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OFFICE OF FILM
& LITERATURE
CLASSIFICATION

Te Tari Kaitiaki Takekōwhiri, Te Kaitiaki

Introduction

The Term 1 2014 Censor for a Day events were held in Wellington at Event Cinemas Queensgate, Event Cinemas in New Plymouth, Downtown Cinema in Palmerston North and Reading Cinemas in Napier. In total 485 students and teachers from nineteen schools attended.

Censor for a Day has three key purposes:

- to provide senior Media Studies students with first-hand experience of a system they are studying at school;
- to engage with students and inform them about this system which directly impacts their day-to-day media choices and consumption; and
- to give the Classification Office insight into the opinions of key stakeholders in the classification system. High school students form a significant group in terms of cinematic film, online film and DVD audiences, and are directly affected by age-restricted film classifications in a way that adults are not.



Students were given a presentation about New Zealand's classification system by Michelle Baker, one of our Information Unit Advisors. The presentation provided students with an overview of the Films, Videos, and Publications Classification Act 1993 and the process Classification Officers ('censors') follow when classifying films, video games, and other publications.

Students were asked to evaluate the film *The Grand Budapest Hotel* using New Zealand's classification criteria.

[The presentation at the start of the day explains how the classification system works](#)

After watching the film, the students completed a classification form with the help of a Senior Classification Officer and decided on an appropriate classification. Students were then led through a discussion about how they applied the classification criteria to the film, and the reasons behind their individual classification choices. There was also opportunity for students to ask the Chief Censor and other Classification Office staff questions about the New Zealand classification system.

In order to ensure that the Classification Office performs its role effectively, it is important to be aware of the public's views on our classification decisions, and on the censorship system as a

whole. Censor for a Day is not only about teaching young people about the classification system — it's about hearing their views on the role of censorship in our society, especially as it relates to children and young people as they are generally the groups most affected by the decisions we make. As always, the views of participating students were thoughtful, constructive, and sometimes challenging. We are grateful for the chance to hear them.

The Film



The movie poster for
The Grand Budapest Hotel

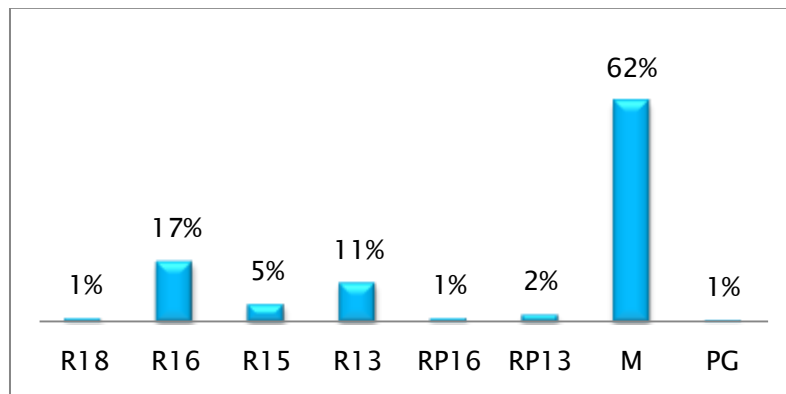
The Grand Budapest Hotel is classified M with the descriptive note 'contains violence, offensive language, sexual references and nudity'. An M classification means that the film is unrestricted — anyone can see the film — but it is recommended for mature audiences aged 16 and over.

The film tells the story of Gustave H, a legendary concierge at a famous European hotel between the wars, and Zero Moustafa, the lobby boy who becomes his most trusted friend.

The film is directed by Wes Anderson, and stars Ralph Fiennes, Adrien Brody, William Dafoe, Saoirse Ronan and Tony Revolori.

