

**ONE DREAM
CAN CHANGE THE WORLD**

SELMA

D I S C U S S I O N G U I D E



HARPOFILMS

INGENIOUS



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SELMA

DISCUSSION GUIDE



ABOUT THE FILM

In spring of 1965, a series of dramatic events changed the course of America and the modern concept of civil rights forever -- as courageous marchers, led by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., attempted three times to carry out a peaceful procession from Selma, Alabama to Montgomery, Alabama on a quest for the basic human right to vote. The shocking confrontations, the triumphant final march, and the passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act that followed are now an indelible part of history. But the vitally relevant, vitally human story of Selma – from the political battles in the halls of power, to the grit and faith of people on the street, to the private, inner struggles Dr. King faced – has never been seen on the movie screen.

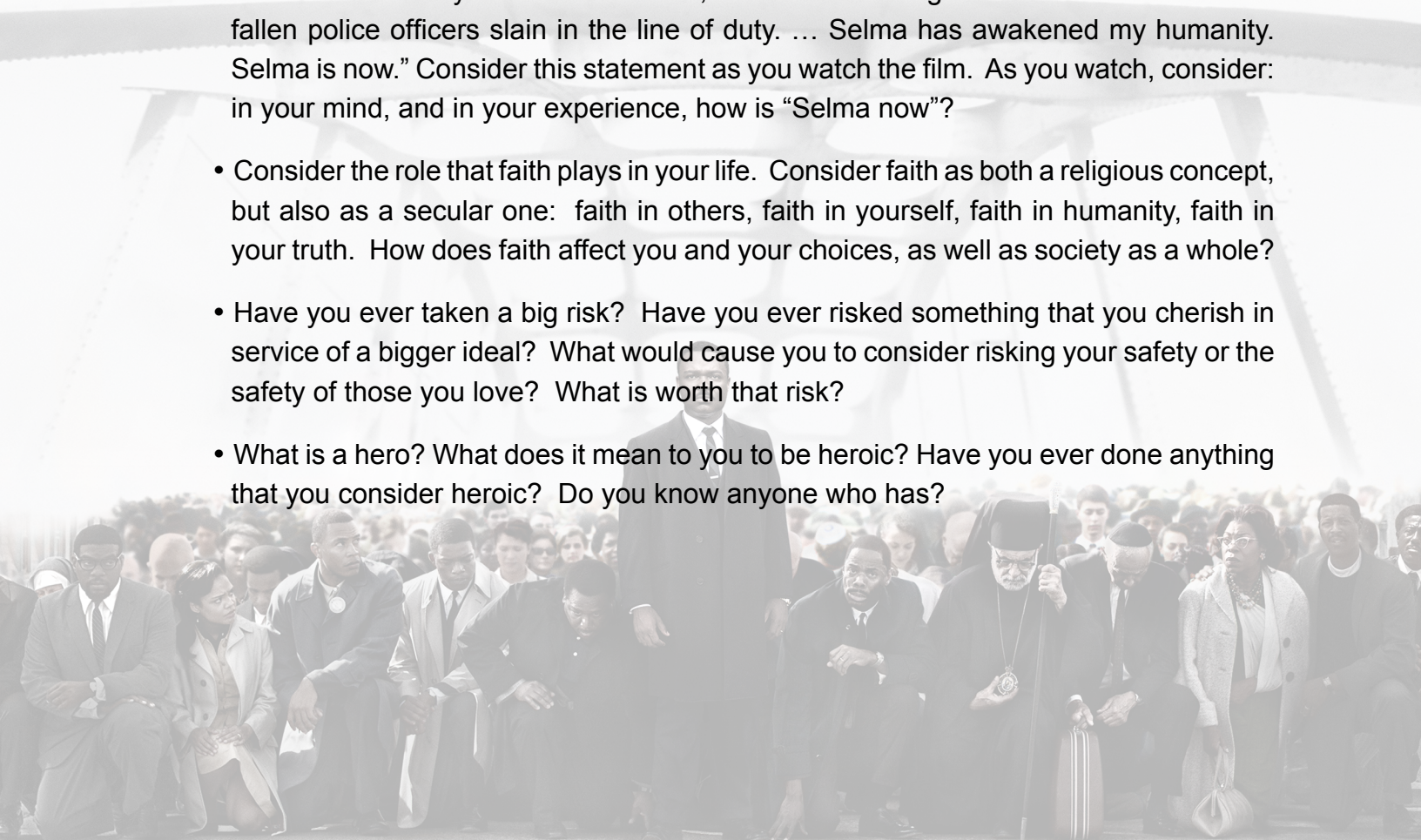
Ava DuVernay's *Selma* brings the power of all that went into creating that hard-won moment of long awaited justice to cinema with an uncompromising immediacy. The film is constructed out of a string of astonishing historical details, large and small -- including the intense relationship between Dr. King and President Lyndon Johnson, the troubling involvement of the FBI, and the unbreakable spirit of ordinary men and women who sacrificed and united around voting rights. But what emerged from these stark details are a vivid tapestry of an American turning point in the making and the stirring journey of a man finding his way through doubts and daunting obstacles towards not just leadership, but the togetherness required to make real change in the world.

