(i)

The Wave

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF TODD STRASSER

Todd Strasser, a native of New York City and an alum of Wisconsin's Benoit College, is the author of several popular books for children and young adults, many of which are novelizations of television shows and movies including Jumanji and Ferris Bueller's Day Off. The Wave is without a doubt his best-known work, but many readers may be surprised to learn that it, too, is actually a novelization of a 1981 ABC television special. The television special was itself inspired by the "Third Wave" teaching experiment that took place at a Palo Alto high school in 1981. Strasser's novels have also been adapted into films-for example, 1996's How I Created My Perfect Prom Date was adapted into the popular 1999 teen flick Drive Me Crazy. Strasser's work has on occasion been regarded as controversial and criticized for being racially insensitive, and his novel American Terrorist—which many pre-publication reviewers saw as Islamophobic-was pulled from publisher Simon & Schuster's publication lineup in 2016. Strasser lives with his wife in Westchester County, New York.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

During the first week of April 1967, history teacher Ron Jones began an experiment at Cubberley High School in Palo Alto, CA. He had begun a lesson plan about the Holocaust, and he was having trouble answering questions from students as to how German citizens and soldiers could have turned a blind eye to the atrocious activities of the Nazi party-or worse, followed orders themselves. To demonstrate how such events could have happened, Jones began a five-day experiment called The Wave, enforcing strict classroom discipline and running drills in order to create an atmosphere of conformity and compliance. Jones later created a salute for his students to greet one another with and referred to the movement into which he was indoctrinating them all as "The Third Wave," a dark play on the term The Third Reich. As the experiment expanded throughout the school it took on a life of its own, and students began taking membership in "The Third Wave" very seriously, even reporting one another's anti-"Wave" sentiments or actions to Mr. Jones. On the final day of the experiment, Jones gathered his students in the auditorium for an announcement, claiming that they'd be watching a broadcast of The Third Wave's leaders announcing its national proliferation. At the rally, however, students were shown an empty black channel-and Jones revealed that the experiment had been designed to show them the effects of fascism and their own willingness to behave just as German citizens and Nazi officers had during the Second World War.

The book is based on these real-life events, as well as the atrocities of the Holocaust and the Second World War.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

While *The Wave* spends less time discussing the facts of the Holocaust than it does investigating the impulses and mechanisms which allow fascism to spread, it is often included in school curriculums which focus on educating young people about the atrocities of the Holocaust. Other books that seek to explain to children and young adults how the Holocaust happened—and provide accounts of its brutality—include Lois Lowry's *Number the Stars*, Elie Wiesel's *Night*, and Jane Yolen's *The Devil's Arithmetic*. Markus Zusak's popular novel <u>The Book</u> <u>Thief</u>, though categorized as young adult literature, has become a popular novel among adult readers as well. <u>The Book Thief</u> follows a German family as they shelter a young Jewish man, and shows several of its young characters resisting recruitment into Hitler Youth and the Nazi party.

KEY FACTS

- Full Title: The Wave
- When Written: Early 1980s
- When Published: 1981
- Literary Period: Contemporary
- Genre: Young Adult Fiction, Historical Fiction
- Setting: Though the setting of *The Wave* is ambiguous, the real-life events on which it is based occurred in Palo Alto, California in 1967.
- Climax: Ben Ross calls a schoolwide rally to show the students of Gordon High, who have become fanatically obsessed with his social experiment, The Wave, the true face of their "leader"—Adolf Hitler.
- Antagonist: Ben Ross; The Wave itself
- Point of View: Third-person

EXTRA CREDIT

Politically Passionate. Ron Jones, the Palo Alto high school teacher who created and facilitated the original Third Wave experiment, was a renowned activist whose passion for educating, supporting, and engaging young people actually got him into trouble A member of the SDS (or Students for a Democratic Society), a left-wing student activist organization, as well as a supporter of the Black Panthers, Jones was ultimately denied tenure at Cubberley High School, the site of the Third Wave experiment, due to his anti-Vietnam activism.

Award-Winning. The television special on which the novel *The Wave* is based was very successful in its own right, winning both an Emmy and a Peabody award.

PLOT SUMMARY

On an ordinary day at Gordon High, Ben Ross shows his history class a film about the Holocaust as part of their unit on World War II. While some students—like the popular and bright Laurie Saunders, editor of the Gordon *Grapevine*, and her best friend Amy Smith—are moved by the film, other students like Laurie's boyfriend David Collins, a self-centered running back for the football team, barely bat an eye. The class "creep," Robert Billings, even falls asleep midway. Ben Ross is intrigued by his students' varied reactions to the film but perturbed when he finds himself unable to answer Laurie and Amy's questions about how ordinary Germans could have turned a blind eye to the atrocities committed by the Nazi Party—or worse, could have joined their ranks.

At lunch the next period, Laurie and Amy remain disturbed by the images from the film, but David Collins and his best friend Brian Ammon wolf down their lunches, immune to what they've just seen. David tells Laurie that he sees the Holocaust as "a piece of history"—something that can't be changed, and certainly won't be repeated. Laurie and Amy's moods lighten over the course of the rest of the school day, and they laugh and joke in the *Grapevine* offices with the class clowns Alex Cooper and Carl Block.

That night, Ross is determined to look through every history book on the second world war he can find to try and discern the answer as to how groupthink and coercion enabled the Nazis to gain so much indisputable power—but discouraged when he still can't find the answers. Ross begins to wonder if, perhaps, an experiment that replicates the conditions of Nazi Germany is the only way to find the answer—so he begins devising an exercise for class the next morning. Ross's wife Christy admires her hardworking husband and encourages him to search for the answers he needs, but secretly worries about his obsessive tendencies.

The next day, Ross begins an experiment with his senior history class. He writes the words "STRENGTH THROUGH DISCIPLINE" on the board, institutes several new strict, militaristic classroom rules, and runs his students through physical and intellectual exercises like a drill sergeant. He is shocked when his normally sluggish, sloppy students are exhilarated and energized by the exercise. The next morning, Ross finds his history students sitting upright and silent in their seats when he walks in—he understands that they don't just tolerate but actually crave the discipline he's meting out to them, and decides to take the experiment one step further. He writes the words "STRENGTH THROUGH COMMUNITY" on the board, and urges his students to consider the fact that they can accomplish incredible things if only they work together. Ross leads the students in a recital of their class's new motto—"Strength through discipline, strength through community"—and then introduces a logo, a name, and a salute for the movement, which he has decided to call **The Wave**. As the students rehearse The Wave salute, Ross is impressed—and slightly nervous.

As The Wave travels through the school, some students, like David Collins and his football buddies Brian and Eric, embrace its tenets of hard work, discipline, and community—while others, like Laurie Saunders, find The Wave a little "militaristic" and threatening to individuality. Ross wonders how far he should take the experiment, and ignores Christy's warnings against becoming a "guinea pig" in his own laboratory. Nevertheless, Ross pushes The Wave even further, passing out membership cards and appointing certain students to be monitors tasked with reporting disobedient Wave members directly to Ross himself. He introduces a third motto—"STRENGTH THROUGH ACTION"—and encourages Wave members to recruit new members from the lower grades, too.

The social order at Gordon High begins to change—cliques break down, and even losers like Robert Billings are accepted by the more popular kids. Laurie begins feeling more and more skeptical of The Wave—though it makes everyone feel like equals, there's something "creepy" about how unthinkingly all of her classmates are going along with it.

As the days go by, more and more students join The Wave. Ross's senior history class is prepared, on-time, regimented, and respectful, and though Ross is overwhelmed by the spread of The Wave, he wonders if his experiment could actually revolutionize schools. As students plan a Wave rally to "indoctrinate" new members, though, Laurie tasks her *Grapevine* staff writers with rounding up as many stories as they can about how Gordon High students really feel about The Wave. Ben Ross is summoned to a meeting with the school's principal, Principal Owens, who tells Ross he's skeptical of The Wave. Ross assures Owens that the movement is nothing but a class experiment, and Owens gives Ross the goahead to continue on with it—but reminds him that "there are limits" to such experiments.

When Laurie discovers an anonymous letter to the *Grapevine* that describes the bullying tactics and threats used by members of The Wave in their recruitment of other students, she grows even more concerned. Robert Billings appoints himself Ben Ross's "bodyguard," and Ross, too, starts to wonder if The Wave has entered dangerous territory. As preparations for the Wave rally intensify, Laurie and David fight, and David accuses Laurie of hating The Wave because it means she's "not special anymore." Over the weekend, Laurie attends the football game in hopes of informing Amy of just how dangerous

The Wave is—but she is forbidden from joining the memberonly seating unless she performs the Wave salute.

Laurie calls an emergency meeting of the *Grapevine* staff, and together they assemble an issue that seeks to expose the true face of The Wave. On Monday morning, Laurie finds Amy in the halls to tell her about the paper, which will be out at lunchtime—but Amy, who has always seen Laurie as her competition, echoes David's earlier accusations and dismisses Laurie out of hand. As the new issue of *The Grapevine* circulates throughout school, rumors and gossip abound—and Ben Ross, amidst his colleague's whispers that he has "brainwashed" the entire school, begins to worry about the moral compromises he's made for The Wave.

That night, Christy confronts Ben about the beast he has created and begs him to put a stop to it. Ben insists that the students must be pushed even further-otherwise, they'll fall just short of learning "the most important lesson of their lives." Meanwhile, Laurie, who leaves the Grapevine offices late after celebrating the issue with her staff, finds the word "ENEMY" written on her locker. She hurries out of the halls to find David waiting for her outside the building. He confronts her about her demonization of The Wave, but Laurie insists that she'll write what she wants, when she wants. In a fit of anger, David grabs Laurie and throws her to the ground. He immediately realizes the gravity of what he's done and embraces Laurie, apologizing to her profusely. Meanwhile, at home, Ben Ross works on a solution to ending The Wave the next day. When Laurie and David knock on his front door, he's surprised, but lets them in. They beg him in earnest to stop The Wave, and he assures them he's going to-but asks for their trust for just one more day.

The next day, Ross begs an irate Principal Owens for just a few more hours. Owens has been fielding frightened and angry calls from teachers and parents alike-and has even received a report of a Jewish boy being beaten up, allegedly by Wave members. Owens warns Ross that if the experiment isn't over by the end of the day, Ross will lose his job. Ross accepts Owens's condition, and heads to class to put a stop to the experiment. In history class, he announces that a special impromptu rally will be held that afternoon. He tells the class that a "National Wave Youth Movement" has begun, and the leader of the movement wants to thank the students of Gordon High for starting it. Laurie and David believe Ross has tricked them in his quest for power. Unable to bear being at school any longer, they decide to cut class. While sitting in a park, however, the angry Laurie is overcome by the need to see the "leader" of The Wave.

Laurie and David return to school just as the rally is beginning. Ross tells the entire student body—who sport Wave armbands and fly Wave banners—that The Wave's leader will soon speak to them on the television. When the television remains blank and signal-less, however, some students accuse Ross of deceiving them, crying out that the movement has no leader. Ross exclaims that it does—and with the help of Alex and Carl, reveals a giant projector screen that bears the face of Adolf Hitler himself. Ross tells the stunned students that they would have made "good Nazis"—they followed a movement blindly, allowed others to make their decisions for them, and renounced their "individual rights" in the name of an equality that didn't actually exist, since Wave members discriminated against non-Wave members cruelly and violently. Ross begs the students to never forget the lessons they've learned through this experiment.

As the stunned students file out of the auditorium, Ross apologizes personally to Laurie, David, Eric, Brian, and Amy. After they leave, the only student left in the room is Robert Billings, who sits weeping in his seat. Ross comforts Robert and offers to take him out for a meal, stating that the two of them have a lot to talk about.

L CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Laurie Saunders - Laurie Saunders, the protagonist of the novel, is an intrepid and bright-eyed high schooler and editorin-chief of her school paper, The Gordon Grapevine. Laurie is sunny but thoughtful, and she takes her editorial duties and her studies very seriously. Laurie is popular and well-liked throughout school-but harbors anxiety about the future of her relationship with her self-centered boyfriend David and her friendship with the overly-competitive Amy. When her history teacher, Ben Ross, shows Laurie and her class a documentary about the Holocaust, Laurie is deeply emotionally affected by the footage of the concentration camps, and she begins to ponder deep questions about how ordinary people could commit such terrible atrocities-or merely stand by while they occurred. Mr. Ross creates The Wave as an attempt to get his students to see how easily groupthink can take over a community, but as the experiment grows more and more out of control, Laurie is horrified by how The Wave transforms her classmates, and indeed her teacher as well. Laurie resists being part of The Wave, even as her classmates-and David-pressure and intimidate her to join its ranks. Laurie uses the Grapevine as a platform to investigate and explore the more sinister effects of the wave, and even exposes a violent attack on a Jewish student as Wave mania sweeps the halls of Gordon High. Laurie's dedication to truth, individuality, and doing the right thing separates her from her classmates-and serves as a testament to the power of a single person's free will in the face of intimidation, fear, and corruption.

Ben Ross – Ben Ross is a young, popular history teacher whose devotion to his students is sincere, if sometimes obsessive. Ross wants to engage with the things he's teaching his students, not just spew facts at them—and so when the time

comes to study the Holocaust, Ross struggles to come up with a way to explain the atrocities of the Nazis. When Ross finds himself unable to answer a student's question as to why ordinary Germans would put up with, participate in, or turn a blind eye to the Nazi party's brutality, he gets the idea for an exercise that will show his students how easy it is to get swept up in groupthink. Ross creates The Wave-a movement whose motto is "strength through discipline, strength through community, strength through action." The Wave begins as a mini-experiment among his high school seniors, and the students enjoy the new, regimented classroom rules Ross implements-and the novel sense of camaraderie they feel as they follow them together. Soon all of Gordon High is drawn to The Wave. Athletes, outcasts, underclassmen, and upperclassmen alike pass out membership cards and arm bands, and even create a Wave salute. Ross realizes that his experiment is growing beyond his control-but there is a part of him that is too fascinated by what his students are doing to stop them. When Wave members begin using violence to recruit members and intimidate non-members, however, Ross calls a giant Wave rally at school, and tells the students that he is about to show them a video announcement from the leader of the Wave movement-only to unveil a recording of Adolf Hitler himself. At the end of the novel, Ross is shaken by what his experiment has revealed: that groupthink, intimidation, and violence can transform even the healthiest of societies into fascist machines, and that total equality comes at the steep price of individuality.