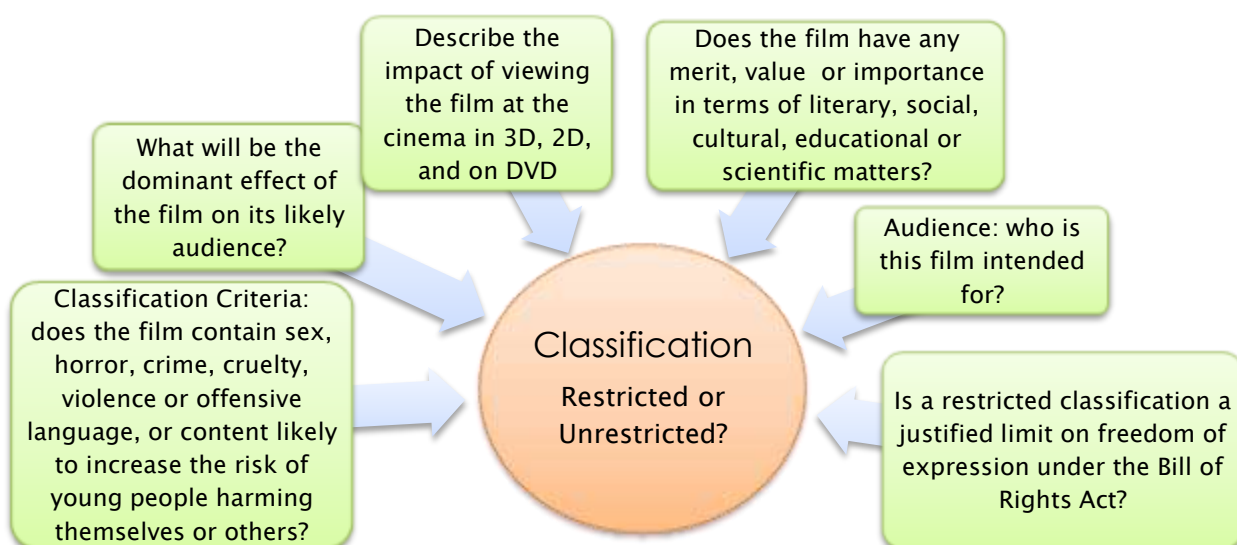
Survey Results: An Overview

Across the four events, 'M' was the classification most commonly assigned by students, with 62% recommending the film carry this unrestricted classification.



The Classification Exercise

After viewing the film, students applied the classification criteria which had been explained to them and filled out a classification form. The exercise involved students answering the following questions which relate to specific sections in the Classification Act. The students were asked to use their answers to these questions to decide on a suitable classification and descriptive note in order to prevent any likelihood of injury to the public good from the availability of the film, while balancing the right to freedom of expression provided by the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990.



Reasons for classification

The reasons students gave in order to justify their choice of a particular classification were relatively consistent across the events.

R16 – restricted to people 16 years and over

Students who classified *The Grand Budapest Hotel* R16 based their classification choice on the levels of violent and sexual content in the film. They suggested that the film was not suitable for younger audiences:

Certain violent scenes could upset/damage younger audience.

– Student from Feilding High School, Palmerston North

[R16] due to content that depicts sexual references, bad language and a small amount of violence which sometimes will only be suitable for citizens above the age of 16.

– Student from Karamu High School, Napier

R15 – restricted to people 15 years and over

Students who classified the film R15 suggested that this was the age restriction required to ensure that those viewing the film were mature enough to handle the content:

The film contained sex, violence, crime and cruelty which should make it restricted to people 15 or older. It shouldn't be R16 as it has artistic, social, and cultural merit that 15 year olds should witness.

– Student from Tawa College, Wellington region

There are quite a lot of scenes that show either nudity/sex or some sort of cruelty/violence that should not be seen by anyone younger than 15. There is also bad language and frights that I don't think are acceptable for a younger audience. 15 years and older are mature enough to see this.

– Student from New Plymouth Girls' High School

It does have some violence and crime, if it was rated M maybe little kids could see it and try to repeat. If you are over 15 I think you are mature enough to watch.

– Student from Stratford High School, New Plymouth

R13 – restricted to people 13 years and over

Students who classified the film R13 expressed concern about children seeing the film, while at the same time arguing that the film's tone meant that a higher age restriction was not necessary:

Too explicit for children - language is not suitable for younger audiences under 13. Sexual bits may be inappropriate for those under 15, but potentially okay. The violence, although largely comical, is perhaps not suitable for under 13 year olds.