This guide was created for students and adults alike, with the purpose of generating thoughtful discussions around the film *Selma*. Sit down with your family or friends and talk about the issues the film raises. For this kind of honest and open dialogue is truly the first step towards continuing Dr. King's important work.

THINGS TO CONSIDER BEFORE WATCHING SELMA

The film Selma depicts historical events and actual people, but it can be viewed and appreciated through more lenses than just an historical one. Take a moment to consider one or all of these themes to enhance both your appreciation of the history, the film, and your movie-viewing experience:

- What do you know about Martin Luther King, Jr. and his friends, family, and colleagues as historical figures? What do you know about them as actual people?
- Why might some consider the right to vote one of the most important rights for a citizen of a democracy? Why is voting such a powerful social tool? What is lost if a person is denied the right to vote?
- The rapper Common, in his acceptance speech for his Golden Globe® for Best Original Song, said “I am the hopeful black woman who was denied her right to vote. I am the caring white supporter killed on the front lines of freedom. I am the unarmed black kid who maybe needed a hand, but was instead given a bullet. I am the two fallen police officers slain in the line of duty. ... Selma has awakened my humanity. Selma is now.” Consider this statement as you watch the film. As you watch, consider: in your mind, and in your experience, how is “Selma now”?
- Consider the role that faith plays in your life. Consider faith as both a religious concept, but also as a secular one: faith in others, faith in yourself, faith in humanity, faith in your truth. How does faith affect you and your choices, as well as society as a whole?
- Have you ever taken a big risk? Have you ever risked something that you cherish in service of a bigger ideal? What would cause you to consider risking your safety or the safety of those you love? What is worth that risk?
- What is a hero? What does it mean to you to be heroic? Have you ever done anything that you consider heroic? Do you know anyone who has?



THINGS TO CONSIDER AFTER WATCHING SELMA

Selma can be appreciated on many levels: as a work of art, as a piece of historical fiction, and as a timeless statement about civil responsibility. Use the following discussion starters to broaden your thinking about the film and the issues it depicts.

MEDIA LITERACY/ FILM STUDIES

- The scenes that open the film - Dr. King preparing for, and being awarded, the Nobel Peace Prize; the murder of four young girls in a church bombing; and Annie Lee Cooper being denied the right to vote by a white clerk – are not presented chronologically in relation to the rest of the film. Why do you think the filmmakers chose to start the film with these scenes, in this particular order?
- The history of the four young girls killed in the bombing at the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham is well-known. And yet, the depiction of this event shocks and startles the audience. Why is this so? What artistic devices does the filmmaker use in her depiction of this event to deepen its impact on the audience?
- How is watching this film a different experience of the history than reading about it in a book? How does this film create an immediacy and an emotional response that reading about the same events might not?
- How might seeing this film allow for a deeper understanding of the history, and perhaps even a new level of empathy in the viewer? In turn, how can this deeper understanding be used to make a difference in contemporary society?
- This film is not a historical document, but a narrative film based on historical events. Ava DuVernay, the director of the film, says she wasn't trying to capture all the facts of the matter, but rather she focused on representing the truth of it all. Discuss the difference between fact and truth in historical fiction, and the usefulness of both in the study of history.
- What surprised you about this film? What would you have liked to see more of? What questions remained for you after the film ended?
- Discuss the filmmaker's use of archival footage at the end of the film. How did this affect you as a viewer? What was the artistic value, and the artistic intent, of using this footage? What was the historical value? What was the filmmaker saying by using archival footage when she did?

