

TEACHERS' NOTES

INTRODUCTION

The Film Space's online resource *Selma* features a series of curriculum-focused and engaging classroom activities exploring different aspects of Ava DuVernay's film. Designed primarily for students of history, English, citizenship and religious studies aged 14-18 the *Selma* resource may also be used in PSHEE. For teachers of all curriculum areas, we recommend that time be given for students to familiarise themselves with the INTERACTIVE TIMELINE in order to contextualise learning.

Offering a range of interactivity based on the film, and with links to online archive material, the resource provides learners with an exciting opportunity to develop skills of close reading and analysis whilst finding out more about this key moment in the US civil rights movement. Activities build students' awareness of the significance of this period in history and help to develop their knowledge and understanding of how primary sources can inform contemporary filmmaking.

Selma raises many important themes and ideas and these notes will guide teachers as to which parts of the resource are most appropriate for each subject area. The material in our online resource is designed to be differentiated by outcome so tasks are accessible across age groups. The levels of research undertaken by students and the sophistication of students' responses will vary depending on their age and levels of ability.

KEY PEOPLE

For reference purposes the main characters in the true-life drama of *Selma* have been listed below. Teachers may wish to share this with students before or after viewing. As an extension research activity students can find out more about one or more of these individuals.

Amelia Boynton	Civil rights activist and leader in Selma protests
Annie Lee Cooper	Civil rights activist in the Selma voting rights movement
Coretta Scott King	Wife of Martin Luther King Jr., author and activist
Diane Nash	Leader and strategist of Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC)
George Wallace	Governor of Alabama and supporter of racial segregation
J. Edgar Hoover	First director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)
Jimmie Lee Jackson	Civil rights protestor, shot by Alabama state trooper in 1965
Malcolm X	Black nationalist leader and human rights activist – assassinated in 1965

Martin Luther King Jr.	Leader of Southern Christian Leadership Council (SCLC) & civil rights leader – assassinated 1968
President Lyndon B Johnson	President of the United States from 1963 - 1969
Reverend Hosea Williams	Civil rights leader, ordained minister and key organiser in SCLC
Andrew Young	Member of SCLC, friend of Martin Luther King Jr.

HISTORY

The history of the US civil rights movement is covered at KS3, GCSE and A level, and in the Curriculum for Excellence in Scotland. Key historical concepts relevant to explore when watching *Selma* for pedagogical purposes include:

- Representation
- Historical enquiry

To evaluate the significance of events, the overall chronology of the period is essential. As well as the INTERACTIVE TIMELINE within the CONTEXT section, the INTRODUCTION to the CIVIL RIGHTS section helps students consolidate their knowledge of key events within the campaigns of civil resistance from 1954 –1968.

The FREEDOM activity within the CIVIL RIGHTS section focuses on important female activists represented in the film: Annie Lee Cooper and Diane Nash. A research task invites students to consider how these women are represented in the film and encourages them to find out more about the real historical figures portrayed by the actors. The role of Amelia Boynton could be explored as a further extension task.

The JUSTICE activity within the PREJUDICE section is based on an archive image used to stimulate discussion about concepts of justice and prejudice. Based on primary sources, the task also develops knowledge and understanding of the 15th Amendment of the American constitution.

The INTRODUCTION to STORYTELLING activity makes explicit links between the real historical figures and how they are represented in the film *Selma*. The task consolidates students' knowledge and understanding of some of the key figures involved in the fight for equal civil rights during this period.

The activity AUTHENTICITY within the STORYTELLING section offers students ways into thinking about the primary sources filmmakers might reference when constructing a historical drama such as *Selma*. This activity could be extended further by tasking students with a historical enquiry based on the events leading up to the Selma protests. Where might students go to research further the background to the history behind the film? What questions might they ask? Further research links are suggested below.

Learning objectives underpinning the history focus of the resource include:

- Developing understanding of how historians and others form interpretations
- Developing understanding of why historians and others have interpreted events, people and situations in different ways through a range of media
- Identifying, selecting and using a range of historical sources, including textual, visual and oral sources
- Presenting and organising accounts and explanations about the past that are coherent, structured and substantiated, using chronological conventions and historical vocabulary

ENGLISH

From an English teacher's perspective, *Selma* offers students a superb way in to exploring the speech making skills of one of the greatest orators of modern times. There is a focus on speechmaking and oral presentation in in English at KS3, and English Language GCSE and A level, and in the Curriculum for Excellence in Scotland.

