

This packet has been put together to help Greene Street Friends School students and families think about the history and stories told in the film *Selma*. It is by no means complete -- there are many more pieces to add and questions to ask. Our hope is that it's a start, and that students and families will pick up where it leaves off, to learn and share more with each other.

Selma's Overall Frame

Before, **DURING**, and After *Selma*

Selma focuses on the "during." It zooms in on what happened during a three-month period in 1965 in Selma, Alabama. Like a writer "exploding the moment," *Selma* gives a detailed, intense view of events in a narrow time frame so that it can communicate in a new way about the difficulties and impact of the civil rights movement and of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

The events of *Selma* are framed between the tragic 1963 bombing of a church in Birmingham, Alabama which killed four young girls, and the "epilogues" we see as the film ends, telling us what happened to key people in the years to come.

Question: What's could be gained by getting so specific about one place in time, when there were so many events, places, and people in the civil rights movement?

The Fight for Voting Rights

At the outset of *Selma*, we see the ongoing, everyday struggle to achieve Voting Rights for Blacks. While the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was supposed to make things equal for all people trying to register to vote, in reality many places in the South placed impossible hurdles in front of Blacks seeking to register to vote. Here's an example of actual paperwork for registration with explanations of the ways it posed insurmountable barriers for Blacks: <http://www.crmvet.org/info/litapp.pdf> Here's an example of a literacy test, also required for registration: <http://www.crmvet.org/info/litques.pdf>

Question: When you see these forms, what thoughts occur to you about voting then, and now?

SCLC and SNCC

As the film unfolds, we see that much work in Selma was done before Martin Luther King's arrival on the scene by the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC, often pronounced "snick"). SNCC was born out of the sit-ins and demonstrations of 1960 and encouraged by MLK. While he hoped they would become the "youth end" of his own SCLC (Southern Christian Leadership Conference), they chose to pursue their own path toward the same goal. In the film, we see some of the push and pull play out between SNCC and the SCLC, involving key figures.

Question: When people or groups share common goals but differ strongly in opinion about methods, can they ever work together? How?

Day in, Day out -- No Justice

Selma shows us the urgency and injustice of a daily reality that doesn't come close to matching the laws newly inked on paper. MLK appeals to president Lyndon Baines Johnson (LBJ) to step in and make things right according to his 1964 Civil Rights Act (the signing of which he calls "the proudest moment of my life" in the film), but LBJ chooses to pursue a war on poverty instead. As MLK points out, until Black people have the same right to vote as Whites, they can have no say in anything -- including justice -- because jurors by definition have to be registered voters. For him, for SNCC, and for all of the protesters and people interested in equality in Selma - there is no time to wait.

Question: Have you ever felt deeply offended, horrified, or angry about something that seemed invisible or unimportant to other people? What did you do?

Being a “witness”

Selma has an incredibly strong current of human resolve, perseverance, and resistance to evil running throughout the story. There are uplifting moments where we feel inspired, or see inner strength and solidarity come pushing through to win the day.

At the same time, there are many times of darkness, when all the effort and moral rightness can't overcome a system that's unjust and individuals that are filled with hatred. Witnessing these times of darkness is critically important. When we go to see a film like this, we stand (or sit) as witnesses to all of the events it shows -- good, bad, and ugly.

By witnessing the violence endured by protesters, we can stand with them, in a safe way, and we can honor and remember what they worked so hard and risked so much for. Witnessing violence can also sometimes lead to change for the better, if the witnesses feel drawn to do something to correct the wrong. You will see this happen in *Selma*, as it did in history, after certain events are photographed or televised.

The violence shown in *Selma* includes a bomb blast (which is felt strongly, but not shown), beatings of protesters with billy clubs and other weapons, and a shooting. In addition to violence, there are countless ways Blacks are faced with indignity (circumstances that crush your dignity) -- such as Voter registration requirements. Absorbing and empathizing with these emotional factors can become stressful for the viewer or “witness,” and there are some things you can do about that.

Here are some **thoughts and strategies to help you process scenes that are disturbing** in *Selma*:

- Everyone has a different response to seeing violence on film -- no response is right or wrong.
- It's okay to look away, cover your eyes, etc. when you think something violent will happen.
- Remind yourself that as real as the characters are, this is a movie and just a recreation of the past.
- We know that the outcome of the civil rights movement was good. Knowing the painful stories along the way gives us deeper appreciation and insight.