David Collins - Laurie Saunders's boyfriend David is a tall, good-looking running back on the Gordon High football team. Athletic, popular, bright, and more than a little self-centered, David has trouble feeling empathy for other people and struggles to focus on issues that don't affect him personally. After seeing the Holocaust film in Ben Ross's class, he isn't nearly as affected as Laurie is, and tells her that he sees the events of World War II as "a piece of history" that can't be changed—or repeated. David is easily swept up in The Wave, enjoying the solidarity, camaraderie, and "power" it creates throughout the school. He leaps at the chance to bring The Wave to the football team in hopes of inspiring teamwork and discipline, but even when his plan fails to bring the team glory, he retains faith in The Wave's power. One night, when trying to recruit Laurie to join The Wave, David lashes out in anger when she refuses and pushes her to the ground. The violence he himself inflicts on the person he loves brings him to his senses-and together, he and Laurie decide to take matters into their own hands and demand an end to The Wave's destruction. Over the course of the novel David, a shallow and selfconcerned person, comes to understand just how dangerous it can be to blindly follow along with the status quo-and to forget the lessons of history.

Amy Smith - Laurie's best friend Amy is a fun and free-spirited

teenager with a rebellious streak. Petite and pretty with "Goldilocks hair," Amy is nonetheless insecure about how she measures up to Laurie, and desperate to emulate her more popular friend. Laurie feels nervous about the occasionally competitive nature of their friendship, and hyperconscious of how Amy's desire to constantly one-up Laurie keeps them from being truly close. Laurie is surprised when Amy gets swept up in The Wave, and as Amy gets sucked deeper and deeper into the movement, Laurie has trouble connecting with her friend. Eventually, Amy admits to Laurie that the reason she is so supportive of The Wave is because it "means that nobody is better than anyone else"-and admits that her constant feelings of jealousy for Laurie have driven her into the rhetoric of The Wave's equalizing force. Smart and wily but deeply emotional and impressionable, Amy-one of the students most affected by the screening of the Holocaust documentary in Ben Ross's class-forgets the dangers of groupthink and gets swept up in the idea of a uniform, conformist society.

Robert Billings - Widely regarded as the "creepy" class loser amongst the seniors at Gordon High, Robert Billings is a painfully introverted young man who is growing up in the shadow of his beloved, successful older brother, a popular Gordon alum. As **The Wave** movement takes hold of the school, Robert comes out of his shell for the first time ever-and Ben Ross and the others students alike are surprised and even charmed by the changes in Robert's personality as he becomes more outgoing and confident. When Robert is made a monitor, however, the power goes to his head-and he becomes one of the most regimented, even dangerous members of The Wave movement. When Ben Ross puts the movement to a stop, Robert is devastated and sits in the auditorium weeping alone long after the other students have cleared out and decided to try to "forget" about how intensely The Wave took hold of their school.

Brian Ammon – Brian is David's best friend and a quarterback on the football team who, in spite of his popularity, is unsuccessful academically at Gordon High. Hotheaded and desperate to prove himself, Brian throws himself headfirst into The Wave—and once he becomes an official "monitor," he starts taking his Wave responsibilities deadly seriously.

Carl Block – Along with Alex Cooper, Carl is one of the "biggest practical jokers" at Gordon High. Tall and lanky with blond hair, Carl is an investigative reporter for *The Grapevine*. Carl is skeptical of **The Wave** from the start, and is one of the few Gordon High students to never join up at all.

Brad – A student at Gordon High who takes special pleasure in "tormenting" Robert Billings. After **The Wave** takes off, however, he finds himself grateful for the "community" values the movement instills within the school, and he stops picking on Robert so much. As The Wave takes hold of the school, Brad seems to begin questioning it—but complies with protocol and orders anyway.

Principal Owens - Principal Owens is the imposing but genial principal of Gordon High. He is a large, towering man who frequently smokes a pipe and is never seen in anything less than a three-piece suit. Owens, who is usually open to new ideas and experiments in furthering his students' education, is initially skeptical of **The Wave** when Ben Ross brings him the idea-but Owens has faith in Ross as an educator, and admires Ross's goal of teaching his students an important moral lesson. As the movement gets out of control, though, and Owens has to field more and more phone calls from and meetings with concerned parents, he warns Ross that if he doesn't bring the movement to a swift, calm end, Ross will have to resign.

Norm Schiller - Norm Schiller is the Gordon High football coach. He takes his students' success on the field-or lack thereof-deeply personally, and he is excited when **The Wave** seems to be shaping his players up into a more cohesive, powerful team. He is disappointed, however, when The Wave ultimately doesn't help the players win the game, and begins talking badly about the movement and Ben Ross as well.

Mrs. Saunders - Mrs. Saunders is Laurie's mother, a "perceptive" worrywart who is always overly concerned and overly involved in Laurie's friendships, problems, and school escapades. Laurie finds her mother annoying at the start of the novel-but as The Wave takes over the school, Laurie begins confiding in her mother about how scary things are becoming.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Christy Ross - Christy is Ben Ross's wife, and the music teacher at Gordon High. Christy is a loving and supportive partner-though her firsthand knowledge of Ben's obsessive tendencies makes her skeptical of The Wave and supersensitive to Ben's moods and behaviors as the movement gets out of control.

Alex Cooper – Alex is another one of Gordon High's resident practical jokers. Alex is short and stocky, and he reviews music for The Grapevine. He and Carl resist The Wave's influence, and are ultimately charged with helping Ben Ross in dismantling it.

Eric - Eric is a student at Gordon High and a player on the football team. Though initially skeptical of The Wave, he helps David introduce the concept to the football team in hopes that it will bring them together and help them win their upcoming games.

Deutsch – Deutsch is a second-string quarterback on the Gordon High football team who is often at odds with Brian.

Mr. Gabondi - Mr. Gabondi is the French teacher at Gordon High. He's a boring, strict man whose class regularly puts students to sleep.

Mr. Saunders - Mr. Saunders is Laurie's father, a hardworking man with a penchant for playing golf.

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own colorcoded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

THEMES



GROUPTHINK AND COERCION

Todd Strasser's The Wave fictionalizes the true story of a high school history class's social experiment gone wrong. When Ben Ross struggles to explain to his students, perturbed by their studies of the Holocaust, how ordinary Germans could have allowed themselves to be swept up in the violence and hatred of the Nazi Party, he decides to show his seniors firsthand just how powerful groupthink can be. As Ross's experiment slides off the rails, Strasser argues that groupthink and coercion, when deployed hand-in-hand, can steer even the most well-intended individuals in the direction of cruelty and blind conformity.

The Wave experiment starts innocently enough—as an exercise in the power of groupthink and collective focus. Ben Ross conceives of The Wave as a simple classroom exercise that demands discipline and conformity. He wants to show his students how thinking and moving as a group or unit is appealing, and how the mindlessness of groupthink dulls individuals to their collective's actions. He urges them to stand beside their desks and address him as "Mr. Ross" before and after answering a question, and also runs drills with them to see how fast they can file out of the classroom and then file back into it and find their seats at their desks. The students are seemingly grateful for the discipline, and work together to impress Ross and implement his rules beyond the bounds of the classroom. As Ross realizes the effect the experiment is having on his students' productivity and attentiveness as the days go by, he decides to expand The Wave by printing membership cards and implementing a Wave "salute." Even as the experiment veers frighteningly close to resembling the Nazi Party in earnest, Ross is proud of how his students are tearing down the social boundaries and cliques that once defined their high school and seemingly pursuing a collective good over individual glory.

Before long, however, the groupthink and collective action that define The Wave begin to give way to mindless cruelty and blind pursuit of total conformity-and Ben Ross realizes before even his students do that he has answered their questions about just how Nazis were able to thoughtlessly perpetrate violence, cruelty, and murder. When Wave members begin harassing non-Wave members into joining-and even don armbands bearing the Wave logo to more easily identify themselves to one another-it becomes clear that things have

gone too far. Ross, however, fears he will be unable to stop the literal and metaphorical "wave" he has created.

When a Jewish student at Gordon High is beaten and called a "dirty Jew," Ross admits to himself that he's unsure whether the attack was Wave-related or simply a random act of violence—and the thought that it could be the former shakes him to his core. Ross sees clearly just how powerful The Wave has become, and how his students have veered from collective action into coercion and, ultimately, into violence without even realizing the groupthink at the heart of their school's rapid shift. Some students, like Laurie Saunders, notice that the experiment is out of control-as she begs her best friend Amy to renounce her "obsession" with The Wave, she tries to point out that "No one is thinking for themselves anymore," and Gordon High's students have become "a flock of sheep." Amy revealingly confesses that she sees what's happening-and likes it. She's happy that for the first time, "no one [at Gordon] is better than anyone else." This twist in the narrative shows that it's not that groupthink sneaks up on people, infiltrating their brains without their permission or attention-rather, it's that the strategic advantages of groupthink are, for some people, more appealing than acting as an individual or doing what's right. Coercion and violence become a tool of the collective as they pursue maintenance of the status quo.

After revealing to his students the true "leader" of The Wave—Adolf Hitler himself—Ross suggests that the most violent and effusive Wave participants showed themselves to be susceptible to the kind of blind obedience that defined the Nazi Party and other soulless regimes like it throughout history. As Ross's final Wave rally draws to a close, he urges his students to take responsibility for their actions, to "always question what [they] do rather than blindly follow a leader," and to "never, ever allow a group's will to usurp your individual rights."



HISTORY AND THE PAST

When Ben Ross shows his senior history students a film about the Holocaust, their differing reactions demonstrate that while some of them are affected

and even disturbed by the dark shadows of history, others see the unspeakable atrocities of the past as contained, faraway events. As Ross attempts to impress upon his students just how recent the events of World War II were—and how fragile the present moment still is—Strasser argues that forgetting or minimizing the past makes the future more vulnerable to repetitions of the errors of history.

In many ways, Ben Ross's classroom screening of a difficult-towatch Holocaust documentary is *The Wave*'s inciting incident. The reactions the film sparks throughout his senior history class vary greatly, from abject sadness to disturbed anxiety to passive indifference. Ross realizes that some of his students recognize history as a living, breathing thing—but also sees that others are blind to the importance of remembering the more painful lessons history has to teach.

After Ross screens the holocaust film for his students, he is "pleased" to see that it deeply affects many of them. Amy Smith and Laurie Saunders have visible emotional reactions, and Amy even cries. Both girls ask incisive questions about how the Nazi Party could have committed such atrocities—and how the rest of the German population could have turned a blind eye. Some students, like Eric, are more outraged than emotional-they feel angry that no one in Germany "notic[ed]" what was going on right under their noses. Other students, however, like David Collins, have little or no reaction to the film at all. They see the events it depicts as so disconnected from their experience of the present-day-and so obviously atrocious-that they hardly even register as real. After the screening, at lunchtime, when Laurie asks David how it's possible that the film didn't bother him, he answers her by saying: "That was a long time ago, Laurie. To me it's like a piece of history. You can't change what happened then." David's blasé reaction shows that he sees history as far away and fixed-he doesn't understand how even the most evil, shameful parts of history can repeat themselves if society does not learn from the atrocities of the past.

"It's not like we've forgotten about history," Laurie tells her mother when Mrs. Saunders expresses trepidation about the **Wave** experiment. Laurie wants her parents to believe that she and her classmates are going into the experiment fully aware of the historical context of what they're studying—and the pitfalls of groupthink and violence that allowed the Nazis to operate. Laurie, however, underestimates how willing her fellow classmates are to overlook the lessons of history. Soon, Wave members are holding rallies, wearing armbands, and cruelly or violently coercing non-Wave members into the experiment—it's clear that most of Gordon High's students have indeed "forgotten about history," or are willingly pushing aside the very lessons their history teacher is trying to instill in them.

As Ross realizes his experiment has been a failure, he becomes desperate for a way to salvage it—to remind his students of the history they've repeated and replicated on a small scale in just a few heady, violent days, and to show them how without proper respect for the painful lessons of history, human beings will never grow and progress. Ross decides to hold one final rally to show the students the face of their true leader, drawing them to the auditorium under the pretense of introducing them to the person who is making The Wave a national movement. At the rally's climax, he reveals a picture of Adolf Hitler himself—thus showing the students just how blind they have been to their own actions, how easily they have forgotten relatively recent history, and how dangerous their willful amnesia really is.

Ultimately, the students of Gordon High are left shattered and sobered by the realization that they have abandoned the

lessons of history. Ben Ross chides his students for asking how the Nazis could have perpetrated such terrible violence—and for just days later, "deny[ing] their own histories" by participating in a movement that veered dangerously close to the Nazi Party itself. Ross tells his students that if they're "smart, [they] won't dare forget" the lessons The Wave has taught them about history, memory, and responsibility to the past.



EQUALITY VS. INDEPENDENCE

When Ben Ross's social experiment, **The Wave**, surges in popularity amongst the students of Gordon High, it becomes clear that part of The

Wave's appeal is the ways in which it equalizes the student body and breaks down the barriers between cliques. Even the most popular kids, like Laurie Saunders and David Collings, find themselves reassessing their school's social organization and befriending outsiders like Robert Billings. As The Wave takes hold of the school in full force, however, it becomes clear to the few remaining non-members of The Wave that the price of total equality is the abandonment of independence and individuality. Strasser uses The Wave to suggest that while social equality is an admirable goal, the obliteration of independence is often a casualty of mandatory egalitarianism.

There is a delicate balance in any microcosm of society between the good of the collective and what's best for that society's individuals. As The Wave takes over Gordon High, the school's students are entranced by how collectivism and community strengthen their student body—so entranced, in fact, that they don't notice when the scales tip, and their community's newfound equality and egalitarianism begin to erase all traces of individuality.

Soon after Ben Ross introduces the Wave experiment to his senior history class at Gordon High, its message of strength through discipline, strength through community, and strength through action spreads through the school like wildfire. When operating as a collective and assuming the identity of members of a larger group, the students of Gordon High notice that the boundaries between cliques and the animosity between popular jocks and "creepy" nerds all dissolve. As social equality changes the landscape of Gordon High, it's not just outcasts like Robert who are grateful for the change-even more popular kids like David and Laurie find themselves grateful for the new social order and the chance to make new friends. The Wave makes everyone socially equal, which at first seems to be a good thing-but soon, it becomes clear that the simmering resentments between individual members of the student body will not be erased by The Wave's egalitarian message, and nor will the dangers of absolute collectivism.