— Student from Tawa College, Wellington region

Although there is violence, it is quick and fast without much reflection on it, but the humour makes the film lighter. There wouldn't be a harm to the public as the killing isn't shown, it is quick, and you don't see the dead people in great detail so people can't copy their actions.

— Student from Sacred Heart Girls' College, New Plymouth

Need to be at this age to understand use of violence, sex and cruelty in humorous way. If seen before 13, will be misunderstood and could frighten or shock younger audience due to some explicit language/scenes.

— Student from Karamu High School, Napier

RP16 and RP13 – restricted to people 16/13 and over unless accompanied by a parent or guardian

Students who assigned these classifications highlighted the important role that parents and guardians can have in helping younger people understand unfamiliar or stronger content in films:

[RP16 because] I was hovering between R16-R13 but thought that some children would be able to enjoy this film with parental guidance. The nudity, violence and offensive language is short and not highlighted enough to be truly offensive.

— Student from Tawa College, Wellington region

[RP13 because] The overall impact of the film is not injurious to the public but some of the scenes with swearing, violence, and sex would be harmful to a younger audience. It would need to be moderated by an adult to judge whether younger viewers are mature enough to be unaffected by the content.

— Student from Paraparaumu College, Wellington region

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[RP13 because] *This way it is the parents decision whether the child watches the sex scenes and offensive language. The content may not be too bad but people may take it in a different way to others.*

— Student from Central Hawkes Bay College, Napier

M – suitable for mature audiences aged 16 and over (unrestricted)

Students who assigned *The Grand Budapest Hotel* an unrestricted classification of M said that while the film dealt with matters of sex, violence and crime, these things were depicted in a way that did not warrant a restriction. They also felt that the film was likely to only appeal to mature audiences.

Despite the fact that there are all of the factors of sex, horror, violence, crime, cruelty and offensive language I think that they are kept to a minimal amount and are used in the movie in places for impact. I think in today's society these factors are very common in today's younger generation so it's not as big of a deal.

— Student from Upper Hutt College, Wellington region

The light-hearted tone provides momentum to the 'fictional' element of the narrative, so it is less injurious to the public good as it is not considered realistic.

— Student from Newlands College, Wellington region

The film is humorous, artistic and well made. Because of the violence, offensive language and crime content in the film I was unsure whether to rate the film R13 or M. I settled on M as a result of the Bill of Rights.

— Student from New Plymouth Girls' High School

I don't think there's any content that people under the age of 13, etc, shouldn't see or haven't seen before. There's nothing too intense but needs someone mature to understand the humorous language and implied jokes.

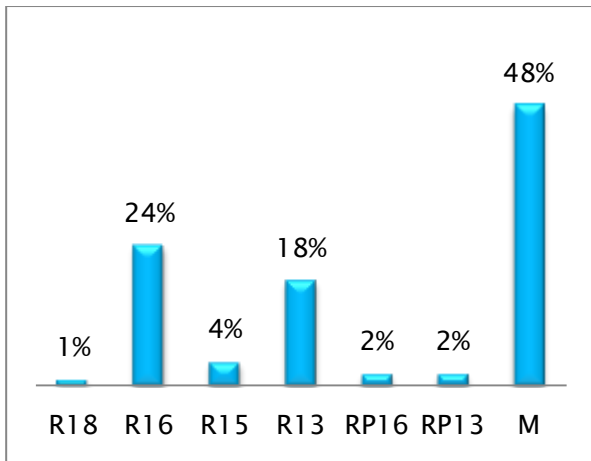
— Student from Feilding High School, Palmerston North

Based on the levels of offensive language, crime and violence the film should be viewed by a mature audience with a more comprehensive understanding of the themes and moral ideas portrayed throughout the film.

