



NEW RELEASES

The Teachers' Lounge

The Teachers' Lounge

Director: Ilker Çatak

Producer: Ingo Fliess

Line Producer: Markus Mayr

Casting: Simone Bär, Alexandra Montag

Casting Children: Patrick Dreikauss

Screenplay: Johannes Duncker, Ilker Çatak

Cinematography: Judith Kaufmann

Editor: Gesa Jäger

Production Design: Zazie Knepper

Music: Marvin Miller

Original Sound: Torsten Többen

Sound Design: Kirsten Kunhardt

Costume Design: Christian Röhrs

Cast:

Leonie Benesch (*Carla Nowak*)

Leonard Stettinisch (*Oskar*)

Eva Löbau (*Friederike Kuhn*)

Michael Klammer (*Thomas Liebenwerda*)

Rafael Stachowiak (*Milosz Dudek*)

Anne-Kathrin Gummich (*Dr Bettina Böhm*)

Kathrin Wehlisch (*Lore Semnik*)

Sarah Bauerett (*Vanessa König*)

Oscar Zickur (*Lukas*)

Antonia Küpper (*Jenny*)

Elsa Krieger (*Hatice*)

Germany 2023

99 mins

Digital

Teachers are having a tough time. Between underfunded institutions, potential union strikes, and paranoia about pupils being 'corrupted', the thankless roles of educators have been put under increased scrutiny. In *The Teachers' Lounge* – Germany's 2024 Oscar-entry – idealistic new maths teacher Carla (Leonie Benesch) attempts to do right by her 7th grade class, giving each kid empathy and attention alongside lessons on logic.

But Ilker Çatak's taut film twists Carla into impossible positions, such as when the school board forces an impromptu search of her classroom for missing money. Carla is disgruntled by their authoritarian methods but must defend them to her students for the sake of a united front. She is consistently placed between the best interests of the 'school' and its 'student body', wishing to be a guardian but made to feel like a warden. Events only escalate once Carla believes she catches the thief in the eponymous teachers' lounge and – in a series of Asghar Farhadi-esque compromises – cannot keep such consequences from spilling into the rest of the school. Soon, the classroom is no longer a respite from the real world, a sanctity of pure learning, but just another arena where the messy politics of reality play out.

The Teachers' Lounge arrives riding a wave of releases investigating troubled teachers. Hirokazu Koreeda's recent release *Monster* (2023) unfurls the hidden relationship between two boys and their teacher from different perspectives, similarly showcasing how the classroom can foster conflicting relationships and secrets which feed parents' worst assumptions. Turkey's own Academy Award entry, Nuri Bilge Ceylan's *About Dry Grasses* (2023), due for release here in July, has its teacher-protagonist accused of abusing a student. *American Fiction* (2023) opened with disgruntled English professor 'Monk' Ellison (Jeffrey Wright) being reprimanded for teaching Flannery O'Connor. Plus, of course, there is the insult-spouting, glass-eyed classics teacher Paul Hunham (Paul Giamatti) in *The Holdovers* (2023).

Of all these, *The Holdovers* is the most consciously retrograde, a throwback to the Hollywood 'inspirational teacher' subgenre; even if here the uplift is more two-sided. Arguably originating with *Blackboard Jungle* (1955), these were particularly popular in the 1980s and 90s – with *Stand and Deliver* (1988), *Dead Poets Society* (1989), *Dangerous Minds* (1995) and more – where an outside figure takes over a stodgy, fatalistic institution and inspires wayward youths to embrace their full potential. Such films are not apolitical, as such, since they often blatantly acknowledge socioeconomic circumstances. But often such prejudices are dismissed, taking a stereotypically American 'bootstraps mentality' where social stigmas are overcome by sheer willpower and codified by winning a regional competition. Teachers here are external, saintly figures who successfully battle the school's stultifying bureaucracy. Meanwhile in *The Teachers' Lounge*, Carla is herself an outsider of Polish descent, a factor which only further alienates and weakens her position within the school, and the battles with procedure grind down Carla's attempts to help her students rather than galvanise them.

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From Mon 25 Mar

Silver Haze

From Fri 29 Mar

Close Your Eyes Cerrar los ojos

From Fri 12 Apr

The Sweet East

From Fri 12 Apr

The Teachers' Lounge (Das Lehrerzimmer)

From Fri 19 Apr

Made in England:

The Films of Powell and Pressburger

From Fri 10 May

Hoard

From Fri 10 May

RE-RELEASES

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Rome, Open City Roma città aperta

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Indeed, European films often tend to be more cynical and complex about the education system. Palme d'Or winner *The Class* (2008) has a similar 'inspirational teacher' set-up. Liberal and well-meaning François Marin (François Bégaudeau) enters a working-class Parisian district filled with rowdy first-generation immigrant students. But rather than whipping the group into rapturous harmony, Marin constantly battles to keep the group attentive and cooperative throughout the school year, ending the film not on unilateral triumph but ambivalence and confusion. At least this is better than in German film *The Wave* (2008), where a politics teacher's thought-experiment escalates into his class becoming a literal fascist movement.

Whether teachers should be strict or soft on children depends on your pedagogical preference. We all agree education is important, but how it is actually implemented is a messier business. During a parent-teacher meeting in *The Teachers' Lounge*, Carla is confronted about one child's poor maths test, and how 'maybe it's not only the kids' failure'. Teachers encounter the same stress and obstacles as other workers, only they have the added burden of government oversight and parental expectations too. America, especially, turns classrooms into cultural battlegrounds over 'children's minds', with conservative protests over Critical Race Theory and Florida's Stop WOKE Act restricting what teachers can say to keep 'politics out of the classroom'.

But education is political: not only in what gets taught, or even in the inherent hierarchy of teachers and students, but in the realpolitik of activity, with education forming an interrelated web of students, teachers, administrators, agencies and more who can only move so far from their own station and must work with what they can. It's telling that Carla cannot even quit in *The Teachers' Lounge*, since the school is already too understaffed. For many of us, school is our first exposure to politics, the first act of institutionalisation, entering into a system of testing, lockers and classrooms that – for good or ill – teaches us about life.

Bruno Savill De Jong, bfi.org.uk, 8 April 2024