THINGS TO CONSIDER AFTER WATCHING SELMA CONTINUED

DR. KING

- After Dr. King receives the Nobel Peace Prize, he returns to the United States where he continues to be treated like a second-class citizen. Explain the brutality of this experience.
- Martin Luther King was a young man in 1965, only 36 years old. What are the pressures that are weighing on Dr. King during the period surrounding the Selma marches? What must he consider as he decides whether or not to go through with the marches?
- In the film, Dr. King says “As long as I am unable to exercise my constitutional right to vote, I do not have command of my own life. I cannot determine my own destiny. For it is determined for me by people who would rather see me suffer than succeed.” Does this represent your feelings about your constitutional right to vote, or does this represent a new perspective? Explain.
- This film presents Dr. King in all of his humanity – his fears, his failures, his strengths, and his weaknesses. In this light, do you think he still qualifies as a hero? Explain.
- What makes a good leader? What made Dr. King a good leader?

THE MOVEMENT THEN AND NOW

- There are a number of women depicted in this film: Annie Lee Cooper, who continuously tried to register to vote in Selma and was continuously turned away; Coretta Scott King, Dr. King’s wife; Diane Nash, one of the leaders of the Selma movement; Amelia Boyton, who was one of the first activists in voter’s rights in Alabama; Richie Jean Jackson, who let Dr. King and his colleagues stay in her home; and Viola Liuzzo, a white woman from Michigan who traveled to Alabama to march. What did you know about the role of women in the civil rights movement before seeing this film? What did you learn, and what surprised you, about the central role that women played?
- The bridge that the protesters marched over is the Edmund Pettus Bridge, named after a man who served as a confederate general in the Civil War and a founding member and Grand Dragon in the Ku Klux Klan. Today, the bridge still bears his name. Should the bridge be renamed? For whom might the bridge be renamed? Explain.

THINGS TO CONSIDER AFTER WATCHING SELMA CONTINUED

THE MOVEMENT THEN AND NOW

- Consider the following lyrics from the song “Glory” which closed the film. Discuss how the events in the film relate to the other events mentioned in the song, such as the death of Michael Brown, the subsequent acquittal by grand jury of the officer who shot him, and the ensuing riots in Ferguson, MO.