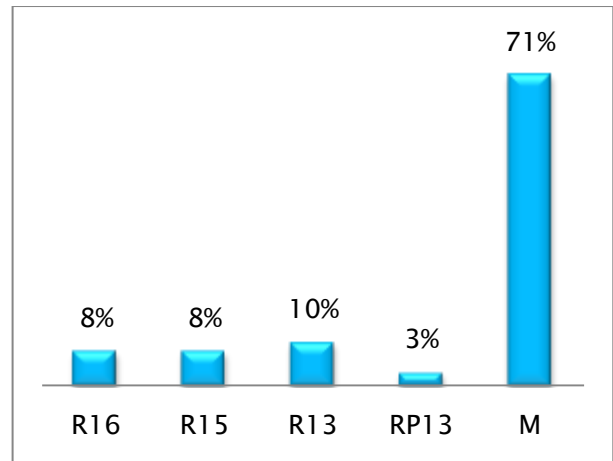
— Student from St Joseph's Maori Girls College, Napier



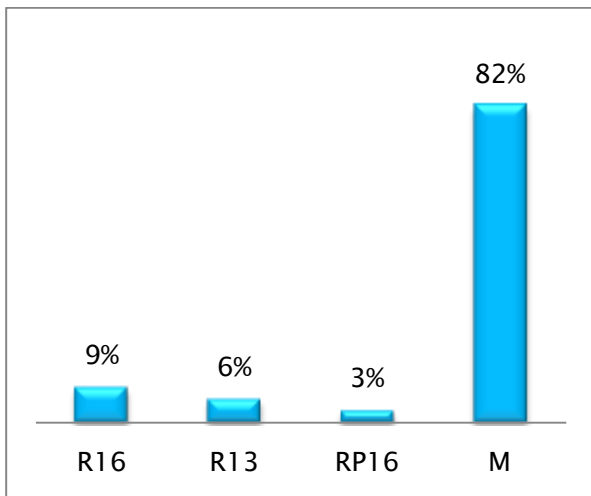
Classification by event



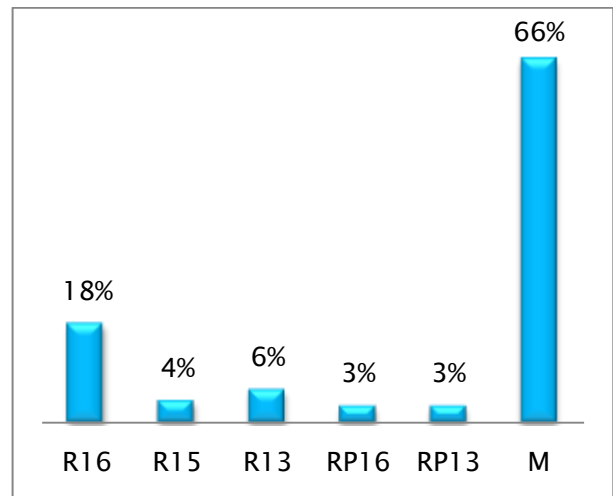
Wellington region classifications



New Plymouth classifications

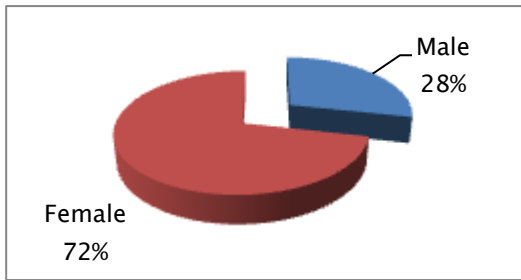


Palmerston North classifications



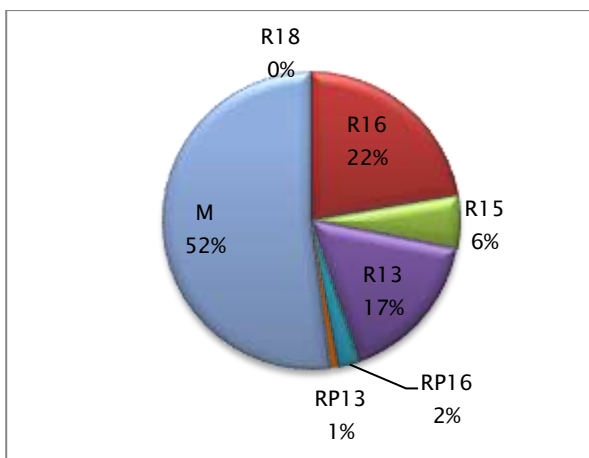
Napier classifications

Classification by gender