Here are some **questions to think about while viewing *Selma*** (we'll have a Monday lunch meeting to talk about these and the next questions):

- What characters do you feel attached to the most? Why?
- What scenes draw out your different emotions? When do you feel angry, scared, sad, or other?
- What are your feelings about the violence in different moments in this movie? What might be the purpose of showing it?

Here are some **questions to talk about after *Selma*** (we encourage you to talk about these with your family):

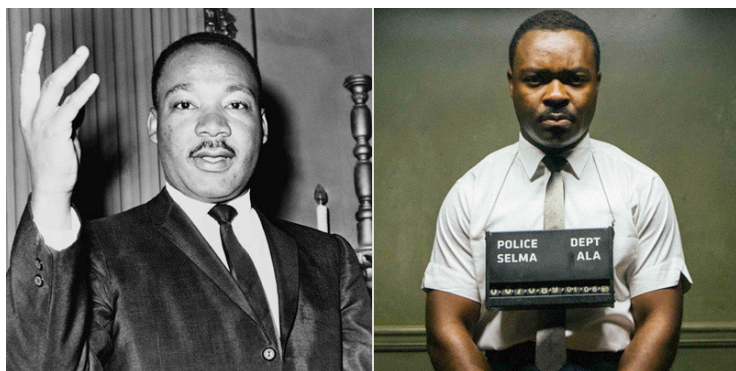
- What do your family members remember about this time period (1964-1965) and about these events?
- How have things changed in our country since the time of *Selma*?
- How do you feel about the police in the movie? How do you feel about our police today?
- There is a reference to Ferguson in Common's rap “Glory” in the closing credits. Why do you think the director and the artist included this reference? What do you think about that reference?

29 Real People Portrayed in *Selma*

Selma is full of glimpses of history and people who shaped it. Knowing who some of the people are by sight can help you to connect and soak it all in. Here are some mini-portraits of the people you will see, either briefly or throughout the movie. There's no need to know every single one of them -- but putting a few names to faces will deepen our interest in the film and the history of this time. It can also be useful to go back and learn more about these individuals after seeing the film. (That's what I did, and I have much more to learn.)

images from <http://www.zimbio.com/Beyond+the+Box+Office/articles/X7tgHYD0oS0/Selma+Pictures+Histories+29+Real+People+Appear>

The photos on the left are the real people; the photos on the right are the actors portraying them in *Selma*.



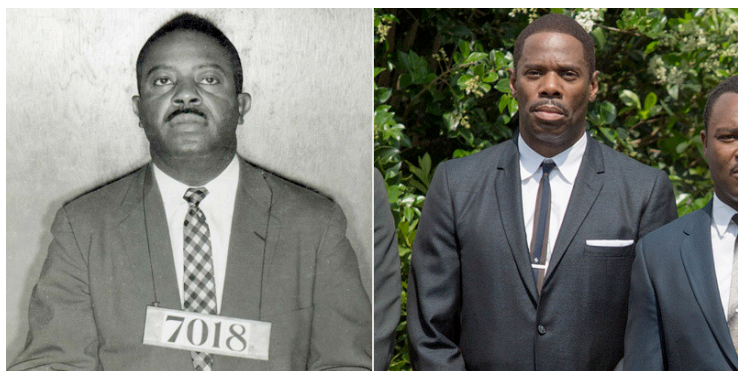
Martin Luther King, Jr. played by **David Oyelowo**

When the movie opens, King receives his Nobel Peace Prize in 1964. He was 36 years old during the time in *Selma*. His assassination occurred in 1968.



Coretta Scott King played by **Carmen Ejogo**

While Coretta Scott King is featured in the film as partner to Martin, worried about their family's welfare and threats against him, her own leadership is not shown in *Selma*. She spoke out against sexism during the Civil Right movement and worked to increase women's involvement. In the 1980's, she worked to end apartheid and advocated that the Civil Rights Act be amended to include LGBT rights.



Ralph Abernathy played by **Colman Domingo**

Ralph Abernathy partnered closely with MLK when they were under 30 to organize the 13-month bus boycott in Montgomery to end bus segregation. A co-founder of the SCLC along with MLK, and a close friend.