THE MOVEMENT IS A RHYTHM TO US

FREEDOM IS LIKE RELIGION TO US

JUSTICE IS JUXTAPOSITION IN US

JUSTICE FOR ALL JUST AIN'T SPECIFIC ENOUGH

ONE SON DIED, HIS SPIRIT IS REVISITIN' US

TRUANT LIVIN' LIVIN' IN US, RESISTANCE IS US

THAT'S WHY ROSA SAT ON THE BUS

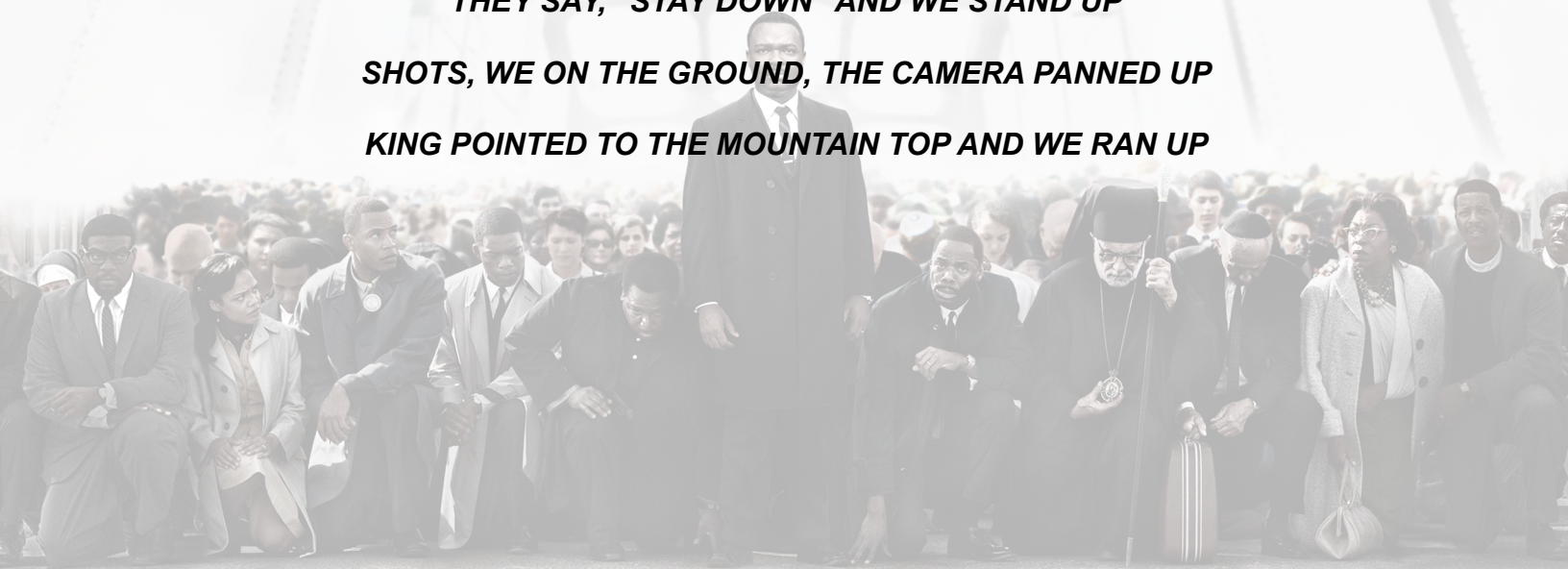
THAT'S WHY WE WALK THROUGH FERGUSON WITH OUR HANDS UP

WHEN IT GO DOWN WE WOMAN AND MAN UP

THEY SAY, "STAY DOWN" AND WE STAND UP

SHOTS, WE ON THE GROUND, THE CAMERA PANNED UP

KING POINTED TO THE MOUNTAIN TOP AND WE RAN UP



THINGS TO DO NOW THAT YOU'VE SEEN SELMA

Selma is a vivid and emotional depiction of one of the most painful periods in our country's history, dealing with issues of race, bigotry, and bias that, unfortunately, are still with us today. The events and people that are vividly brought to life onscreen for generations old and new in this film will surely haunt viewers long after the credits roll, and many questions will remain unanswered. For those viewers who wish to process some of these feelings and reactions after viewing the film, consider the following:

- Want to get involved in the issues on the forefront of today's civil rights movement? Check out ColorofChange.org, one of the largest online civil rights organizations in the country. Sign up to learn more about the issues they champion and how you can make a difference at www.colorofchange.org
- We all have an issue to champion. What do you march for? Share your story and join the movement at www.selmamarchon.com
- The Southern Poverty Law Center has documented 939 hate groups operating in the United States today. Learn more and get involved in the fight against hate at www.splcenter.org
- Selma reminds us never to take the right to vote for granted. In a democracy, voting is the best way to make sure your interests are protected. Get involved in today's fight to maintain the vote by going to www.rockthevote.com/get-involved/ - and let your voice be heard.
- Start a civil rights group in your local community. Learn – and teach – about the importance of human and civil rights, and how to protect them. Some guidelines for starting a group can be found on the Youth for Human Rights website: www.youthforhumanrights.org/take-action/groups/how-to-start-a-group.html
- Knowledge is power. Without an understanding of our shared history and our current struggles, we cannot positively affect the future. Learn more about our country's civil rights movement – past and present – so you can become an active participant in its future. A few great places to start are at www.civilrights.org, www.naacp.org, and www.thekingcenter.org

ABOUT BIG PICTURE INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN

Kimberly Birbrower founded Big Picture Instructional Design to get all the stakeholders in the educational space talking about — and watching — movies. As former classroom educators with extensive experience in nonprofit work, educational administration, and media literacy, BPID increases the reach and impact of issue-driven films, television projects, and documentaries by creating custom-designed campaigns and writing original collateral materials that always put the film at the forefront. Big Picture Instructional Design has spearheaded or contributed to the educational campaigns for numerous films, including those for Fury, TEACH, Lincoln, ESCAPE FIRE, The Conspirator, The Soloist, The 11th Hour, and Thanks for Sharing. For samples of our work and to learn more about our outreach campaigns, visit us at www.bigpictureinstructional.com.