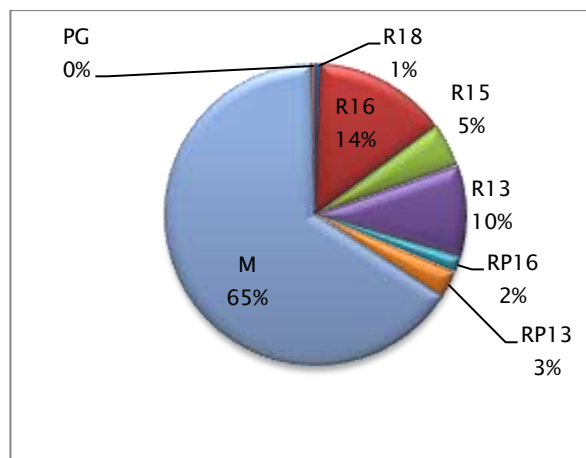


There were significantly more female than male students at the Term 1 Censor for a Day events.

Overall, male and female students' classification decisions were similar, though female students were more likely to assign the film an unrestricted classification.

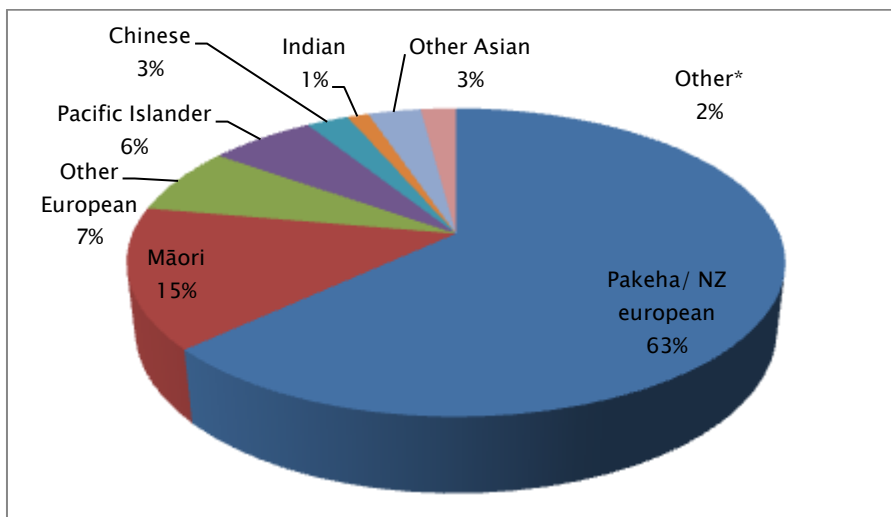


Classifications assigned by male students



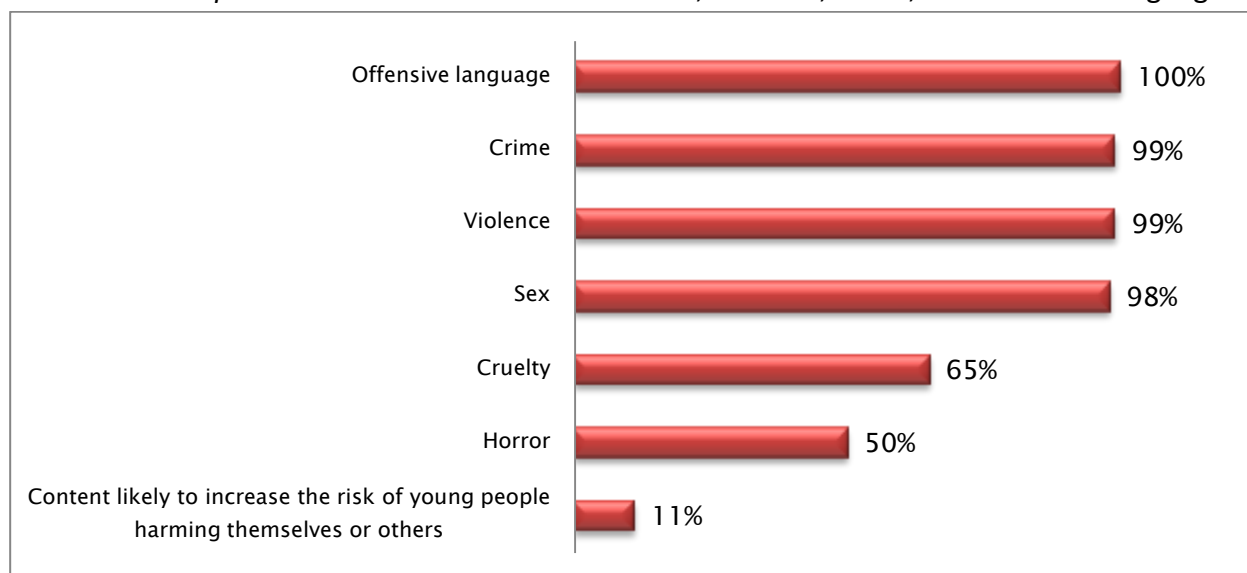
Classifications assigned by female students