As the students of Gordon High begin seeing The Wave as a way of erasing social boundaries, strengthening school spirit, and uniting disparate groups of students together in pursuit of a common goal, many of them begin to value the collective over the individual—and shame one another for still pursuing individuality and personal glory. David Collins brings The Wave to his football team, and angrily urges his fellow players to see that "self-serving individuals don't make a team." As Amy Smith and Laurie Saunders fight over The Wave, Laurie tries to express how dangerous the movement really is—but Amy insists that Laurie just hates The Wave "because it means [she's] not a princess anymore." Laurie, long having possessed a reputation as the popular and brilliant golden girl of Gordon High, is stunned to hear such a criticism lobbed her way—and finds there's a part of her that worries she *does* resent The Wave for demonizing individuality and thus making her less special.

As The Wave comes crashing to the ground and Ben Ross brings the ever-more dangerous experiment to a close, he chides his students at a mass rally for allowing The Wave to take over their lives and infringe on their freedoms. Ross accuses the students of using The Wave to further collectivism and community in name only—in reality, he suggests, they saw The Wave as an opportunity to feel "special" and "better than everyone" who was not affiliated with The Wave. Though The Wave was meant to bolster community and equality, equality soon become "superiority over non-Wave members," and obscured not just individual will but any expression of individuality at all. In other words, Ross is asserting—and Strasser is, as well—that total egalitarianism only comes at the price of individual freedoms.

Over the course of *The Wave*, Todd Strasser shows how groupthink leads to cruelty and coercion—and goes even deeper as he asserts that collective equality often costs individuals their freedoms of speech, of self-expression, and of identity. A completely fair and equal society seems utopic at first glance—but Strasser ultimately suggests that there is a dark sacrifice at the heart of conformity.

EDUCATION

The out-of-control social experiment at the heart of *The Wave* is one unorthodox educator's attempt to really connect with his students—and to teach

them important life lessons they won't soon forget. Ben Ross doesn't want his students to memorize facts out of their textbook; he wants to truly educate them in the ways of the world. As Ross's experiment flies off the handle, however, and his students' feelings, reputations, and in some cases their lives come under threat, Strasser calls into question what the responsibilities of education are. Strasser ultimately suggests that while it is not enough to encourage students to do rote learning devoid of curiosity or practical understanding of the concepts they're studying, the role of a teacher is never one that justifies toying with the lives of students, even in the name of enriching their education.

Ben Ross is, arguably, the primary antagonist of *The Wave*. Despite his good intentions and his fierce beliefs in the power of education, Ross takes his role as an educator a bit too far when he creates **The Wave**. The effects his experiment has on his students' lives are indelible—and ethically dubious. Ross is introduced as a teacher who truly loves teaching. He is a restless thinker and deeply inquisitive man who doesn't want to settle for just teaching his students facts out of a textbook—he wants them to engage with the world around them, consider deeply the lessons of history, and really think about how what they're learning applies to their lives and relationships.

Ben's intentions are good—but his methods for pushing the boundaries of the role of the educator are faulty. Ben is an obsessive person whose wife Christy notes that he often gets "utterly absorbed in [things] to the point where he tend[s] to forget that the rest of the world exist[s.]" Whatever Ben's preoccupation of the month is—be it playing bridge, investigating the history of Native Americans, or answering his students' complicated questions about the Holocaust—he reads, studies, and ponders it obsessively until the itch fizzles out. This is a major personality flaw in Ben Ross—but his obsession with getting to the root of his students' questions about the Nazis is the spark that lights the fire of The Wave.

Ben Ross is excited by his students' emotional reactions to their unit on World War II and the Holocaust, and becomes determined to stoke their wide-ranging feelings and deepseated questions about Hitler and the Nazis. By creating The Wave, Ross is attempting to show students how easily conformity, groupthink, and rigor can seize and transform a population—but he has no idea just how completely swept up his students will soon become. By subjecting his students to a social experiment, Ross flexes his unorthodox teaching methods and is "pleased" with the results—but he doesn't take the time to consider that the young, malleable minds entrusted to him each day are too impressionable for such a grave, serious exercise.

As The Wave surges throughout Gordon High and begins engendering discord, cruelty, and even violence, Ross realizes what he's done—but is afraid he's powerless to stop the students' trajectory. In trying to expand the social construct of the student-teacher relationship, Ross has obliterated necessary boundaries and toyed with his students' minds and actions. They've taken his experiment and run away with it on their own—and like the young people in novels like *The Lord of the Flies* and *The Chocolate War*, a new social order run entirely by children has taken hold of Gordon High. As pressure from Principal Owens and the school's parents bears down on Ross, he knows that his experiment has gone much too far, and that he must try to reign it back in. If he can't, he faces losing not just his job but his reputation—and admitting to the fact that his educational ethos is flawed and volatile. Wave to a halt, Ross confides in Laurie Saunders that he is planning to "skip" the lesson of The Wave in "next year's course"—implying that he has learned from his actions and will not experiment with his students' lives again. Strasser uses Ross's anxiety and shame in the latter half of the novel—in stark contrast to the excitement, pride, and self-confidence he felt in the early days of The Wave experiment—to show that the code between students and their teachers is a sacred one. Teachers take on the responsibility of molding, shaping, and caring for students' minds and hearts alike—and in using them like lab rats in pursuit of one's own existential questions or obsessions, one violates that delicate boundary and may even put lives at risk.

 \mathfrak{B}

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

THE WAVE

The central symbol in The Wave is, aptly, The Wave movement that seizes hold of Gordon High School. It symbolizes the human tendency to conform to group norms, even when those norms are horrifying. The Wave is created almost on a whim by history teacher Ben Ross in an attempt to get his high school students to grasp the gravity of the atrocities of the Holocaust-and to explain the impossible guestion of how ordinary Germans could have participated in or turned a blind eye to the evil mission of the Nazi party. When Ross creates The Wave, he attempts to instill the ideals of strength through discipline, strength through community, and strength through action in his students to show them how simple mottos and pursuit of a common goal can transform behavior and opinion. However, Ross also creates a hierarchy of student spies, guards, and enforcers who quickly become carried away with their roles. As Wave members don armbands, harass non-Wave members, and even begin discriminating against Jewish members of the Gordon student body, Ross realizes that the experiment has gone off the rails—and is mirroring life in Nazi Germany far more closely than he ever intended. The Wave experiment, then, becomes a symbol for the perils of groupthink, the destructive force of blind compliance, and the dark streak within human nature which allows "ordinary" individuals to commit horrible, unthinkable acts under the influence of pressure to conform. Just likes waves in the ocean move forward and gather strength, speed, and volume until they break, so too does the "wave" of fascist behavior at Gordon High swell and crash.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Dell

At the end of the novel, after Ross successfully brings The

99

Laurel-Leaf edition of *The Wave* published in 1981.

Chapter 2 Quotes

♥♥ "How could the Germans sit back while the Nazis slaughtered people all around them and say they didn't know about it? How could they do that?" [...]

"All I can tell you," Ben said, "is that the Nazis were highly organized and feared. The behavior of the rest of the German population is a mystery—why they didn't try to stop it, how they could say they didn't know. We just don't know the answers."

Eric's hand was up again. [...] "I would never let such a small minority of people rule the majority."

"Yeah," said Brad. "I wouldn't let a couple of Nazis scare me into pretending I didn't see or hear anything."

After Ben Ross shows his senior history students a film about the Holocaust, their reactions range from disinterested to deeply disturbed. Laurie Saunders is the most perturbed member of the class, unable to understand how the Nazis could "slaughter" Jews, Roma, and homosexual and disabled individuals in their death camps-and how ordinary Germans could stand by while the atrocities occurred. This exchange between Laurie, Ross, and two other members of the class, Brad and Eric, sets up many of the fundamental thematic questions that The Wave will investigate. The bystander phenomenon as well as the dangers of groupthink are at the heart of the classroom experiment that Ross will soon devise to give his students a "taste" of life in Nazi Germany-and though Eric and Brad claim they would never let a "small minority" rule them or "scare them into" doing certain things, both boys will soon become dedicated members of a movement that thrives on conformity, coercion, and intimidation. Ross's students claim to be baffled by the social and moral breakdowns that allowed the Nazis to take control of Germany, but ultimately, the novel will show just how susceptible even these well-informed and seemingly autonomous students are to the dangers of groupthink, blind allegiance, and historical amnesia.

Related Characters: Brad, Eric, Ben Ross, Laurie Saunders (speaker)

Related Themes: 🐽 (🕥

Page Number: 13

Chapter 3 Quotes

♥♥ "Hey," David said defensively. "I didn't say I wasn't bothered by it. I just said it's over now. Forget about it. It happened once and the world learned its lesson. It'll never happen again."

"I hope not," Laurie said, picking up her tray.

After viewing the film about the Holocaust in Mr. Ross's history class, Laurie Saunders is confused and emotional—but her jock boyfriend David Collins barely feels anything at all. When Laurie calls him out on his flat, glib reaction to the film, David insists he's not unbothered, but simply unconvinced that the dangers of World War II-era Germany are things he needs to worry about in his day-to-day life. This apathy towards the lessons of history is one of *The Wave's* central themes and biggest concerns. David—and many of his peers—see history as a fixed, unchangeable thing, and regard the lessons of the past as lessons learned. However, as *The Wave* will soon show, it's frighteningly easy to forget the important lessons the past has to offer—and David and his peers will soon fall prey to a small-scale repetition of one of history's most dangerous moments.

Related Characters: Laurie Saunders, David Collins (speaker)

Related Themes: 🕥

Page Number: 21

Chapter 4 Quotes

♥♥ Suppose, [Ross] thought, just suppose he took a period, perhaps two periods, and tried an experiment. Just tried to give his students a sampling, a taste of what life in Nazi Germany might have been like. If he could just figure out how it could be done, how the experiment could be run, he was certain it would make far more of an impression on the students than any book explanation could ever make. It certainly was worth a try.

Related Characters: Ben Ross (speaker)

Related Themes: 🐽 (

Page Number: 26

Explanation and Analysis

When Ben Ross's senior history students ask him a serious of probing and profound questions about the social, moral, and existential reasons as to how the atrocities of the Holocaust could have taken place, he finds himself unable to give them adequate answers. He doesn't know how to

explain ordinary Germans' apathy towards or supposed ignorance of what was going on around them, and neither can he possibly imagine how the Nazis were able to commit such physically and morally violent acts against the Jews and other minorities of Europe. As Ross combs the pages of some history books looking for answers, he comes up short-but in a flash of inspiration, he begins to wonder if the best way to answer his student's questions is to let them figure the truth out for themselves. The "experiment" Ross begins devising in this brief passage is one that will plunge his students into the dangers of groupthink, the flattening social force of mandatory egalitarianism, and the violence of coercion. Ross believes his students are mature and wellinformed enough to see the experiment for what it is-but underestimates just how powerful the forces at work behind the experiment are, and will soon give his students a bigger "taste" than any of them have bargained for.

Chapter 5 Quotes

♥ He had told his wife how surprisingly enthusiastic his students had been that afternoon, but he had not told her that he too had gotten caught up in it. It would almost be embarrassing to admit that he could get swept up in such a simple game. But yet on reflection he knew that he had. The fierce exchange of questions and answers, the quest for perfect discipline—it had been infectious [...] Interesting, he thought as he got into bed.

Related Characters: Christy Ross, Ben Ross (speaker)

Related Themes: 🐽 🥃

Page Number: 40

Explanation and Analysis

After the first day of the social experiment that will soon be known as The Wave, Ben Ross is shocked—but not displeased—by how compliant his senior history students were with their new classroom regimen of strict discipline and unthinking adherence to orders. Ross wants to experiment with making his students behave like soldiers in order to show them how easy it was for even ordinary Germans to get swept up in the groupthink of the Nazi party—but doesn't yet realize just how easy it will be for his students, too, to soon become a violent, unthinking mass. In this passage, Ross is forced to admit to himself that he also has felt a rush as a result of the experiment's early stages. Even though he is supposed to be its leader and keep his students from veering into morally fraught or harmful territory, this passage suggests that Ross is just a bit too curious about the outcome of the experiment that he's created, and is willing to push his students further than they need to go in order to explore their "infectious" new environment. Ross, as an educator, has the responsibility of monitoring his students' intellectual, social, and moral wellbeing—in plunging them into this experiment, he's going against the sacred code between teacher and student and using his charges as guinea pigs in an untested social exercise. Ross is breaking the moral contract all educators must uphold, but can't resist the temptation to sate his own curiosity.

Chapter 6 Quotes

♥♥ "This will be our symbol. A wave is a pattern of change. It has movement, direction, and impact. From now on, our community, our movement will be known as The Wave." He paused and looked at the class standing at stiff attention, accepting everything he told them. "And this will be our salute," he said, cupping his right hand in the shape of a wave, then tapping it against his left shoulder and holding it upright. "Class, give the salute," he ordered.

The class gave the salute.

Related Characters: Ben Ross (speaker)



Page Number: 43

Explanation and Analysis

Ben Ross, high on the unexpected early results of his spontaneous classroom experiment, decides to push the exercise one step further by giving the movement a name, a slogan, a logo, and a salute. Though Ross is styling his own movement in the vein of the Nazi party, his students are too swept up in their new feelings of motivation and community to realize what's going on—and they blindly follow along as he leads them in the Wave salute. In this passage, as Ross decides to name his movement The Wave, he chooses a deeply metaphoric name that will turn The Wave itself into the novel's central symbol. Just like a real ocean wave, The Wave starts as something small and imperceptible, but soon gathers strength, volume, and speed until it crashes—and drags anything in its path into the undertow. The symbol of a wave, generally viewed as repetitive, gentle, and calming,

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takes on a new fierceness and danger as the novel's pages unfold and The Wave movement overwhelms Gordon High.

Chapter 7 Quotes

♥ "My mother says [The Wave] sounds like brainwashing to her," Laurie said.

"What?"

"She says Mr. Ross is manipulating us."