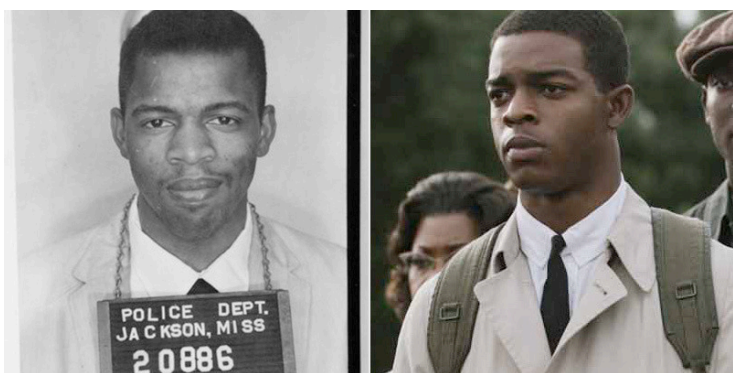
Andrew Young played by **Andre Holland**

Andrew Young was the executive director of the SCLC during the events in Selma, and worked very closely with MLK. He went on to hold many positions of leadership in national and international politics, including Congressional Representative from Georgia, UN Ambassador, and Mayor of Atlanta.



C.T Vivian played by **Corey Reynolds**

C.T. Vivian was a preacher who worked alongside MLK in the 1960's. In 1970 he wrote a book about civil rights: *Black Power and the American Myth*.



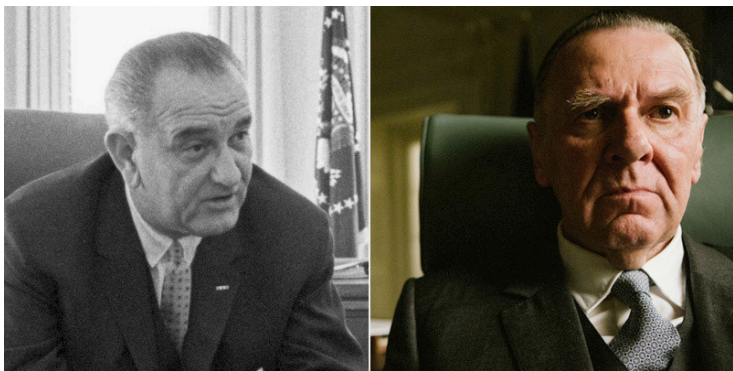
Chairman of SNCC at age 25, John Lewis was the youngest of the “Big Six” Civil Rights Leaders. He went into politics in the 1970’s, serving Congress as Representative from Georgia since 1987.

John Lewis played by **Stephan James**



Hosea Williams was the SCLC leader who led the first march over the Edmund Pettus Bridge. He was a veteran who fought overseas and then returned to the US, only to be beaten for drinking from a whites-only water fountain. He worked in politics and started a charity organization for the homeless in Atlanta.

Hosea Williams played by **Wendell Pierce**



Lyndon B. Johnson (LBJ) became president when John F Kennedy was assassinated, and then he won re-election in 1964. In the film he is shown as opposing MLK’s efforts in Selma. Some criticize this depiction because he is also said to have been a supporter of Civil Rights.

Lyndon B. Johnson played by **Tom Wilkinson**



Lee White was a key aide and trusted advisor to President Johnson. He worked with LBJ presenting the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

Lee C. White played by **Giovanni Ribisi**



John Doar advises King to be more cautious because of threats in *Selma*. His role was Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights from 1960 to 1967, and he worked to keep protesters safe. Though we don't see it in *Selma*, he arrives first in Montgomery to make sure King would be free from harm that day.

John Doar played by **Alessandro Nivola**



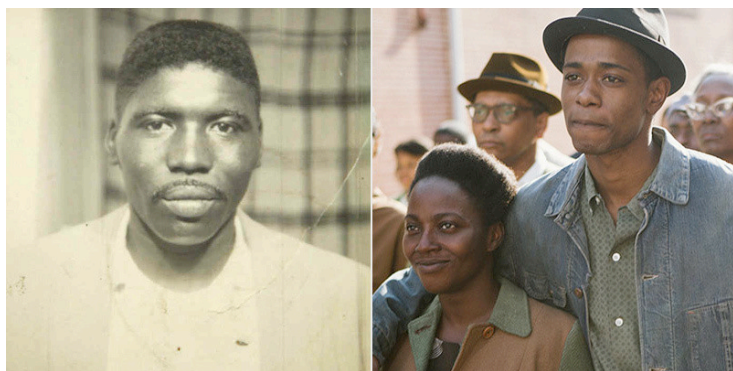
J. Edgar Hoover was Director of the FBI. He tried to discredit MLK, by trying to link his protests with Communism, and also by looking for evidence that MLK had extramarital affairs. He is likely to have used information to try to weaken or break up the King family.

