*Ida*

[*Ida*](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt2718492/); Canal+ Polska, 2013; Directed by Pawel Pawlikowski; Starring Agata Kulesza and Agata Trzebuchowska; Rated PG-13; [Watch the trailer](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oXhCaVqB0x0).

Summary:

A young Polish woman named Anna is told to visit and meet her only living relative, an aunt, before Anna takes her vows to become a nun. Anna’s aunt is “Red Wanda,” a Communist judge and former prosecutor who uses sex, smoking, and drinking to cloud her memories of the past. Upon meeting Wanda, Anna learns three shocking facts about herself: (1) she is Jewish, (2) her real name is Ida, and (3) her parents were killed in the WWII. The revelations tie these two women together. Initially, Ida and Wanda are set up as contrasts, but the narrative unfolds such that each clarifies, helps, and influences the other to do things she otherwise normally would not have dared.

Set in the early sixties during the dictatorship of Stalin—everyone calls each other “comrade”—and wisely shot in black and white, this film is a concise eighty-minute story in which the primary plot points are suggested rather than directly stated. Gestures and silence communicate much in a film that takes clichéd cinematic categories—journeys of self-discovery and road trips—and repackages them anew.

Themes, Symbols, & Motifs:

* Religion. Ida’s parents were Jewish, while Ida is Catholic. Wanda displays hostility toward God and the church.
* Vices. Wanda’s life is rife with vices, yet she encourages Ida to engage in them. The film toys with the idea of vices acting as a means for clarity.
* Music. Music acts as one way in which Wanda and Ida are contrasted. Ida relates to the orderly Latin songs in the convent as well as the planned symphony of Mozart playing in Wanda’s apartment. Wanda best fits with the improvisation of jazz, such as the John Coltrane piece played at the party.
* Roads. Roads and walkways feature heavily in the film, from the roads Ida and Wanda drive on to the walkway to and from the convent to Ida’s long walk on the road at the end.
* The past. Memories can change people, yes—consider Wanda—but Ida is changed not by a memory but by a realization of a past of which she *has* no memory. Still, knowledge of the past affects her present and future.

Discussion Questions:

1. What effect is achieved for viewers by having the film in black and white?
2. The statue of Jesus appears at the film’s beginning and end. Why?
3. Assess the way the film portrays sex and nudity. Was this unnecessary, or tastefully done?
4. At the end, after discovering her family’s history, is Ida redeemed or crushed?
5. What do you think happened to Ida’s family, and why is this left ambiguous?
6. Where is Ida going at the end?