"She's crazy," David said. "How could she know? And besides, what do you care what your mother says? You know she worries about everything."

Related Characters: David Collins, Laurie Saunders (speaker), Ben Ross, Mrs. Saunders



Page Number: 56

Explanation and Analysis

Though The Wave is still in its early days, as Laurie and David debate about it on the walk to school, David is already showing hallmark signs of someone who has been brainwashed, or sucked into the undertow of unquestioning groupthink. Laurie tries to have an honest discussion with him about The Wave's potential pitfalls and its undercurrent of danger, but David is unwilling to hear her, and even lashes out violently, accusing Laurie's mother of being "crazy" for questioning The Wave and implying that Laurie should distance herself from her mother's influence. This passage shows how seriously students like David are already taking The Wave, and how dangerous groupthink really is. David is losing his capacity for independent thought, and trying to make sure that Laurie diminishes hers as well, so that she will more easily go along with the will of the collective. Laurie's instincts are valid, as many victims of groupthink's are-but those around her, as this passage demonstrates, are trying to squash her autonomy and make her question her remaining individual beliefs.

"When we first began The Wave a few days ago I felt that some of you were actually competing to give the right answers and to be better members than others. From now on I want this to end. [...] You must conceive of yourselves as a team, a team of which you are all members. Remember, in The Wave you are all equals. No one is more important or more popular than anyone else and no one is to be excluded from the group. Community means equality within the group."

Related Characters: Ben Ross (speaker)





Page Number: 60

Explanation and Analysis

As Ben Ross continues to deepen and expand The Wave, he tries to steer his students in a new direction. This passage is fraught with ambiguity and even danger as Ross gives his students a seemingly positive initiative-to think of themselves "as a team" on which all members are equals. Though equality and social egalitarianism seem like they could be positive things within the context of the cliquey, socially stratified atmosphere of Gordon High, Ross may actually be attempting something sinister here. Ross knows that he can deepen the movement's pull and allure by dangling social equality in front of his students-and that once they accept that they are all equal members of a collective, they will begin seeing non-Wave members as a distinct social class in need of conversion. Strasser doesn't seem to come down clearly on whether Ross is deliberately attempting to manipulate his students into an organization that will condone coercion, or whether Ross is really trying to improve life for his students while remaining ignorant to the side effects of The Wave's new direction. One thing, however, is clear: the call to complete social egalitarianism is one of the forces that transforms The Wave from an experiment to a real schoolwide movement.

Chapter 9 Quotes

♥♥ Ben noticed a marked improvement in preparation for class and in class participation, but he also noticed that there was less thinking behind the preparation. His students could glibly spit back answers as if by rote, but there was no analysis, no questioning on their part.

Related Characters: Ben Ross (speaker)



Page Number: 66

Explanation and Analysis

As The Wave continues to deepen and proliferate throughout Gordon High, Ben Ross notices several changes in his students. In this passage, as he reflects on how much more organized and disciplined they are, he also realizes that their sense of autonomy and individuality-and their ability to think and talk critically-has all but disappeared. This passage ties in with the novel's themes of groupthink and coercion, equality vs. independence, and education. Ben's job is to educate his students, and he has gained renown at Gordon High for his unorthodox teaching methods that seek to immerse his students in the lessons of history rather than focus on rote memorization or testtaking. Since The Wave has taken over school, his students value discipline and egalitarianism over creativity and individuality-and their behavior in class reflects that. Ben is beginning to realize that his experiment is perhaps too successful, and is stripping his students of the tools they need to really learn.

Chapter 10 Quotes

♥♥ Ben stepped out into the hall and started down toward the principal's office. On the way more than a dozen students paused to give him The Wave salute. He returned them and continued quickly, wondering what [Principal] Owens was going to say. In one sense, if Owens was going to tell him that there had been complaints and that he should stop the experiment, Ross knew he would feel some relief.

Related Characters: Ben Ross (speaker), Principal Owens

Related Themes: 🐽 🥃

Page Number: 75

Explanation and Analysis

As Ben heads to a meeting with the principal of Gordon High, he fields salutes from his Wave-indoctrinated students, and watches members of The Wave pass out membership cards and hang banners. Ross is overwhelmed by how the movement has spread like wildfire throughout the school, and though he doesn't want to be professionally reprimanded, he would feel relieved, he admits, if someone above him were to call off the experiment once and for all. Ben is beginning to realize that his latest education exercise has failed; though he's not yet willing to outright admit to himself just how seriously he has plunged Gordon High into a nightmare of groupthink and how profoundly he's stripped his students of their autonomy and individuality, he knows that something is wrong, and fears he is no longer able to stop it. The Wave, Ross fears, has grown larger than him or his class—it is about the ideology, and as he knows from history, very little can stop an idea.

Chapter 11 Quotes

♥♥ Today I found out that three of my friends joined after some other seniors talked to them. I saw that senior from Mr. Ross's class in the hall and he asked if I had joined yet. I told him I didn't intend to. He said if I didn't join soon it would be too late.

All I want to know is: Too late for what?

Related Characters: Robert Billings, Ben Ross, Laurie Saunders



Related Symbols:

Page Number: 82

Explanation and Analysis

This passage is a quotation taken from an anonymous letter which Laurie Saunders, editor-in-chief of Gordon High's school paper The Grapevine, receives one morning in an unmarked enveloped slipped under the paper's office door. The letter describes the bullying, verbally violent coercion, and veiled threats that Wave members have begun doling out to those who don't immediately join up with The Wave. Laurie is deeply concerned by the allegations contained in the letter-if they're true, it means that The Wave has begun injecting violence and fear into its recruitment methods, and that things are only, as per the Wave members themselves' implications, going to get worse. This passage represents the moment in which Laurie realizes just how precious her individuality is-and how seriously at risk the independence and autonomy of all of her classmates truly is.

Chapter 12 Quotes

♥♥ "That guy's a real detriment to the team. I wish Schiller would throw him off."

"Because he isn't in The Wave?" Laurie asked.

"Yeah," David replied. "If he really wanted the best for the team he'd join The Wave instead of giving Brian such a hard time. He's a one-man team, Laurie. He's just on a big ego trip and he's not helping anyone."

Related Characters: Laurie Saunders, David Collins (speaker), Brian Ammon, Norm Schiller, Deutsch

Related Themes: 🐠 🤞



Page Number: 86-87

Explanation and Analysis

While Laurie harbors fears about and growing resentments towards The Wave and its members, her boyfriend David has plunged headfirst into the movement. David has even brought The Wave to his football team, believing that its tenets of "strength through discipline" and "strength through community" will make the players a strong, unified front. When one player, Deutsch, refuses to join The Wave, the other team members gang up on him-and one player, Brian Ammon, even physically attacks him. Laurie, shaken by witnessing the boys' fight, seeks comfort from her boyfriend David-but David has succumbed fully to The Wave's tenets of groupthink and community, and now sees any expression of individual ideology or will as an assault against The Wave. Individuality is no longer a prized, revered quality-instead, it's a threat to The Wave's success, and grounds for social ostracization (and even violence).

Chapter 13 Quotes

♥♥ "You mean I can't go up into the stands unless I give The Wave salute?" Laurie asked.

[...] Brad shrugged. "I know. Look, what's the big deal. Just give me the salute and you can go up."

[...] "You mean everyone in the stands gave you the salute?"

"Well, yeah. In this part of the stands."

"Well, I want to go up and I don't want to give The Wave salute," Laurie said angrily.

[...] Brad blushed. "Look, Laurie," he said in a low voice. "Just do the stupid salute already."

But Laurie was adamant. "No, this is ridiculous. Even you know it's ridiculous."

Related Characters: Brad, Laurie Saunders (speaker)



Related Symbols:

Page Number: 95

Explanation and Analysis

When Laurie tries to attend a football game in order to confront her friend Amy about The Wave's sinister encroachment, she's barred from entering the Wavemember-only section of the stands unless she gives The Wave salute. Laurie has quietly resisted The Wave's influence, even as she refrains from speaking out against it for fear of being targeted or ostracized. Now, however, as Brad demands she give the salute, Laurie finds herself at a crossroads-she must either succumb to The Wave's groupthink, or make a stand for her individuality. She chooses to do the latter, and even calls out her friend Brad for going along with a movement he knows is "ridiculous" and even harmful. Brad, in spite of his ambivalence, won't allow Laurie to bend the rules or maintain neutrality in the face of The Wave-this shows how groupthink and coercion function, by forcing even those who have moral or ideological opposition to a movement to participate in it, and force others to as well. Even though Brad is opposed to The Wave, he'd never say so out loud: such is the power of The Wave's influence, and the fear it engenders among the Gordon High student body.

Chapter 14 Quotes

•• "Why do you want to be part of it?"

"Because it means that nobody is better than anyone else for once," Amy said. "Because ever since we became friends all I've ever done is try to compete with you and keep up with you. But now I don't feel like I have to have a boyfriend on the football team like you. And if I don't want to, I don't have to get the same grades you get, Laurie. For the first time in three years I feel like I don't have to keep up with Laurie Saunders and people will still like me."

Related Characters: Amy Smith, Laurie Saunders (speaker)

Related Themes: 🔗

Page Number: 100

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Laurie at last gets the chance to confront her best friend Amy about Amy's involvement in The Wave. Though Laurie begs Amy to resist The Wave, Amy gives her reasons for participating in the movement: she is drawn, she says, to the social egalitarianism and equality The Wave has created. Amy has felt competitive with Laurie for the entirety of their friendship-but since The Wave began, Amy doesn't have to feel that way anymore, because she's part of a uniform group. This passage demonstrates one of the novel's major themes: equality versus independence. Movements like The Wave make a society equal-but also flatten individuality and squash out any independent thought or action amongst their members. People like Amy, however, who have long resented those at the "top" of the social or intellectual hierarchy, blindly-gladly, even-go along with the change in social order because it assuages their insecurities and makes them feel worthy for the first time.

Chapter 15 Quotes

♥♥ "I created this experiment, and they went along. If I stop now they'll all be left hanging. They'd be confused, and they wouldn't have learned anything.

"Well, let them be confused," Christy said.

[...] "I can't do that!" he shouted at his wife. "I'm their teacher. I was responsible for getting them into this. I admit that maybe I did let this go too long. But they've come too far to just drop it now. I have to push them until they get the point. I might be teaching these kids the most important lesson of their lives!"

Related Characters: Christy Ross, Ben Ross (speaker)





Page Number: 108

Explanation and Analysis

Ben Ross's wife Christy begs him to end The Wave-before he loses his job and she loses her reputation due to her association with him-Ross exclaims that if he ends the experiment without allowing his students to figure out its core lessons for themselves, they'll be more lost and confused than before. As an educator, Ben holds firmly to the idea that students must practically explore the lessons they're learning, and has tried to use The Wave to help them unpack and understand a complicated and painful historical and ideological truth. His plan, though, has backfired-and now he has a new responsibility as an educator, which is to keep the lesson of The Wave intact while saving his students from its harmful rhetoric. Ross is angry with himself, frustrated with (and sad for) his students, and deeply morally shaken by how his class has, in miniature, replicated one of history's darkest periods. At the same time, he knows he can't shy away from what he's started: he must shepherd his students through the darkness they've all created together, and help them reach the light again on their own.

David instantly recoiled in shock at what he had done. Laurie lay still on the ground and he was filled with fear as he dropped to his knees and put his arms around her. [...] David could not believe it. He felt almost as if he were coming out of a trance. What had possessed him these last days that could cause him to do something so stupid? There he'd been, denying that The Wave could hurt anyone, and at the same time he'd hurt Laurie, his own girlfriend, in the name of The Wave!

Related Characters: David Collins (speaker), Laurie Saunders



Page Number: 114

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, David, who has just thrown Laurie to the

ground in the wake of a Wave-related argument, realizes the full gravity of what he's done-and who he's become under the influence of The Wave's rhetoric. As David comes out of his "trance," he realizes the hold The Wave has taken not just over him, but over the entire school. David was so committed to The Wave's ideology of equality, discipline, and action-empty words with hazy, shadowy goals-that he abandoned and betrayed those he claimed to love. David has learned, however painfully, the lesson Ben Ross set out to teach when he created The Wave: that groupthink, enforced equality, and the erasure of autonomy are dangerous weapons that can turn even the most wellmeaning individuals into unthinking foot soldiers willing to commit terrible violence to further their ideology. David, who at the start of the novel didn't see the importance of dwelling on the past, now recognizes that history-specifically, the history of the Holocaust-can and will repeat itself, and that its lessons must be heeded if such cycles are to be avoided.

[Ross] recalled those students in his own history classes who had condemned the Jews for not taking the Nazi threat seriously, for not fleeing [...] when rumors of the concentration camps and gas chambers first filtered back to them. Of course, Ross thought, how could any rational person believe such a thing? And who could have believed that a nice bunch of high school students [...] could have become a fascist group called The Wave?

Related Characters: Ben Ross (speaker), David Collins, Laurie Saunders

Related Themes: 🐽 💿 🥃 Related Symbols: 💽

Page Number: 119

Explanation and Analysis

As Ben Ross reckons with how The Wave has transformed the atmosphere of Gordon High, he thinks about the larger social, moral, and existential questions the experiment has raised. He created The Wave to show his students how Nazi ideology—and movements like it—could take such strong hold over seemingly normal, morally upright communities. His students couldn't understand how Nazis and ordinary Germans alike could have perpetrated such atrocities, and neither could they comprehend how the vulnerable populations of Jewish people that they targeted resisted seeing the truth about the danger they faced. Ross realizes now that movements like The Wave—and Nazism—slide stealthily and slowly into terrible violence in shades and grades, so that those within and around them become slowly inured to the ideological, verbal, and physical violence unfolding. While his students claimed just days ago to abhor fascism, violence, and groupthink, they have now begun to perpetrate all three—and Ross, as their leader, realizes that he must do something to stop them from making even more serious moral, ideological, or actionable mistakes.

Chapter 16 Quotes

♥♥ "You weren't dumb, David. You were idealistic. I mean, there were good things about The Wave. It couldn't be all bad, or no one would have joined in the first place. It's just that they don't see what's bad about it. They think it makes everyone equal, but they don't understand that it robs you of your right to be independent."