J. Edgar Hoover played by **Dylan Baker**



Annie Lee Cooper is emblematic of the fight for Voter Registration in the South. She had been registered to vote in both Ohio and Pennsylvania when she moved back to Selma in 1964. There, she was continually prevented from registering by officials who asked her impossibly hard questions. She also, famously, punched mayor Jim Clark in the face when he repeatedly poked her with a club while she was waiting to register.

Annie Lee Cooper played by **Oprah Winfrey**



Jimmie Lee Jackson was shot after fleeing a protest that was broken up by Alabama State Troopers. He held on for 8 days, but later died from an infection. 42 years later, in 2010, the Trooper who shot him was charged and convicted of manslaughter.

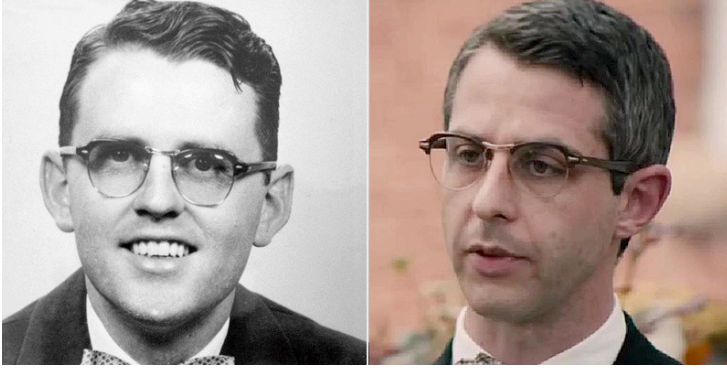
Jimmie Lee Jackson played by **Keith Stanfield**



Amelia Boynton became a key figure in the Civil Rights Movement in Selma. She and her husband worked to help Blacks pass the literacy test for voter registration. She was knocked unconscious during "Bloody Sunday," the first attempt to cross the Edmund Pettus Bridge. The pictures of her published in newspapers rallied others to the cause. Amelia Boynton is now 103 years old.

(These two photos are reversed)

Amelia Boynton played by **Lorraine Toussaint**



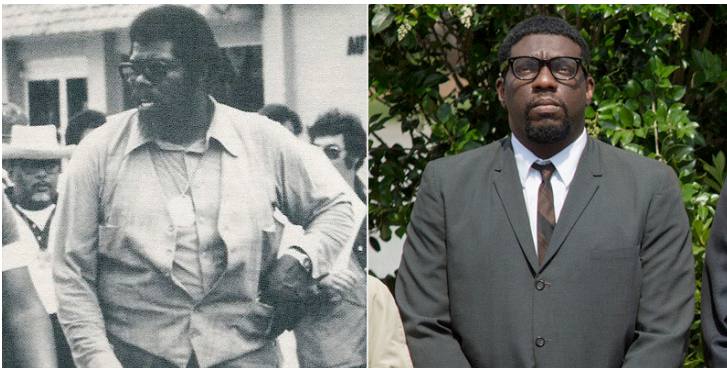
James Reeb lived in Boston, where he was a Unitarian Universalist minister. After Bloody Sunday, he joined MLK at the demonstrations in Selma. After eating at an integrated restaurant in Selma, James Reeb was attacked by three White men, and he later died from his injuries.