The majority of the students identified as Pakeha/New Zealand European, 15% identified as New Zealand Māori, 6% as Pacific Islanders, 7% as non-New Zealand European, 1% as Indian, 3% as Other Asian and 3% as Chinese.



Survey Results

Students were asked to consider whether the film contained classification criteria such as sex, horror, crime, cruelty, violence, highly offensive language, or content likely to increase the risk of young people harming themselves or others. The students were also asked to describe how this material was depicted or otherwise dealt with in the film. Almost all students agreed that *The Grand Budapest Hotel* contained elements of sex, violence, crime, and offensive language.



Classification criteria considered by students

Sex

The Grand Budapest Hotel has minimal sexual content, however most students noted its presence and suggested that it was so brief that it did not warrant a restriction. At the same time, some students felt that any depictions of nudity or sexual references indicated that the film was for an older audience, and should be restricted as such.

It was portrayed in a rather funny way and only briefly so it's not too terrible.

— Student from New Plymouth Girls' High School

There weren't many 'sex scenes' but a lot of references to it. Handled with a light comedic manner. It was short and sharp.

— Student from Tawa College, Wellington region

All shots of sexual content were quick and did not last long. The degree wasn't that explicit but still obvious what was happening.

— Student from Francis Douglas Memorial College, New Plymouth

Violence

Most students (99%) agreed that the film contained matters of violence, and considered this part of the criteria carefully in their classification deliberations.

Short duration, mostly low impact, mostly for comedic impact. Not gory.

— Student from Newlands College, Wellington region

Punches and fighting were shown. It wasn't overly graphic or intense. Violence was shown as something the 'bad guys' initiated.

— Student from Taradale High School, Napier

There was violence throughout the film but never for very extended scenes. Violence was done in a way that was comedic without condoning it. Some might be shocking for the sensitive but nothing overly offensive.

— Student from Karamu High School, Napier

Cruelty

The majority of the 65% of students who said that the film dealt with matters of cruelty cited examples of cruelty towards a character based on his ethnicity, the sadistic demeanour and actions of one of the characters, and a brief instance of animal cruelty in the film.



Horror

Half of the students in attendance felt that the film contained horror, though they agreed this couldn't be described at all as a 'horror film'. Instead, students noted a couple of brief horrific and gory moments in the film and discussed the extent, degree and manner of these depictions.

Some parts, while somewhat horrific were very quick and were not dwelled on which eliminated most of the horror.

— Student from Francis Douglas Memorial College, New Plymouth

There was a low degree of horror but when it did show up it gave you quite a fright. It didn't happen often but when it did it was quite full on. Also depicted as humourous.

— Student from Central Hawkes Bay College, Napier

Crime

Most (99%) of the students noted that a large portion of the storyline related to matters of crime. At the same time, they suggested that while crime was featured in the film it was not presented in a way that was likely to give people the impression that the character's actions should be replicated in real life.



There was a substantial amount of crime, but it wasn't promoted in any way and it wasn't harmful to the audience. All crime was important content in relation to the storyline.