Related Characters: Laurie Saunders (speaker), David Collins

Related Themes: 🐽 🔌 Related Symbols: 💽

Page Number: 127

Explanation and Analysis

As David and Laurie cut class to sit in a park and discuss the impending Wave rally about to happen back at school, they reflect on how The Wave has subsumed their high school-and David reckons openly with how The Wave transformed him, too. Laurie, who has forgiven David for the verbal, emotional, and physical violence he perpetrated against her while under the influence of The Wave's rhetoric, comforts the embarrassed David by pointing out that movements like The Wave don't get off the ground on their own. There are always, she implies, positives to social movements like The Wave-and those positives distract adherents and new recruits alike from the constricting egalitarianism and violence that allow the movements to thrive. Laurie and David have learned a difficult, complicated lesson about the nature of groupthink and coercion-and will, hopefully, be able to use the things they've learned from The Wave to be more discerning, autonomous individuals in the future.

Chapter 17 Quotes

♥ Ben began to realize how much more serious this "little experiment" was than he'd ever imagined. It was frightening how easily they would put their faith in your hands, how easily they would let you decide for them. If people were destined to be led, Ben thought, this was something he must make sure they learned: to question thoroughly, never to put your faith in anyone's hands blindly. Otherwise...

Related Characters: Ben Ross (speaker)



Page Number: 133

Explanation and Analysis

As Ben looks out at the sea of Gordon High students before him, he realizes how "serious" The Wave has become for all of them. He has called a rally to bring the students together under the guise of introducing them to the "leader" of the "National Wave Youth Movement"—but is actually planning on showing them a picture of their true moral leader, Adolf Hitler. Ross knows that this is his chance to stop The Wave in its tracks while still impressing upon his students the difficult lesson they have all learned through the experiment. Ross is hopeful that his students will truly grow and change based on their experiences with The Wave—and will understand, going forward, the importance of individuality and autonomy, the dangers of groupthink, and the vitality of the past as a living, breathing thing rather than history to be filed away and forgotten.

"You thought you were so special!" Ross told them. "Better than everyone else outside of this room. You traded your freedom for what you said was equality. But you turned your equality into superiority over non-Wave members. You accepted the group's will over your own convictions, no matter who you had to hurt to do it. [..]. You all would have made good Nazis," Ben told them. [...] You say it could never happen again, but look how close you came."

Related Characters: Ben Ross (speaker)



Page Number: 133

Explanation and Analysis

As he tries to bring The Wave to a halt, Ben Ross both indicts his students for behaving like "good Nazis" and for forgetting the lessons of the past—but also tries to impress upon them just how easy it is to blindly accept the will of the group and lose oneself in the process. Ross doesn't want to shame his students so profoundly that they try to deny what happened to all of them, but he does want them to understand the gravity of what has taken place at Gordon High, and to see what happens when the lessons of history are ignored and the sacredness of the individual is cast aside. Ben knows that this is his final chance to stop The Wave before it gets completely out of control—and as an educator, he wants to do so while also bringing his students into the light of one of the most important lessons of their entire lives.

Ben moved closer to the front of the stage and spoke in a lower voice. "If history repeats itself, you will all want to deny what happened to you in The Wave. But, if our experiment has been successful, [...] you will have learned that we are all responsible for our own actions, and that you must always question what you do rather than blindly follow a leader, and that for the rest of your lives, you will never, ever allow a group's will to usurp your individual rights."

Related Characters: Ben Ross (speaker)



Page Number: 135

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, as Ross attempts to impress upon his students the full gravity of what The Wave has shown their community, he practically begs them not to "deny" the fact that The Wave existed—and took over. He implies through this short speech to his students that the reason people fail to learn from history is a combination of secrecy and shame. Those who participate in the darker pockets of history—like, for example, members of the Nazi party—often try to deny their involvement in such moments in order to mitigate their own shame or control others' perceptions of them. Ross, however, entreats his students to admit to their actions and recognize the power of the dark forces of groupthink, blind allegiance, and the annihilation of individuality. Ross wants his students to genuinely learn something from The Wave—after all, he first designed it as an experiment that would help them understand how societies spiral out of control, and in the end The Wave did usher Gordon High into a brief era of coercion, authoritarianism, and the surrender of "individual rights" to free speech and free thought.

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SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1

Laurie Saunders, the pretty and popular editor of Gordon High School's student paper, *The Grapevine*, sits in the editorial office looking around at the empty desks around her. No one on the paper's staff is as hardworking as Laurie, and she is disappointed in her classmates for being so lazy. Even though there's no rule that *Grapevine* staffers need to work during their free period, Laurie knows that if her classmates don't focus, they'll never get the next issue of the paper out in time. Every issue of the paper for the last three years has been late—even now that Laurie has been appointed editor-in-chief, her influence makes no difference.

Laurie leaves the publications office just before the bell rings. She walks down the hallway and passes Mr. Gabondi's French classroom, where she spots her best friend, Amy Smith, through the window in the door. Laurie feels bad for Amy, who is stuck in Mr. Gabondi's notoriously boring class, and decides to cheer her up by making some silly faces at her. Laurie delights in watching Amy try her hardest not to laugh—but feels a sharp pang of embarrassment when she realizes that Mr. Gabondi, too, has noticed her. Laurie is saved by the bell, however, as the period ends and Amy rushes out to meet her. The girls walk together to their next class—history.

In his history classroom, Ben Ross is crouched over a film projector, trying to make the machine work. He is inept when it comes to all things mechanical, and usually leaves such tasks to his wife Christy—who is also a teacher at Gordon High. Over the last two years, Ross has earned a "growing reputation as an outstanding young teacher." His students know that he is intense, involved, and enthusiastic about what he teaches. Ross often uses elaborate classroom exercises to illustrate his history lessons more practically.

Frustrated with the projector, Ross heads up to his desk to gather up some papers he wants to pass back at the start of the class. He is disappointed by most of his students' work—the only A earners are Laurie Saunders and Amy Smith, and the rest of the class's work is middling at best. Ben is also bothered by his students' "lackadaisical attitude" towards punctuality and their even more laissez-faire approach to completing their homework. In the novel's introductory passages, Strasser shows Laurie growing frustrated with her fellow classmates' poor work ethic and lousy sense of community and a common goal. This foreshadows the regimented, ordered group mentality The Wave will bring to Gordon High—and the reasons that both teachers and students will accept and even admire its influence.



Laurie and Amy are best friends—fun-loving girls who are good students, but aren't afraid to poke fun at the more boring parts of their education. Amy and Laurie are individuals capable of thinking for themselves, and both girls relish the differences in their personalities.



This passage introduces Ben Ross and shows as a bright young star in the education world. He is passionate about his work, and cares deeply about his students' success. He doesn't want them to just spit facts back at him out of their textbooks—he wants them to really understand what they're learning. Ben's dedication to his job is undeniable, but as the novel progresses, he will take his commitment to practical history lessons too far.



Like the earlier passage that demonstrated the lack of school spirit and initiative amongst the student staffers of The Grapevine, this paragraph shows how even in their "real" classes, the students of Gordon High are generally lazy and unmotivated—they are in need of a galvanizing force to unite and inspire them.



As students head into the room, Ross asks David Collins—Laurie Saunders's boyfriend and a tall, athletic running back for the football team—to finish setting up the projector. Next, Robert Billings—the class loser—trudges in. Robert is messily dressed and barely groomed, and Ross feels a pang of empathy for the boy. As the rest of the class begins to take their seats, Ross distributes their papers, chiding them all for their "sloppy" work. As Ross moves up and down the aisles, he realizes that some students are barely even paying attention.

CHAPTER 2

Ben Ross starts up the film that he and his students are watching in class that day—a documentary about the concentration camps of the Holocaust and the awful atrocities committed there. The images on the film are shocking and frightening, and though Ross has seen this film several times, the sight of such suffering still "horrifie[s]" him. As the film rolls, Ben Ross explains the rise of Hitler and the Nazi Party to his students, citing the high inflation, confused leadership, and waning social safety net in post-World War I Germany as the reason the Nazis came so quickly to power. He explains the creation and mission of the Nazis' death camps—and how Hitler hoped they would be the "Final Solution to the Jewish problem."

When the film comes to the end and Ross flicks the lights back on, he gauges his students' reactions to the horrible film they've just seen. Some, like Amy Smith and Laurie Saunders, look visibly shaken and even tearful—but others seem bored or inattentive, and Robert Billings has actually fallen asleep. When Ross asks if anyone has questions about the documentary, Amy raises her hand to ask why no ordinary Germans tried to stop the Nazis. Ross admits that he can't answer that question, but suspects that regular Germans either were scared of the Nazis, hopeful that their rule would restore prosperity to Germany, or ignorant of what was truly going on.

Two boys, Eric and Brad, speak up to state that there's no way ten million people could be "slaughter[ed]" in the death camps with no one noticing, and Laurie Saunders adds her voice to theirs, outraged that the German people could have sat back and done nothing in the face of such horrific violence. Ross is forced to admit that "the behavior of the [...] German population is a mystery," and there simply aren't answers to his students' questions. Eric and Brad speak up and say that they'd never "let such a small minority of people rule the majority." Ross continues to be disappointed by his students' inability—or refusal—to meet their true potential. The gears of his brain are turning as he subconsciously thinks of how he can get through to them.



The teaching of the Holocaust in schools is a difficult subject—it's a delicate matter, and difficult even for adults to stomach and understand the atrocities committed by the Nazi Party. Ross, however, doesn't shy away from presenting his students with the full horror of the death camps—he wants to really impress history upon them so that they don't forget its lessons.



The differing reactions throughout the class show just how numb most of Ross's students are even to the most painful lessons of history. And yet, although some students seem not to care about what they've just seen, Ross feels invigorated by the students who do respond to the film and the lesson with emotion—and committed to helping those students seek real, practical answers to their difficult questions.



This passage, and Eric and Brad's decisive statement about how they'd react to groupthink and coercion, foreshadows the literal and metaphorical wave that is about to rush through Gordon High, sweeping many of these very students up in its current.



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As the bell rings, David Collins stands up, starving and ready for lunch. He rushes out to the cafeteria, urging Laurie to follow along, but she tells him she'll catch up with him. As other students file out of the classroom, Laurie stays to talk to Mr. Ross—she is obviously upset. She struggles to understand why the Germans couldn't "think for themselves," and has a hard time believing anybody would "follow an order" so atrocious. Ross is unable to offer her any solace, and can only agree with her that what happened in the second World War was "totally sick."

As Robert Billings wakes from his nap and hurries out of the classroom, Ross asks if the boy is getting enough sleep at home. Robert nods. Ross warns Robert that he'll never pass if he doesn't participate in class, and won't graduate if he fails. Robert responds that he doesn't care. As Robert hurries from the classroom, Ross feels torn—he knows Robert lives in the shadow of his older brother, Jeff, a former Gordon High student, but doesn't know how to get the boy to try in the face of such inertia. Ross loves it when his students really care about what they're learning. Laurie's inability to understand a key piece of history—for moral reasons, not intellectual ones—spurs Ross on as he attempts to create an exercise that will help his students grasp the magnitude of the Holocaust and the dark allure of conformity and groupthink.



Robert is perhaps the most acute example of the lazy malaise that has taken over Gordon High. Robert doesn't care about the past, his present, or his future—and students like Robert further motivate Ross to do something drastic that will get their attention and make them care about the world around them.



CHAPTER 3

In the cafeteria, David wolfs down his lunch. Laurie arrives and sits with him, and together they watch Robert struggle to find a place to sit. As Laurie picks at her lunch, David asks her what's wrong—she admits that she was deeply bothered by the film about the Holocaust, and asks David if he's bothered, too. David replies that as "horrible" as the death camps were, they happened "a long time ago," and David knows one "can't change" history. Laurie says one can't forget about it, either. David asks Laurie if he can finish her hamburger, and she hands it to him.

Amy and Brian Ammon, the football team's quarterback, arrive at the lunch table and squabble about who gets to sit at the table with Laurie and David. Laurie encourages them both to squeeze in. Brian sets down two full lunch trays, and explains that he is bulking up for a game against Clarkstown, a rival high school whose players are rumored to be "huge." David agrees that Gordon High barely stands a chance—half their players can't even be bothered to show up to practice. This passage shows how, in stark contrast to Laurie's deep emotional and existential reaction to the film, David could not care less about history—he sees it as a closed circuit rather than a living, breathing thing. This interaction foreshadows that David will learn the hard way that history can sometimes repeat itself.



The subplot about Gordon High's upcoming game against the intimidating Clarkstown team is yet another example of the scattered, disorganized student body at Gordon—and how The Wave will stand to galvanize them.



The group's attention once again shifts to Robert Billings, who is reading a comic book and dribbling food down his chin. Brian asks the others if they saw him sleeping through the movie. David tells Brian not to bring up the movie, since it upset Laurie. Laurie accuses David of teasing her. David retorts that he's not teasing, and wasn't unbothered by the film—but believes "the world learned its lesson." Laurie stands up and says she's going to *The Grapevine* office to work. Amy offers to accompany Laurie. As the girls walk away, David tells Brian that Laurie "always takes stuff like that too seriously."

Amy and Laurie sit in *The Grapevine* office talking about the film from history class while Amy sits near an open window, smoking a cigarette. Amy asks if Laurie and David are having a fight, but Laurie says she just wishes David would be a little more serious sometimes. The girls discuss college and marriage—Laurie says she wants to go to college with David, but doesn't feel ready to get married yet. Amy says that she herself wouldn't turn down a marriage proposal from a guy like David. Laurie, who knows how much Amy envies her and wants to emulate her, becomes nervous about the competitive edge their friendship has always had.

There is a loud knock on the door—when the girls ask who's there, a deep voice replies that it is Principal Owens, and reprimands the girls for locking the door. Amy quickly throws away her cigarette, terrified, while Laurie unlocks the door to reveal Carl Block and Alex Cooper, two *Grapevine* writers and class jokers, standing on the other side. Laurie chides the boys for their cruel joke, and asks them where their assignments for the next issue are. Alex exclaims that he has to "catch a plane to Argentina," and Carl offers to drive him to the airport. They scurry from the office as Laurie and Amy laugh.