James Reeb played by **Jeremy Strong**



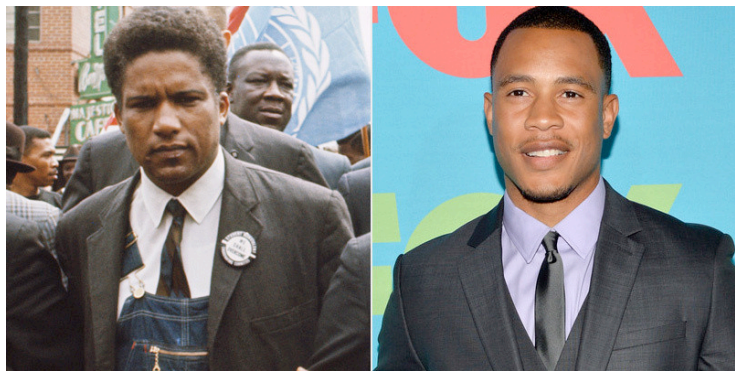
Richie Jean Jackson opened her home to MLK and the other civil rights leaders in Selma, making it an unofficial headquarters.

Richie Jean Jackson played by **Niecy Nash**



James Orange was jailed for helping people try to register to vote in Selma. At a rally to protest his arrest, Jimmie Lee Jackson was shot.

James Orange played by **Omar J. Dorsey**



James Forman was a leader in SNCC, and he was older and more extreme in his views than some other SNCC students.

James Forman played by **Trai Byers**



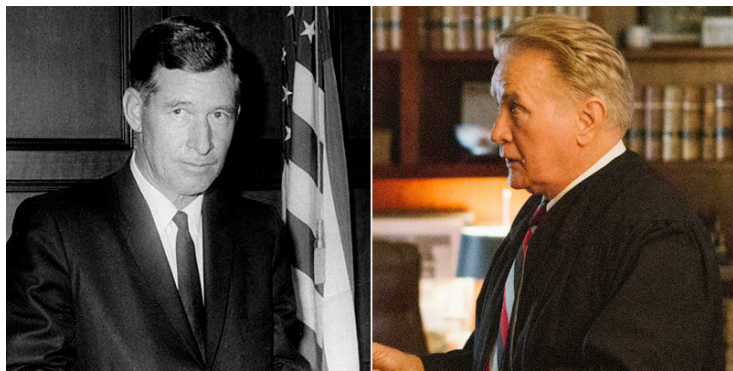
Bayard Rustin was a civil rights leader who helped to organize the SCLC and the 1963 march on Washington. He advocated nonviolence and civil disobedience. He was controversial at the time because he was a member of the Communist Party and he was gay.

Bayard Rustin played by **Ruben Santiago-Hudson**



Fred Gray was a lawyer who worked behind the scenes to make the march from Selma to Montgomery happen. He worked tirelessly to overcome segregation in Alabama's schools through the '60s, and has since been honored at several colleges he helped integrate. He still practices law in Alabama and speaks to audiences about the American Civil Rights movement.

Fred Gray played by **Cuba Gooding, Jr.**



Frank M. Johnson was a district judge who overturned Governor George C. Wallace's prohibition against the march from Selma to Montgomery. He worked to help end segregation throughout the 1960's.

Frank Minis Johnson played by **Martin Sheen**



In the 1960's, Mahalia Jackson, a gospel singer, often traveled with Martin Luther King and the SCLC. "She sang before King's "I Have a Dream" speech during the March on Washington, and would later sing at his funeral. King once said a voice like hers comes around "once in a millennium." (<http://www.zimbio.com/Beyond+the+Box+Office/articles/X7tgHYD0oS0/Selma+Pictures+Histories+29+Real+People+Appear>)

Mahalia Jackson played by **Ledisi Young**



A visible figure in the civil rights movement, Archbishop Iakovos was Primate of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of North and South America. Shown walking with King across the Edmund Pettus Bridge, he remained a visible figure in the civil rights movement, meeting with may subsequent presidents.

Archbishop Iakovos played by **Michael Shikany**



Malcolm X and MLK had common goals but differing approaches. Malcolm X disagreed with the non-violent aspects of the civil rights movement, until he converted to Sunni Islam in 1964. Less than a month before Bloody Sunday, he was assassinated. This is not shown in the film.

Malcolm X played by **Nigel Thatch**



George Wallace was governor of Alabama for four terms, and three of them were after the Voting Rights Act of 1965 had passed. He stayed firmly for segregation, despite laws that passed.

George C. Wallace played by **Tim Roth**



Sheriff Jim Clark was in favor of segregation throughout his life. He wore a button about desegregation that said "Never." Clark ordered the "Bloody Sunday" attack on protesters crossing the Edmund Pettus Bridge.

Sheriff Jim Clark played by **Stan Houston**