— Student from Sacred Heart Girls' College New Plymouth

The nature of the movie made the crimes seem not so full on but thinking back, murder, theft and breaking out of prison are quite serious crimes.

— Student from Central Hawkes Bay College, Napier

Highly offensive language

All of the students highlighted the presence of highly offensive language in the film. They noted that language was used in different ways by different characters – sometimes it was presented as part of everyday language, while at other times it was used by one character in an aggressive or threatening manner towards another character. They agreed that the way in which language is used can affect how offensive it is.



Lots of swearing but in a funny, conversational way.

— Student from New Plymouth Girls' High School

Highly offensive because it was directed and intended to hurt people.

— Student from Tawa College, Wellington region

Content likely to increase the risk of young people harming themselves or others

Only a few students (11%) felt that some of the content in *The Grand Budapest Hotel* could have this effect on a young audience. They expressed concern that younger audiences may not appreciate the negative consequences of some of the characters' actions.

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Encouraging people to hurt people in order to get what they want.

— Student from Kapiti College, Wellington region

Could encourage animal abuse.

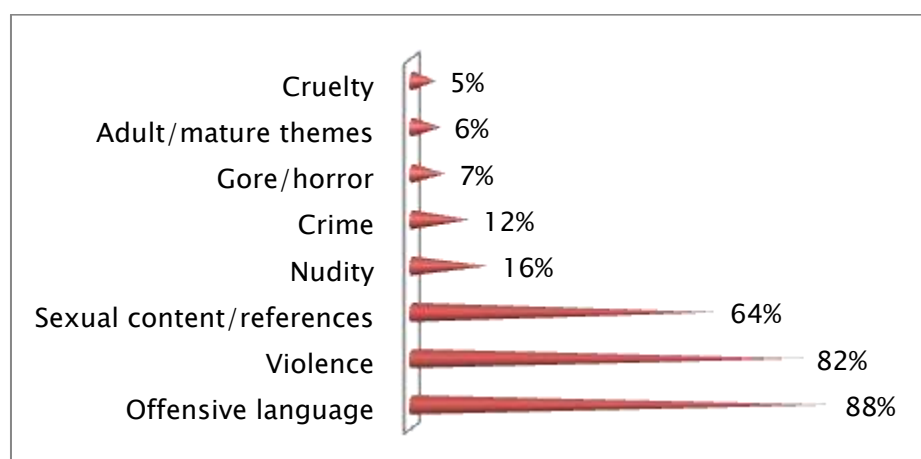
— Student from Taradale High School, Napier

Name calling and swearing at each other.

— Student from New Plymouth Girls' High School

The Descriptive Note

Descriptive notes inform the public about content within a film which may concern them. The descriptive note for *The Grand Budapest Hotel* informs potential audiences that the film contains 'violence, offensive language, sexual references and nudity'. When students were asked what descriptive note they thought the film should have, most noted 'offensive language' (88%) and a warning related to the film's violent content (82%). Many students also felt a warning of 'sex scenes', 'sexual references' or 'sexual content' appropriate (64%).



Audience

Students were asked who they thought was the intended or likely audience for the film. The majority of students identified older teenagers and adults as the target audience for *The Grand Budapest Hotel*. They felt younger audiences might be bored or not appreciate the film's story. Some students also suggested the film may appeal to people interested in history, as elements in the film parallel events from the second World War.

I feel it is aimed at older audiences. People who enjoy comedy but action and who like historical factors in a film. A mature audience

— Student from Feilding High School, Palmerston North

Dominant Effect

When asked what the dominant effect on the film's likely audience would be, most students thought people would leave feeling entertained after watching an enjoyable film.

It is a film that is quirky and unique, that will leave the viewer commenting on the unusual way it is shot and leaving the viewer satisfied.

—Student from Tawa College, Wellington region

Merit, Value or Importance

The majority of students (59%) considered that the film had merit. Most students categorised this as artistic merit, citing the film's unique visual style (a trademark of director Wes Anderson's films). Some students also felt that the film has social or cultural merit in relation to the film's themes of friendship, compassion, and struggles of life in wartime.