CHAPTER 4

That afternoon, Ben Ross is perturbed as he leaves school. He's anxious about the fact that he wasn't able to provide his students with good enough answers to their questions about how the majority of Germans behaved during World War II. On the way out of school, Ross stops at the library to take out several books on the Holocaust, and looks forward to several uninterrupted hours of reading back at home while his wife Christy plays tennis.

After several hours of reading, Ross is still unable to find the answer to the questions he's looking for. He wonders if the answer is something historians can't explain—if the answer lies in "re-creating a similar situation." He considers conducting an in-class experiment that gives the students "a taste of what life in Nazi Germany might have been like." David and Brian have little empathy for Laurie's emotions, and even regard her as slightly hysterical—a pattern that will resurface throughout the novel in increasingly painful ways.



This passage foreshadows another element of The Wave's appeal to many students at Gordon. Laurie knows how competitive and jealous Amy is, to the point of wanting to have Laurie's life as her own. The equalizing force of The Wave will soon create a sense of egalitarianism within the student body—but whether that equality is really true or not will remain to be seen.



Even though Amy and Laurie have difficulties in their friendship, there is a close sense of camaraderie between them. They share secrets and mutual friends, and always look out for one another. This dynamic, however, will shift as The Wave takes over Gordon.



This passage again demonstrates how devoted Ross is to really working on behalf of his students and helping them to find the answers they seek. His duties to them don't stop at the end of class.



As Ross begins brainstorming a way to attempt to answer his students' difficult questions, he has no idea just how off-the-rails his experiment will get in the days to come.



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That night, when Christy arrives home, she is excited to tell her husband all about her tennis game, but Ben is deep in his books, and greets Christy absently and distantly. Christy isn't upset—she knows how "utterly absorbed" he can get in things he's teaching or studying. She tells him to finish his work and not worry about her—but not to come to bed too late and sacrifice his sleep.

CHAPTER 5

The next day, Ben Ross's students file into history class sluggishly as always. Brad sticks a "kick me" sign to Robert's back, and many students distractedly stand around talking rather than taking their seats. As Ross starts class, he writes the words "STRENGTH THROUGH DISCIPLINE" on the blackboard, and tells the class they are going to have an "exciting" lesson about discipline, power, and success. He explains that discipline is the key to success—in school, in sports, and in life. He tells his students that he can help them create power through discipline—if they'll just humor him.

Ben Ross tells each student that he wants them to adopt a more rigid posture. He moves through the aisles correcting those who slouch and complimenting those who sit up straight. Robert quickly adopts a perfect posture, and Ross holds the way he's sitting up as an example to the others. To Ross's surprise—and pleasure—the other students begin copying Robert.

Ross begins drilling the students, asking them to stand up and walk around the room and then return to their seats as quickly as possible. At first, the students are disorganized and silly—but after a few repetitions, they are able to move quickly and effortlessly, and even begin to organize amongst themselves the most efficient routes back to their seats.

Ross then introduces several new classroom rules. First, he tells the students they must always have a pencil and paper on them. Second, he tells them they must stand at the sides of their desks when answering questions. Third, he tells them that they must address him as "Mr. Ross" at the start of a question or answer. As Ross drills the students with questions, he offers praise to those who follow the rules—and, using a ruler, raps on the desks of those who don't. The eager students quickly fall in line, "caught up in this new game" Ross has created. Ross is exhilarated by his students' discipline, and shocked when the bell rings and they rise from their seats "in what seem[s] like a single movement."

Ben's wife Christy admires his work ethic, even if she knows that he can get a little obsessive sometimes about his many different interests.



On the day that Ben Ross first attempts to create an atmosphere of "discipline" in his classroom, the students are as badly behaved as ever before. He seems doubtful that his students will embrace his experiment—but knows that if they do, he could transform not just their worldviews, but his own classroom environment. There's a part of Ben that has created this experiment to benefit himself, as well, and make his own teaching experience easier.



From the start, Ross's students are intrigued by the idea of behaving with more discipline. This speaks to the book's idea that people often crave regimented, thoughtless direction and will blindly follow along with groupthink and orders.



As the students find that following Ross's instructions actually unites them, they begin doing his exercises with glee and enthusiasm.



In just one short class period, Ross has turned his students from an unruly bunch of slackers into a kind of small army. The students, Ross thinks, are just "caught up" in a "game"—he doesn't yet realize just how seriously they are taking his orders (and seemingly, neither do they).



After class, in the halls, Brian, Amy, David, Laurie, and Brad talk about what a "rush" the strange history period was. David remarks on how the class seemed like "more than just a class" when they all acted together. Brad tells David he's being corny and taking the exercise too seriously, but as David splits off from the others to use the restroom, he feels a genuine sense of pride and accomplishment. After using the toilet and stepping out of his stall, David sees Robert Billings standing at the bathroom sink—practicing his snaps to attention and soundlessly moving his lips as if answering Mr. Ross's questions rapid-fire.

That night, in bed, Ross tells Christy about the success of the experiment. He tells her that his students seemingly "wanted to be disciplined." Christy is surprised by the students' enthusiasm and jokingly warns Ben that he might have "created a monster." She asks if he'll continue the experiment in class tomorrow, and though Ben says he doesn't think he will, he privately thinks about how he had been just as "swept up" in the "infectious" exercise as his students.

CHAPTER 6

The next morning, it is Ben Ross, not his students, who is late to class. When he arrives in the classroom, he finds his students all sitting straight up in their seats, silently waiting for him. Ross is pleased and impressed, and "tempted" to push the experiment from yesterday even further. Ross writes the words "STRENGTH THROUGH COMMUNITY" on the board, and tells his students that there's more going on in the classroom than just discipline—they are building a community, and "struggl[ing] together for a common goal." David Collins perks up, realizing that what Mr. Ross is talking about is exactly what the football team needs.

Ross urges his students to repeat the words "Strength Through Discipline, Strength Through Community" aloud. All but a few—including Laurie and Brad—repeat the motto. Ross says that what the class needs now is a symbol for their new community—he turns to the board and draws a wave enclosed by a circle. He explains that a wave represents change—but also "movement, direction, and impact." Their community, he says, will be henceforth known as **The Wave**—and they will even use a "salute." Ross cups his hand in the shape of a wave, taps it against his left shoulder, and then holds it upright. The class automatically repeats the salute. As Mr. Ross encourages the class to repeat the salute alongside the motto again and again, he is amazed how "like a regiment" they have become. David feels invigorated by the act of moving together in a group—as a player, he craves that kind of unity. He's surprised, however, to find that even students like Robert want to perfect their ability to fit in and follow orders to maintain a sense of sameness and togetherness.



This passage introduces one of the novel's major threads—the fact that Ben Ross gets a thrill from leading his students, and from watching them blossom into a group. The implications of this fact will have devastating effects as Ross struggles to check his own coercive impulses and maintain his boundaries as an educator.



Ross fell asleep the night before uncertain as to whether or not he'd even give his little experiment another day—but as he arrives at class and sees that his students remain transformed, he decides to push things further and see if he can get them to continue on this new path.



Ross names his experiment "The Wave"—a name that has deep symbolic meaning. Ross perhaps doesn't realize just how violent of a wave his experiment will be as it sucks students in as if to a riptide, and then breaks with chaos and finality alike. By giving the class experiment not just a slogan, but a salute, Ross is drawing a direct parallel between The Wave and the Nazi Party—though his students, so troubled by the Nazi's actions just a few days ago, don't seem to realize what they're doing.



After school, as David and Eric get ready for football, David suggests bringing **The Wave** to the football team, and making them all "members" too. Eric is skeptical of bringing the idea to Coach Schiller, but David assures him that The Wave is what the team needs. Brian chimes in and says he'll try anything to unite the team against their imposing rivals from Clarkstown. A player named Deutsch teases Brian for being so intimidated by the opposing team, and soon the two boys are brawling. David pulls them apart and chides them for not supporting each other as teammates should. Deutsch says the team could win if only he could take Brian's place, but David retorts that "a bunch of self-serving individuals don't make a team."

As David's teammates gather around him, they all chime in about how desperate they are to pull together and win. They ask David what they can do, and Eric encourages David to tell them all about **The Wave**. David begins instructing them all in The Wave's mottos—and its salute. David has long been disappointed by his team's inability to rally together and win, and believes that the galvanizing force of The Wave will change all that. David already is beginning to believe in the collective over the individual, and seems to be willingly muting his independence in pursuit of what he sees as the greater good.



The Wave could be a positive force for the football team—but David's emphasis on the salute and mottos rather than the core values of the movement seem to suggest that The Wave is more about control and unthinking fealty than real change.



CHAPTER 7

That evening, over dinner, Laurie Saunders interrupts her father's boring stories about his golf game earlier that day to tell her parents about what's been going on in her history class over the last couple of days. Laurie knows her mother is a "worrywart," but doesn't think there's anything suspect about **The Wave**. She describes the experiment as being "incredible" and exciting.

Mrs. Saunders says she thinks the experiment sounds "too militaristic," but Laurie retorts that it's "positive"—even the "class creep" Robert Billings has been picked on less and less over the last couple of days. Mrs. Saunders worries that Laurie is learning to be part of a group rather than learning the facts of history, and she and Mr. Saunders debate whether American values favor the power of the collective or those who aren't "afraid to act as individuals." Mrs. Saunders reminds Laurie that she has been raised to think for herself.

Mr. Saunders accuses his wife of making too big a deal of the experiment. Mrs. Saunders suggests that Mr. Ross is manipulating his students, but Laurie angrily says that Mr. Ross is doing what he's doing "for the class's good."

Even though Laurie has gotten a strange feeling about The Wave at school, she pretends to be excited about it as she runs it by her parents—perhaps in hopes of gaining their approval, and thus a kind of permission to stop worrying and go along with everyone else.



Laurie's parents have deep-seated values and ideals regarding the importance of individuality and thinking for oneself, and perceive any threat to their daughter's autonomy as a serious one—even as Laurie insists that The Wave is just an experiment.



Laurie's parents seem divided on The Wave's utility—but Laurie continues trying to tell herself that ultimately, The Wave will be a good thing for Gordon High.



Though this evening is Ben Ross's night to cook dinner for himself and Christy, he's too preoccupied with more research for **The Wave** to make anything, and instead picks up Chinese takeout. Over dinner, Christy asks if Ross's "monsters" have "turned on [him]" yet—but Ross insists that his students are actually acting like human beings for the first time. Christy marvels that the same unruly students in her music class could behave so well for Ben—Ross retorts that "it's amazing how much more they like you when you make decisions for them."

Christy asks Ben how far he plans to take his experiment, and he admits that he doesn't know—but is too fascinated to stop. He admits that he feels himself getting caught up in it too. Christy jokes that he is "becoming a guinea pig in [his] own experiment"—but there is a part of her that hopes her husband will take her words to heart as a warning. As Ben and Christy discuss the experiment, even Christy is charmed by The Wave's power to transform lazy, selfish students into unified, hardworking ones. Ben, with some sarcasm, marvels at how well students respond to mindless authoritarianism—but the dark side of his comment will reverberate throughout the novel's pages as The Wave grows stronger.



Just like Ben's sarcastic statement about students loving to have their decisions made on their behalf, Christy's joke about Ben being a "guinea pig" also has serious undertones.



CHAPTER 8

Since tenth grade, David has been going out of his way each morning to pick up Laurie from her house so that they can walk together to school. This morning, as David arrives at Laurie's house, he is full of excited energy as he tells her all about how he brought **The Wave** to the football team. Laurie expresses her doubts that The Wave could really transform the football team—and mentions to David that her mother thinks the whole Wave movement "sounds like brainwashing." David tells Laurie that her mother is a "crazy" worrywart and couldn't "possibly understand" what The Wave is really about. Laurie feels the urge to argue with David, but restrains herself—she doesn't want to get into a fight.

That day, when Ben Ross's students arrive in his history classroom, they find that he has tacked up a large poster with the blue **Wave** symbol on it at the back of the room. Ross silently moves up and down the aisles, passing around small cards—Laurie realizes they are Wave membership cards. Mr. Ross explains that some students will notice a red X on the backs of their cards—these students are "monitors," and are tasked with reporting directly to Mr. Ross "any members of The Wave who do not obey [its] rules."

Ross turns to the blackboard and writes a third section of **The Wave**'s motto: "STRENGTH THROUGH ACTION." Discipline and community, he explains, are "meaningless" without action. He encourages the students to behave like a "well-oiled machine" and support each other through the tenets of The Wave. The students, one by one, rise and stand at attention next to their desks. Laurie joins them—but feels that something is off and "creepy" about how her classmates are behaving. This passage shows how The Wave, though still in its early days, is already threatening to come between Laurie and David. They are at ideological odds when it comes to The Wave—and David is exhibiting a classic hallmark of groupthink as he encourages Laurie to dismiss or even revile anyone who questions The Wave's righteousness.



Ben is excited by his students' demonstration of initiative—and decides to reward them by taking the experiment one step further and upping the stakes even more. As the experiment veers more transparently into authoritarianism and surveillance, most students are actually excited rather than nervous.



Ross wants his students to spread The Wave through the school and usher the experiment into a new phase—but as The Wave moves beyond Ross's classroom, Laurie's reservations multiply.



Ross tells his students that **The Wave** is not about individual glory but support of a "common cause"—they are all members on a team, and "No one is more important or more popular than anyone else." The Wave, he posits, represents total equality. He charges his students with recruiting new members, a process which involves educating them about the rules of The Wave and making them "pledge strict obedience." One by one, students begin standing up and telling Mr. Ross how grateful they are for The Wave. Ross is surprised and touched by the students' earnest testimonials. He leads them all in a round of The Wave salute.

At lunch, all of **The Wave** members sit together at a long table. Brian, Brad, Amy, Laurie, and David are soon joined by Robert Billings, whom David welcomes warmly to their table. As the students discuss The Wave excitedly, Laurie chimes in to ask if anyone is feeling "weird" about the experiment, but the others all say they're just excited about how "different" school is. Brad is grateful for the dissolution of the cliques and popularity contests that define high school—everyone, he says, is "equal" now. Laurie says she's not sure how she feels about that. Brian flashes his membership card, revealing that he is a monitor, and jokingly threatens to report Laurie. David says that Laurie isn't breaking any rules—but Robert speaks up and says that she would be if she was truly in her heart "against" The Wave.

