

Name: _____ Class: _____

The Third Wave

By CommonLit Staff
From Wikipedia • 2015

In 1967, history teacher Ron Jones conducted a social experiment with the students in his class at Cubberley High School in Palo Alto, CA. He was the only person who knew it was an experiment, and by the fifth day, it had gotten out of control. As you read, take notes in the margins on the experiment and what might have appealed to the students to join the Third Wave.

Background

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



"Reichsgründungsfeier, Schulklasse" is licensed under .

The Experiment

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

1. **Authoritarian** (*adjective*): severe, controlling, all-powerful
2. **Preface** (*verb*): to begin

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

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

- [5] At the end of the week, instead of a televised address of their leader, the students were presented with a blank channel. After a few minutes of waiting, Jones announced that they had been a part of an experiment to demonstrate how people willingly create a sense of superiority over others, and how this can lead people to justify doing horrible things in the name of the state's honor.

Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: How did Ron Jones frame the goal of the Third Wave to his students? [RI.6]
 - A. Jones stated that the goal of the Third Wave was to eliminate democracy, but because he clearly framed it as an experiment, more students willingly joined.
 - B. Jones framed it so the Third Wave's goal was to create unity (throughout the school), even though this was done through exclusionary and authoritative means.
 - C. The Third Wave's goal was to eliminate democracy; Jones justified this by stating that democracy was weak because it focused on the individual rather than the community.
 - D. The Third Wave's goal was to create order in class through discipline and authority, however, Jones framed it as strengthening students' grades and participation in class.

2. PART B: Which of the following quotes best supports the answer to Part A? [RI.1]
 - A. "History teacher Ron Jones, finding himself unable to explain to his students how people throughout history followed the crowd even when terrible things were happening, decided to demonstrate it to his students through an experiment." (Paragraph 1)
 - B. "Jones announced that he was starting a movement aimed to eliminate democracy.... One of the central points of this movement was that democracy's main weakness is that it favors the individual over the whole community." (Paragraph 1)
 - C. "Jones emphasized this main point of the movement when he created this catchy motto: "Strength through discipline, strength through community, strength through action, strength through pride.'" (Paragraph 1)
 - D. "He then proceeded to enforce strict classroom discipline by emerging as an authoritarian figure. This resulted in dramatic improvements to the efficiency, or orderliness, of the class." (Paragraph 2)

3. Which of the following best describes the appeal of the Third Wave's motto? [RI.4]
 - A. The simplicity of the motto is what likely appealed most to the students, as they cared little about the class anyway.
 - B. The repetition is what likely appealed to students because it resembles a chant, and this made the students feel more important.
 - C. The motto was likely appealing to students because it focused on pride and on the strength of the individual.
 - D. The repetition is not only audibly appealing, but the emphasis on "strength" suggests one would become stronger through the movement.

4. How is the Third Wave salute a key detail in the experiment and in the text's central ideas? [RI.5] [RI.2]
- A. The salute resembled that of the Nazi regime; Jones did this because he wanted to see if students were experts on the Nazis.
 - B. The students were required to salute each other outside of class, and this was the key reason why more kids eventually joined the Third Wave.
 - C. The students were required to salute each other; even without the authority figure present (Jones), using a gesture similar to the Nazi salute, they still followed orders and the crowd.
 - D. The salute resembled that of the Nazi regime; Jones designed it like that as an interactive section to his history lessons, showing that the education can always be applied to real life.

5. Summarize how the Third Wave developed over such a short period of time and why the experiment was ended. [RI.3] [RI.2]