Key concepts for literacy and English relevant to explore when watching *Selma* for pedagogical purposes include:

- Speeches / rhetoric
- Genre

The THEMES activity within the CONTEXT section provides a useful way into the background to the story. Developing skills of visual analysis, students analyse the trailer to *Selma*. We recommend here that teachers introduce concepts of connotation and denotation.

The DEMOCRACY activity within the CIVIL RIGHTS section is particularly relevant for English lessons as it includes a film clip based on a rousing speech by Martin Luther King Jr. that is worth exploring for its rhetorical techniques.

Additionally, this activity references literacy tests that were devised by Southern states to prevent black voters from registering – an interesting opportunity to discuss the connections between literacy and power in society.

Another representation of Martin Luther King Jr. delivering a rousing speech is found in the INTRODUCTION to PREJUDICE. Links to more recent new stories about protests in response to killings by state forces of black people in the US provide non-fiction reading stimulus for discussion and opinion writing.

When exploring the speeches represented in the film, students should consider:

- Accent
- Choice of words
- Content
- Intonation
- Pace
- Pause

Questions to ask might include:

- If you didn't know the context for this speech, what clues could you draw on to tell you that this is a formal public speech?
- What could you say about the accent and pronunciation of Martin Luther King Jr.? What style of English does he seem to use?
- What elements of formal or informal speech can you identify?
- In what ways do you think that the Martin Luther King Jr.'s power, and also his humanity, comes across in the speech?
- What techniques does he use here that might be helpful for anyone having to give a speech or a talk in public?

The GENRE activity within the STORYTELLING section encourages students to reflect on the generic conventions of the film, building on their existing knowledge of other genres. To extend this activity further, teachers may wish to show trailers from other historical dramas by way of comparison or compare the trailer with other non-fiction texts about the Martin Luther King Jr.

CITIZENSHIP & RELIGIOUS STUDIES

Selma offers teachers of citizenship and religious studies a brilliant opportunity to explore issues of faith, civil rights and prejudice all of which are relevant at KS3, GCSE and A level, and to the Curriculum for Excellence in Scotland.

Key concepts for citizenship and religious studies relevant to explore when watching *Selma* for pedagogical purposes include:

- Democracy
- Voting rights
- Prejudice and discrimination
- Religion, community and politics

Martin Luther King Jr's faith is central to his philosophy of non-violent resistance. Several of the scenes in the film take place in a church and the civil rights organisation he leads is Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC): religion and politics are inextricably entwined in this story.

The THEMES activity in the CONTEXT section, based on the film's trailer, offers students an accessible way in to introduce the main topics in the film. We recommend this be followed with the CIVIL RIGHTS activity which contextualises the major campaigns of resistance from 1954 – 1968 in the US - a useful starting place for a citizenship focus.

Based on a clip from the film, the DEMOCRACY activity within the CIVIL RIGHTS section offers students an insight into key issues relating to democratic rights, state power and levels of literacy. This activity also offers students opportunities to learn about the federal system of governance in the USA thus developing and extending their political literacy. Discussion questions invite students to consider wider issues about universal suffrage.

Based on another film clip, the INTRODUCTION to PREJUDICE makes overt the role of protest in the fight for equal voting rights. Taking place in a church, this scene makes explicit for students the connection between faith and politics. Links are made to more current protests in the US broadening out learning to questions of institutional racism and opening philosophical debate about the validity of different styles of protest within a democracy.

The interactive RACISM task within the PREJUDICE section uses the film's poster as stimulus to explore how the filmmakers have chosen to represent Martin Luther King Jr.'s fight against racism. As an extension task, ask students to redesign the poster for *Selma* to foreground one of the following themes:

- Connection between faith and politics in the Selma protests
- Denial of black people's right to vote
- Role of key women in the protests at Selma

FURTHER RESEARCH

Suggested resources to find out more about the topics and history covered in the film:

- [Article – What activists can learn from Selma](#)
- [BBC Bitesize](#)
- [Images of Selma protest](#)
- [Journey to Justice](#)
- [Newsreels of Martin Luther King Jr marching](#)