Laurie is about to argue with Robert—but realizes that in doing so, she'd undermine the sense of community **The Wave** has created amongst her peers, and be alienating poor Robert once more. Brad claps Robert on the back and tells him he's glad Robert has joined their table. Robert jokingly asks if Brad has stuck another "kick me" sign on his back, and all the others laugh.

CHAPTER 9

As **The Wave** begins to spread beyond the walls of his history classroom, Ben Ross is unsure of what to make of his little experiment. Students from other classes are now joining **The Wave** and even sitting in on Ross's history class—but despite the larger class size, the students are actually covering material quickly and efficiently. Everyone is well-prepared for class each day—but Ross is slightly perturbed by the automatic, unthinking answers his students spit back without any questioning or analysis. Even though the students are doing their homework more often, their answers are short and rote, devoid of thoughtfulness or personality.

Ben Ross introduces an element of The Wave that he knows will appeal to his students—the idea of total equality. Ross isn't blind to the social stratifications at Gordon, and in suggesting that no one should be more popular or more worthy than anyone else, he's galvanizing a large part of the student body in pursuit of egalitarianism and the erasure of individual glory.



This passage makes it clear that students like Robert, who have the most to gain from The Wave, are in danger of taking its mission too seriously for fear for sliding back into the school's old ways. Robert is enjoying feeling like a part of a group, and is willing to do anything to keep that feeling going—even if it means turning against any of his newfound "friends" who speak out against The Wave.



Laurie doesn't want to rock the boat or appear to be against her other classmates. She also feels a lot of empathy for Robert, and wants him to enjoy his newfound sense of belonging. Laurie is willing to go along with The Wave in order to keep things nice and simple among her friend group—for now, at least.



Ben Ross's great mission as a teacher is to get his students to think critically about what they're learning, and examine the place the lessons of history have in their present day-lives. The Wave has organized and galvanized his students—but it's also made them into automatons who value unthinking uniformity over critical, individualized thought.



As Ross asks some of his students what they like most about **The Wave**, he is pleased to hear that the experiment has essentially erased social cliques and helped the students feel like they are "all equal." He dreams of the possibilities The Wave could create, and envisions an article about himself in *Time* magazine lauding him for his advancements in education and discipline.

During a staff meeting of the *Grapevine*, Laurie tells her writers that there are not enough stories for the upcoming issue, which is due out this week. Laurie urges her staff to come up with some more ideas for stories, and Carl suggests writing about **The Wave**—the "biggest story" in school lately. Laurie is nervous about writing about The Wave, as the thought of doing so gives her a "creepy" feeling. Nevertheless, she urges her student reporters to gather as much information as they can about The Wave—and find out what Gordon students are really saying about the experiment.

That night, Laurie is doing homework in her room when her mother comes in to talk to her. Mrs. Saunders sits on Laurie's bed and tells her that she ran into Robert Billings's mother at the supermarket earlier—and was surprised to hear that Robert has been transformed by **The Wave**. Mrs. Saunders says she doesn't trust something that could create such a drastic change, and admits she's worried that The Wave sounds a little bit like a cult. Laurie says she's feeling more and more skeptical of The Wave, but believes it is just a "fad" that will pass.

Mrs. Saunders points out that she's heard there is a **Wave** rally before the upcoming football game at which two hundred new Wave members will be "formally indoctrinate[d]." Laurie urges her mother not to be too "paranoid"—The Wave is just a game, and Mr. Ross is a good teacher who would never let his students get out of hand. Laurie admits that she doesn't know why her closest friends like David and Amy would get swept up in something so immature—but begs her mother not to blow things out of proportion. As Mrs. Saunders leaves her room, however, Laurie wonders if The Wave really is "just a fad." Ben Ross, time and time again, nudges aside his personal fears and misgivings about his own experiment by imagining the individual glory and success he stands to achieve if The Wave works out the way he wants it to. Ross prioritizes himself over his students' wellbeing in these moments.



Laurie is testing the waters with regard to speaking out publicly against The Wave. She doesn't yet know what the movement really is—only that it rubs her the wrong way, and seems too powerful for its own good. Laurie isn't ready to take a stand yet—but this passage shows that she and several other Gordon High students haven't renounced their capacity for individual, critical thought.



This passage again deals with how susceptible outsiders like Robert are to movements that flatten individuality and focus on the group. Robert feels accepted for the first time—but the sense of happiness he feels is an illusion, and the circumstances that have allowed him to be included are false and even dangerous.



Laurie's misgivings about The Wave increase seemingly by the hour. Her "worrywart" mother's opinions meant less to her just a couple of days ago—but now, as she sees the effect The Wave is having, she realizes that her mother's fears about the Gordon High students' loss of individuality might be more valid than she thought.



CHAPTER 10

The next day at school, Ben Ross is summoned to a meeting in Principal Owens's office. On the way down the hall, over a dozen students give him the **Wave** salute. Ross is nervous that Owens will urge him to stop The Wave—but admits that if that's what happens in the meeting, he'll feel "some relief." He can't believe how big The Wave has gotten in such a short span of time. Even though students like Robert Billings have been positively impacted by The Wave, Ross is nervous about his own involvement in the experiment—he is worried about getting too "carried away."

In the meeting with the "towering" and formidable but nonetheless genial Principal Owens, Owens asks Ross to tell him some more about the experiment that has the whole school "in a tizzy." Ross explains **The Wave** to Owens, who regards the experiment as "unusual." Ross assures Owens that there have been no complaints, but Owens remains uncertain about The Wave's use of mottos and salutes. Still, Owens admits that even Coach Schiller has credited The Wave with turning the football team's attitudes around.

Owens reminds Ross that "there are limits" to classroom experiments like this, and Ross assures Owens that he won't let **The Wave** go too far or get out of hand. Owens tells Ross to be careful with his young and impressionable students—but says that because Ross has never given Owens a reason to doubt him before, he has the go-ahead to continue with The Wave. Ross is getting nervous about The Wave—and though he doesn't want to be reprimanded by his boss or have his teaching methods questioned, there's a part of him that wants to surrender responsibility for The Wave and the ways in which it's changing the atmosphere of Gordon High.



This passage shows that Owens is willing to risk some controversy for the success of the struggling football team. He knows that Ross's methods are unconventional—but if they help his school, and himself by proxy, look better in the eyes of the community, he's happy to be along for the ride.



Owens retains a bit of skepticism—and gives Ross a clear, fair warning about how fragile and susceptible young people's minds can be. Ross insists he already knows this, and is committed to conducting the experiment safely—but he will soon find himself pushing his own experiment to the very "limits" Owens is speaking of.



CHAPTER 11

The next morning, Laurie finds a plain envelope slid under the door of the *Grapevine* office. Inside is a handwritten story and a note—the note says that the story enclosed has been written anonymously. The title of the story is "Welcome to the Wave—or Else," and it details the experience of a Gordon High junior who was recently bullied by a senior who wanted him to join **The Wave**. The student is concerned by how many of his friends have been coerced into joining—and by Wave members' threats that soon, it will be "too late" for non-members. Laurie is deeply concerned by the story.

Laurie has been worried that she's all alone in her fears about The Wave—this story, though, shows her that she's not. The fact that it's written anonymously tells her that people are scared of The Wave—another reason Laurie believes it needs to be stopped before it threatens the safety and comfort of any more students.



On the day of the **Wave** rally and the football game, Ben Ross watches as some students put up a large Wave banner in the hall. Further down the hall, Brad and Eric are passing out Wave pamphlets and shouting the Wave motto at passing students. Ross feels nervous and overwhelmed by the students' "untethered energy." As he continues down the hall, he notices that Robert Billings is following him. When he asks Robert what he's doing, Robert explains he has appointed himself Ross's "bodyguard." Ross is shocked by how The Wave has "taken on a life of its own"—but nonetheless consents to Robert being his bodyguard. Ross reasons that having one will help maintain the "image" of Ross as the Wave's leader—and the only person, perhaps, who can keep the movement in check. Just as Laurie is beginning to realize how dangerous The Wave might become, Ben Ross is concerned by the militaristic bent things are taking on. He wanted to teach his students about discipline, community, and action—but for all his wife's jokes about having created a "monster," he's starting to realize that Christy's worst fears about The Wave could actually be true.



CHAPTER 12

As the **Wave** rally approaches, Laurie stands at her locker, feeling increasingly uncertain about whether or not she wants to attend. Something deep inside her is anxious about The Wave. Laurie is beginning to realize that there are people in school who are actually afraid of The Wave and its members. Laurie is snapped from her reverie as she notices a fight erupting on the quad—Brian Ammon is fighting another boy, and as a teacher separates them, Brian shouts out The Wave motto.

David comes up to Laurie and explains that Brian was fighting another football player named Deutsch—a "jerk" who has refused to join **The Wave**. David asks Laurie to follow him to the rally, but Laurie says she's not going—she thinks the school is taking The Wave too seriously. David retorts that Laurie is the one who isn't taking The Wave seriously enough. She has always been popular and a natural leader, David says, and if she joins The Wave, many others will. Laurie says that students need to make up their own minds about joining The Wave.

David says that **The Wave** is important because it makes everyone equal, but Laurie claims that he's too idealistic, and is creating a "utopian Wave society" in his head. Laurie says that there will "always be a few people" who don't want to join—and that's all right. David nastily retorts that Laurie is against The Wave because it means she's "not special anymore." The two of them continue angrily sniping at one another until David stalks off towards the gym. As he does, Laurie realizes just how "out of control" everyone is. In this passage, as Laurie questions her own instincts about The Wave, she witnesses an incident of Wave-related violence—and realizes that the voice inside her head has been right all along.



David and Laurie continue to argue about The Wave. Laurie is nervous about joining The Wave and renouncing her individuality, but David accuses her of holding her social capital back and damaging The Wave in doing so. This shows that David doesn't care about individuality in the face of the greater good, while Laurie is desperate to maintain her sense of self.



When Laurie refuses to join The Wave and tries to confide her fears in David, he reacts with cruelty and verbal violence. He wants to break Laurie down and shame her for her individuality—a hallmark of fascistic thought and an important part of The Wave's success.



During the rally, Laurie hides out in the *Grapevine* office. About halfway through, Alex comes into the office, denigrating **The Wave** rally as a militaristic freak show. Laurie agrees with him. Soon, Carl comes into the room too, and the three of them discuss putting out a new issue of *The Grapevine*—one that exposes The Wave for what it really is. Laurie tells the boys to come to an "emergency" meeting at her house that Sunday to plan the issue.

That night, Laurie hides up in her room, having told her parents about her fight with David but feeling too embarrassed to discuss it in-depth. Mr. Saunders knocks on Laurie's door and comes in to talk to her. He tells her he's concerned about **The Wave** not just because it's the source of her and David's fight—but because he heard a story on the golf course about a Jewish boy being beaten up at Gordon High for refusing to attend the Wave rally. Laurie is shocked, and tells her father that she's more determined than ever to use the school paper to expose the dark side of The Wave.

CHAPTER 13

On Saturday, Laurie heads to school to go to the football game—and to talk to Amy about what's going on. Laurie spots Amy in the stands and hurries up to talk to her, but halfway up the bleachers, Brad stops her—and orders her to do the **Wave** salute before she goes up any further. Laurie is shocked, but Brad tells her the members of The Wave decided that all attendees at the game had to give the salute. Laurie tells Brad his demand is "ridiculous," and Brad shyly lets her go up without giving the salute. Laurie, however, feels so sickened that she doesn't want to go up anymore.

Laurie asks Brad if he's being made to feel afraid by someone. Brad retorts that he isn't afraid of anyone, and urges Laurie to "shut [her] mouth." He tells her that her absence at the **Wave** rally the day before was noticed. Laurie, shocked, leaves the game as the Gordon team scores a touchdown.

Sunday afternoon, Laurie and some of the *Grapevine* staff work together and put together a special edition of the paper focusing on **The Wave**. A few staff members are missing, and Carl suggests that they don't want to "incur the wrath of The Wave." The paper focuses on the anonymous story submitted to Laurie, and a report on the Jewish boy who'd been beaten up a few days ago. It's still unclear whether the incident was directly Wave-related or not—but the boy's parents are, according to Carl, planning a visit to the principal's office on Monday. Laurie is relieved to find that though Amy, David, and her other friends have fallen prey to The Wave's influence, there are still some likeminded individuals left at Gordon High who are willing to resist The Wave's pull.



Laurie witnessed one incident of Wave-related violence at school with her own two eyes. Now, hearing about another—one that seems to target a Jewish individual, bringing The Wave one step closer to true Nazism—Laurie realizes that something at the heart of The Wave is very, very wrong. Rather than renounce her individuality to fit in, she decides to wield it even more proudly, and use it to try to stop The Wave's advancement.



Laurie is realizing just how completely The Wave has taken over even social activities at Gordon High. There's no part of student life that hasn't been infiltrated by The Wave—and while Laurie says its influence is "ridiculous," there's a part of her that's genuinely upset and even scared.



Though Brad seems ambivalent at best about his own adherence to Wave rules, he's going along with his orders anyway—and even making coded threats to Laurie about her lack of involvement.



Laurie knows that the only weapon against a machine like The Wave is the truth—and she attempts to harness the solidarity and strength of her own staff even without Wave-like discipline. The paper staff's commitment to telling these stories shows that power and strength through discipline and community are possible—even when not weaponized in the form of slogans, salutes, and coercive rules.



determined to retain and even celebrate her individuality.

Laurie is nervous to speak out alone against The Wave, but with the support of her friends and her own belief in doing what's right, she's

Laurie herself is writing an editorial for the paper's special issue condemning **The Wave** as "a dangerous and mindless movement." She calls for a stop to The Wave in her article, even though she knows her voice may draw unwanted attention. Carl and Alex help Laurie put everything together, and then volunteer to take the paper to the printer. They assure Laurie that the paper will be ready by lunchtime the next day.

CHAPTER 14

On Monday morning, Laurie is determined to track down Amy and talk to her about **The Wave**. She wants to change her best friend's mind, and warn her about how dangerous The Wave is becoming. When she finds Amy in the library and gives her an advance copy of the *Grapevine* issue, however, Amy accuses Laurie of retaliating against The Wave because of her fight with David. Laurie begs Amy to see that The Wave is hurting people, even as they go along with it "like a flock of sheep."

