



Presents

GlenVIEWINGS: Kate the Great *The Reader*

"Have you spent much time thinking about the past?" - Michael



The Reader centers on the struggle of a younger generation to comprehend the actions of their elders during World War II -- how to empathize with them while also condemning their crimes. These complex issues infuse the story of an affair between a young boy and a mature woman with a secret.

Director Stephen Daldry's biggest change from Bernhard Schlink's successful novel is to cut between many time periods, adding to the story's emotional pull by fracturing it through the memory of Michael, the young boy who is seduced into entering into a fulfilling physical relationship, but is unprepared for the devastating emotional repercussions it will have on his psyche.

After five previous nominations, Kate Winslet was rewarded with the 2009 Best Actress Oscar for her portrayal of Hanna Schmitz. She gives a subtle, physical performance, fleshing out a character whose thoughts remain essentially unknown to the audience. In the early scenes, her mechanical movements and imperious manner, spiked with sudden flashes of nervous vulnerability, wordlessly conveys the psychology of this haunted, yet manipulative human riddle. As the reasons for her puzzling behavior are later revealed, Winslet aptly conveys Hanna's defiance, and shame, as she condemns herself in the courtroom.

Ultimately, the film is a thoughtful and multifaceted meditation on the concept of the "banality of evil," as embodied by Hanna's unthinking involvement in one of history's greatest crimes. To its credit, it leaves the judgment of those actions open to the viewer.

Did you know?

- Nicole Kidman, Marion Cotillard, and Naomi Watts were among the actresses considered for the role before Kate Winslet accepted.
- This was Michael Kross' first English-language role. He studied for seven hours a day with a dialect coach in preparation, also learning ancient Greek and Latin to fit the character.
- The concentration camp scenes were filmed at the Majdanek concentration camp, in Lublin, Poland. This camp was functional at the time of its liberation by the Soviets in 1944.



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"Well... what would you have done?" - Hanna

Things to Explore

- Who is 'the reader' in the story?
- What is the significance of the age difference between Hanna and Michael in relation to the film's themes?
- Which character in *The Reader* do you feel most sympathy for?
- How problematic is Hanna's illiteracy as a metaphor for the German experience of responding to the Holocaust? Why doesn't Hanna admit to it when she has the chance?
- Bernhard Schlink's novel was criticized by some for "simplifying history by allowing its readers to identify with the perpetrators." Does the film make you feel this way?
- Why do you think Michael makes tapes for Hanna? What, if any, is the metaphorical significance of this development in their relationship?
- Is the film too faithful to the book, or not faithful enough?
- What is there to be learned about those who commit acts of evil from a story like *The Reader*?

Themes

- Secrecy
- Self-knowledge
- Literature
- Guilt and responsibility
- Sexuality
- Judgment and blame
- Memory and the impact of the past on the present
- Evil
- The Holocaust



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**"I'm not frightened. I'm not frightened of anything. The more I suffer, the more I love." -
Michael**

Library Resources

1) *The Reader*, Bernhard Schlink. A German law professor and writer of detective thrillers, Schlink became a worldwide literary sensation with *The Reader*, now a required text for anyone attempting to comprehend the Holocaust.

| Copy | Material | Location |
|-----------------|----------|-----------|
| BRD SCHLINK, B. | Book | Paperback |

2) *Eichmann in Jerusalem : a report on the banality of evil*, Hannah Arendt. Arendt's report on the trial of Nazi leader Adolf Eichmann remains a key text on not only the Holocaust, but in any attempt to understand how normal humans can become complicit in acts of atrocity.

| Copy | Material | Location |
|------------------|----------|------------------------------|
| 940.5318 Arend.H | Book | Evanston Library, Nonfiction |

3) *Holocaust : the events and their impact on real people*, Angela Wood. An ambitious and comprehensive history that examines the historical background of the Holocaust and its continued impact, and uses testimonies and photography to make its overwhelming topic more personally affecting.

| Copy | Material | Location |
|---------------|----------|------------|
| j940.5318 WOO | Book | Nonfiction |

4) *Shoah [videorecording (VHS)]*

Claude Lanzmann's mammoth 1985 documentary remains the most powerful visual and oral history of the Holocaust ever assembled, and grapples with many of the same questions of guilt and memory as *The Reader*.

| Copy | Material | Location |
|---------------------------------------|----------|-------------------|
| OVERSIZE 940.5315 SHO PARTS 1-5 VIDEO | | Oversize material |

5) *The Reader [videorecording (DVD)]*

The DVD contains extra features on the film's production, including deleted scenes, features on the film's music, make-up and production design, and a conversation between David Kross and Stephen Daldrey.

| Copy | Material | Location |
|---------|--------------|-----------------------|
| DVD ATO | DVD, Fiction | Audio-Visual - Movies |



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**"What we feel isn't important. It's utterly unimportant. The only question is what we do" -
Professor Rohl**

Online Resources

<http://thereader-movie.com/site/>

The official website for the film offers excerpts from the film, enlightening video commentaries from Stephen Daldrey, Kate Winslet and Ralph Fiennes, and provocative articles responding to criticisms of the film's handling of the Holocaust.

<http://katewinsletfan.com/>

Probably the best - certainly the most devoted and regularly updated - Kate Winslet fansite. A comprehensive source for photos, interviews, video and audio clips, and even artwork by adoring fans.

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0976051/>

The film's page at the Internet Movie Database, where it currently has a rating of 7.7 out of 10 from over 28,000 users.

<http://www.randomhouse.com/vintage/read/reader/>

The official page of the novel's publisher, with many resources and thought-provoking questions relating to the book's themes.

<http://www.discoverkate.com/>

Another Winslet fansite, with many resources relating to press and TV interviews she gave in promotion of *The Reader*.

<http://www.oscar.com/nominees/?pn=detail&nominee=Winslet%20Kate%20-%20Actress%20Leading%20Role%20Nominee>

Watch Winslet's Oscar acceptance speech and red carpet entrance here.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2008/dec/19/kate-winslet-film-the-reader-revolutionary-road>

A revealing interview with Winslet from December 2008.

<http://www.charlierose.com/view/interview/9879>

Kate Winslet, Stephen Daldry, David Hare and Michael Kross discuss the film on Charlie Rose, and in particular the concept of the "banality of evil."

<http://www.time.com/time/arts/article/0,8599,1880401-1,00.html>

A *Time* feature on Kate Winslet that covers her performance in *The Reader* in great detail.