It was very artistic in the way it was filmed, it could be a great film to study for techniques and imagery.

— Student from Karamu High School, Napier

Very stylised camera shots and scene transitions. The voice over adds to the intrigue and is like watching a book in movie form.

— Student from Paraparaumu College, Wellington region

It does mention key historical events and their effects, such as war. The presentation is artistically sophisticated.

— Student from Newlands College, Wellington region

Social merit because of the loyalty the men had towards one another.

— Student from Taradale High School, Napier

Impact of the Medium

Students were asked to think the impact of viewing *The Grand Budapest Hotel* in a cinema, and consider how this would compare with watching it on DVD.

Overall students said that there would be little difference in viewing the film in different mediums, as it doesn't rely on large-scale action to build suspense. They did note that watching it in a cinema may allow the audience to become more absorbed in the world of the film, and appreciate the film's visual qualities better than they would be able to at home.

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I think there's not a big difference with this movie, because there aren't so many effects like in action films where it matters how big the screen is.

— Student from Stratford High School, New Plymouth

It's a very fast film so it would be good to watch it at the movies where you're less likely to be distracted and miss stuff.

— Student from Feilding High School, Palmerston North

Teacher feedback

Teachers who attended Censor for a Day were encouraged to fill in a feedback form about the event. This feedback helps us ensure that the event is meeting the needs of Media Studies educators and their students.

Of the 10 teachers who filled in the feedback forms, all agreed that:

- The timeslot was suitable
- The classification form was easy to follow
- The programme provided students with sufficient information
- The programme enhanced students understanding of film censorship
- The content of the film was appropriate for the students
- Their school would wish to attend a similar event again
- The programme as a whole was 'very good' or 'excellent'.

Some teachers suggested some possible improvements to the programme, such as:

- More visual examples in the first session to keep them interested.
- A later finish time (2:00-2:30 rather than 1:40) would fit in better with the school day.
- Mixed groups for when students are doing the classification exercise.
- More time for questions would be good.
- Maybe include opportunity to talk about some of the arguments and debates around censorship, the role of the state, moral panic, etc.

Some additional comments:

"It was nice to see a film that they would not normally choose to go and see and the girls appreciated this."

"My students loved the experience! They are very pleased to know how the classification of films works. I think they've taken something worthwhile from the experience."

"Thanks again for a great day. Kids loved it as did we, the staff. Successful gamble on the movie too. Most enjoyed it and I think it broadened their viewing horizons. Great stuff."

"Students enjoyed it very much – it was a good choice of film, as it is the sort of film that they would not necessarily choose."

“The students really enjoyed it – we had been discussing censorship in class and they still could not really get their heads around the ideas that one person may be offended by something, while another could find it amusing. This particular film was an excellent example of using black humour to make fun of events and circumstances, and the discussion after when students were saying why they had ticked the boxes was very thought provoking.”

“The students loved it. The choice of film was great. The presentation was very informative and well managed. Fantastic.”

“The students were super impressed! They said it was ‘really fun’ and ‘really interesting’. They enjoyed the process of viewing and classifying the film as well as finding the Q and A session very valuable.”

“The format was perfect, the discussions and Q & A were really interesting for the students. This was an amazing opportunity for the students. I know my students thoroughly enjoyed the day and loved the activity. Thanks so much for providing this wonderful opportunity for the students – a very worthwhile day.”

Acknowledgements

The Classification Office would like to thank 20th Century Fox Film Distribution. Without distributors' generosity in lending us a film, Censor for a Day would not be possible.

We would also like to thank the cinema managers, projectionists and caterers at Event Cinemas Queensgate, Event Cinemas New Plymouth, Downtown Cinemas and Reading Cinemas Napier who provided us with excellent service and ensured the events ran smoothly.

Lastly we would like to thank the students and teachers from Wellington, New Plymouth, Palmerston North and Napier who made the event another success and who gave us valuable feedback in the process. We hope to see some of you at a future event!

For information or resources on the classification system, please contact the Classification Office on 0508 236 767 or at info@classification.govt.nz.