Amy confesses that she likes **The Wave** "because it means that nobody is better than anyone else for once," and admits how competitive she's always felt towards Laurie. Amy accuses Laurie of resisting The Wave because it means Laurie isn't the "princess" of Gordon High anymore, then gathers her things and hurriedly walks away.

The new issue of *The Grapevine* sets Gordon High abuzz, and many rumors begin circulating throughout the day. Stories of people abusing **The Wave**'s power begin to come out, and students gossip about the stream of parents who have been coming and going from Principal Owens's office all morning.

As Ben Ross reads his copy of the paper, he gets a terrible headache—he feels things are spinning out of control. He is disturbed by the assault on the Jewish boy, and by the football team's staggering loss over the weekend—in spite of their reliance on **The Wave**. When Ross overhears Norm Schiller and another teacher talking about how Ross has "brainwashed" the whole school, he becomes panicky and worried that he has "accidentally slipped into the role of a dictator." As Laurie at last confronts Amy about how quickly she's succumbed to The Wave's doctrine, she begins to see that her friend has calculated reasons for joining the movement. Amy can see what's wrong—she just doesn't care.



Amy likes The Wave because it satiates her own insecurities—especially about her competitive, contentious friendship with Laurie.



The Wave is not the only thing with power over the school—the written word and the truth are still, this passage shows, able to hold sway against the tide of The Wave.



Ben Ross has had his own reservations about The Wave's power before now—but as he sees just how serious the allegations against Wave members are and how threatened many students feel, as well as how his colleagues look down on him, he understands that things have gotten way out of hand and must be reigned back in.



David, Robert, and several other students read the new issue of *The Grapevine* together. David is concerned by the allegations contained in the paper—but Robert staunchly claims that Laurie "can't be allowed to say [such] things." Eric worries that the articles in the paper will undermine **The Wave**, and Robert reiterates that Laurie is a "threat" that "must be stopped." Brian tells Robert that he and David will talk some sense into Laurie, and then leads David away from the rest of the group. David tells Brian he's worried by Robert's language, but Brian suggests that Robert has a point. He tells David that the two of them should wait for Laurie after school and talk to her. David reluctantly agrees to the plan.

Even though David seems to have some reservations about confronting Laurie, he allows himself to be pressured into action by the fanatical adherents of The Wave's doctrine. This passage shows how fascistic movements single out—and attempt to root out—any individuals who speak against them.



CHAPTER 15

Christy Ross hurries home from school to see Ben, having heard rumors about the events of the school day. She finds him at the kitchen table reading a book, insisting that he is too busy to talk and needs to prepare for tomorrow. Christy says she needs to talk to Ben about what's happening at school—and how **The Wave** is disrupting the entire student body. Ben says no one understands what he's trying to do, and that most people just think he's on some "ego trip." Christy suggests that Ben's critics might be right, but Ben retorts that he has created this beast, and he must be the one to stop it in his own time.

Ben is clearly upset with himself—he knows that as the children's teacher, he has a responsibility to them, and has pushed them too far. At the same time, he tells Christy, he has to push them a little further still—until they get the true point of the experiment and learn "the most important lesson of their lives." Christy tells Ben that Principal Owens wants to see him first thing in the morning, and warns him to be prepared for what might come.

The whole *Grapevine* staff stays late to celebrate their issue's success, and Laurie is the last one to leave—she cleans up her slacker classmates' mess before heading out of the office. By the time Laurie leaves, it is dark outside, and as she walks through the abandoned halls of school, she gets a creepy feeling. As she heads to her locker to drop off some books, she is stopped in her tracks by the sight of the word "ENEMY" painted across her locker in red letters. Laurie turns around and hurries for the exit, rushing out the door into the evening air.

Even Christy is losing faith in her husband's mission. She realizes how out of control The Wave has become—and, given her husband's obsessive tendencies, she's not certain that he has a handle on things any longer. As an educator, Christy understands the sacred contract between teachers and their students—and fears Ben has broken his.



Ben insists that he is aware of what he's doing, and knows that because he's gotten the students into hot water, he has an even greater responsibility to getting them out of it the right way.



Things at Gordon High are getting more and more unsafe for Laurie—she's already been the subject of gossip and contention, and is now being clearly painted as an "enemy" by the entirety of The Wave. Laurie is rightfully scared, and desperate to protect herself.



David and Brian are parked outside the school, waiting for Laurie to emerge. As they catch sight of her coming outside, Brian urges David to go talk to her, and David gets out of Brian's van. He approaches Laurie and asks for a word with her. She coldly asks him where his "troops" are, and asks him to leave her alone. David pursues Laurie, however, telling her that she needs to stop writing about **The Wave**. He insists that The Wave could still "work" and transform the school into a better place, but when she refuses to listen to her, David grabs her arm.

Laurie struggles against David, shouting that she'll write whatever she wants. David is "overcome with anger," and vows that he and the rest of **The Wave** will "stop" Laurie. Laurie cries out that she hates David, and everyone in The Wave. David throws Laurie down onto the ground, then instantly recoils at what he has done. He crouches down, wraps Laurie in his arms, and apologizes profusely. David can't believe what he's done to Laurie, and feels himself come out of his "trance."

Meanwhile, at Ben Ross's house, Christy approaches him and begs him to end **The Wave** tomorrow. She tells him that if he doesn't end it, Owens will—and the experiment will have been a failure. Ben tells Christy that he can't possibly come up with a way to end it tomorrow, but at the same time he admits to himself that The Wave is quickly headed for "disaster." As its leader, he has resisted admitting The Wave's danger because he has enjoyed the "fleeting moments of power" it has given him.

Ben realizes that Christy is right: he must do something "abrupt and final," and hope that his students will follow him as their leader. Struck by a sudden surge of inspiration, Ben tells Christy he has an idea. Christy heads to bed while Ben stays up planning. It is late when Ben decides to head to bed, but he's stopped by a knock at the front door. He is shocked to find Laurie and David standing outside, begging to talk to him.

Laurie and David tell Mr. Ross that they believe **The Wave** must be stopped. Laurie tells Ross how scared the nonmembers at school are, and Ross realizes that the experiment has perhaps actually been "too much of a success." Ben's students, he realizes, have done the very thing they believed no "rational person" could do: they have gone along with "fascist" ideology and behavior. David has sacrificed his friendships, personal beliefs, and individuality in the name of The Wave. When confronted with the idea that it's flawed or even corrupt, he's unable to renounce his own delusions about it—and this passage shows that he will desperately resort to intimidation and violence to maintain his new ideals.



As David commits an act of violence in the name of The Wave, he realizes just how low he's stooped and how much he's lost—and how The Wave has spurred him to cruelty. He sees The Wave for the first time for what it truly is—a re-creation of the regimented hivemind of the Nazi Party, an experiment in the power of groupthink and coercion.



Ben is reluctant to end The Wave abruptly, even though he realizes it must be stopped. He wants to finish the experiment on his own terms so as not to further confuse—or anger—his students. At the same time, he is aware of the ways in which he's fallen prey to his own ideology, a fact that convinces him more than anything that The Wave must come to an end sooner rather than later.



Though stuck between a rock and a hard place, Ben is struck with a flash of a vision as to how to stop The Wave before it gets even more powerful—while still honoring his commitment to his students' educations.



When even Ben's students come to him frightened, concerned, and desperate, the full scope of The Wave hits him. Just two students have learned The Wave's lessons: all the others have fallen prey to its undertow.



Laurie and David beg Mr. Ross to stop The Wave. He assures them that he will, but he doesn't reveal his plan for doing so to them. Ross believes that The Wave members must choose to stop themselves-after he presents them with a key piece of "evidence." Ross commends David and Laurie for having learned the lesson their classmates have not. He asks them to trust him to end the experiment in his own way, and they reluctantly do so.

CHAPTER 16

The next morning, Ben Ross sits through an uncomfortable, contentious meeting with Principal Owens. Owens states that teachers and parents alike are complaining to him nonstop about The Wave, and he wants it stopped immediately. Ross admits that The Wave has gone too far because of his own mistakes, and apologizes for "experiment[ing] with human beings." Ross urges Owens to give him the rest of the day to make sure that the two-hundred-plus Wave members learn the lesson that Ross set out to teach them in the first place. Ross outlines his plan for Owens, and Owens agrees to give Ross until the end of the day-but warns Ross that if his plan doesn't work, he'll have to resign.

That day in history class, Ross announces to his students that there is a "special announcement" concerning The Wave. At five o'clock, he says, there will be a members-only Wave rally-he tells his students that The Wave has actually been a national experiment, and the leader of The Wave is going to talk to them via television to commend them on what they've accomplished in just a few short days and announce a "National Wave Youth Movement." As David and Laurie listen to Mr. Ross's speech, they believe he has gone back on his promise to end The Wave, and try to warn the other students about what's happening.

Mr. Ross orders Robert to take over class while he escorts Laurie and David to the principal's office for disrupting class. Once Ross has Laurie and David alone in the hall, he reminds them of the promise they made to trust him. Laurie says they have no reason to trust him-he is the one who started **The** Wave in the first place. Ross is forced to admit that Laurie is right.

Ben has lost the confidence of his colleagues, his wife, and even his students, and must resort to begging and bartering as he tries to buy himself enough time to end things on his own terms.





Ross is fully aware of the gravity of what he's done, and he regrets his own role in allowing the experiment to get out of hand. At the same time, he understands how serious things are now, and sees that he cannot leave the resolution of the project to chance-he needs to steer the ship once again and make sure his students learn the right lesson from The Wave. They must understand how destructive it is for themselves-not have a system that's given them "strength" and solidarity stripped away at the height of its power.



David and Laurie trusted Mr. Ross for a time-but they have had their worlds so destabilized by The Wave and have watched so many of their classmates betray one another that they no longer believe anything Mr. Ross says.



When Ross is confronted by his saddened, irate students, he is brought face-to-face with his own selfishness and pride—and with his role in making The Wave as violent, regimented, and dangerous as it currently is.



David and Laurie wait to see Principal Owens, sure that they've been hoodwinked by Mr. Ross. When they meet with Owens, though, and beg him to stop **The Wave** himself, he promises that everything will turn out all right. After meeting with Owens, Laurie and David commiserate over how the entire school has fallen prey to The Wave. The two of them decide to leave for the day. While sitting in a park and relaxing, Laurie's thoughts turn to the "leader" of The Wave, and what horrible things he might instruct the Gordon High Wave members to do. Laurie tells David that they need to return to school for the rally—history is repeating itself, and she wants to look into the face of the "leader" who's making it happen. David reluctantly agrees to follow Laurie back to school. David and Laurie no longer trust the authority figures at their high school—because of The Wave, they see everyone as a potential enemy or threat to their individuality. Laurie and David are the only two who have truly learned The Wave's lesson—and believing that things are about to get worse, they become determined to stop it from completely overtaking everything they know.



CHAPTER 17

As Ben Ross heads into the auditorium for the **Wave** rally, he is overwhelmed by how regimented and organized the students have become, and how quickly they've gotten things together for the impromptu rally. Before Ross takes the stage, Christy gives him a quick good-luck kiss, and assures him that things will all go according to plan. Robert approaches Mr. Ross to tell him that he has stationed "guards" at all of the doors. Ross thanks Robert and takes the stage as the crowd goes wild, bursting into the Wave motto and the Wave salute. The second Ross holds out his arms for silence, the entire auditorium grows hushed.

Ross indicates the TV on the center of the stage, and tells the students that in just a few moments, their "leader" will address them. Robert turns on the television, which glows bright blue. Meanwhile, Laurie and David run around the sides of the auditorium, trying to get past the locked doors.

As the students grow more and more restless waiting for their "leader" to appear on the screen, Ross realizes how frightening it is that the students would blindly put their faith in anyone who would decide things for them. Ben hopes that after today, they'll "question thoroughly" the world around them. When one student stands up and cries out that there is no leader, Ross replies that there is indeed—and on his cue, Carl pulls aside a curtain to reveal a large movie screen, while in the projection room, Alex flicks on the projector—casting a huge picture of Adolf Hitler onto the screen. Ross is nervous as the rally begins—and aware that while his power at this moment seems to be absolute and unquestioned, things could still go terribly wrong, given the power The Wave has taken on amongst the students.



Ross's plan is in motion, and Laurie and David are convinced that they must stop him from seizing even greater control over the school.



Ross brings The Wave to a decisive end by revealing to the students that while they're not yet committing atrocities on the scale of the Nazi Party's, they've fallen prey to the same unquestioning groupthink, desire to obliterate the individual, and fealty to any leader who allows them to continue amassing power.



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Ross explains to the shocked students that there is no National Wave Youth Movement—but if there were, Hitler would be its leader. Ross explains to his students that in joining **The Wave**, they "traded [their] freedom" for hopes of equality, but then "turned [their] equality into superiority over non-Wave members." Ross tells his students that he hopes they will learn from The Wave rather than deny it—and, in the future, will accept responsibility for their actions, question authority, and "never, ever allow a group's will to usurp [their] individual rights."

Ross apologizes to the shocked students for letting **The Wave** get out of hand. He says he hopes, however, they can all share the lessons of The Wave for the rest of their lives. As the stunned students begin to exit the auditorium—some tearfully—they leave their membership cards behind. Laurie, David, Eric, and Brian reunite and discuss the gravity of what they've all been through. Mr. Ross joins them, and apologizes once again for putting them through such a difficult time.

As Laurie and the others file out of the auditorium, Ben Ross breathes a sigh of relief—**The Wave** is over, and he can begin to repair his students' faith in him. Ross himself is about to leave the auditorium when he notices one student left behind—Robert is still staring in disbelief at the television set and sobbing. Ross approaches Robert and comforts him—then offers to take him out for a bite to eat, so that they can talk "some things" through. Ross must confront his students with the fact that in spite of their sadness over the Holocaust, they allowed history to repeat itself—albeit in miniature—in the very halls of their high school. This time, he wants them to hew closely to the lessons of history and the past rather than carelessly forget them.



Ross acknowledges his responsibility in The Wave's power, and apologizes genuinely to his students for allowing his own hubris and curiosity to endanger their safety, their individuality, and their friendships.



Robert was the one student whose life was given an entirely new purpose because of The Wave—and Ross knows that out of all his students, he owes the most sincere explanation and apology to him. He wants to make sure that the fragile Robert understands what has happened—and has the strength to move forward.



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