a part of a nationwide movement and that on the next day a presidential candidate of the movement would publicly announce its existence on television. Jones ordered students to attend a noon rally on Friday to witness announcement.

At the end of the week, instead of a televised address of their leader, the students were presented with

"The Third Wave" is adapted from Wikipedia by CommonLit.

For Teachers:

Suggested Text Pairings:

“Why do people follow the crowd?” (News)

Dr. Gregory Burns, a professor of behavioral science, conducted several experiments to study why humans readily conform. ABC’s Primetime recreated these experiments using several unsuspecting people. Pair “The Third Wave” with “Why do people follow the crowd?” and ask students to compare the conclusions of each social experiment. Find “Why do people follow the crowd?” on CommonLit.org. (**Social Pressure** → **Why do people follow the crowd?** → **7th-8th Grade**)

http://commonlit.s3.amazonaws.com/texts/pdfs/000/000/168/original/Why_Do_People_Follow_The_Crowd.pdf?1426345657

“First They Came...” (Quotation)

Martin Neimoeller was a Lutheran pastor whose famous quotation reveals his guilt for not initially speaking up during the Holocaust. Pair “The Third Wave” with “First They Came...” and other Holocaust texts to help students understand the reasons why so many people in an advanced nation stood behind Hitler. Find “First They Came...” at CommonLit.org (**Social Pressure** → **What are the effects of following the crowd?** → **7th-8th Grade**)

http://commonlit.s3.amazonaws.com/texts/pdfs/000/000/103/original/First_They_Came_880L.pdf?1434734269