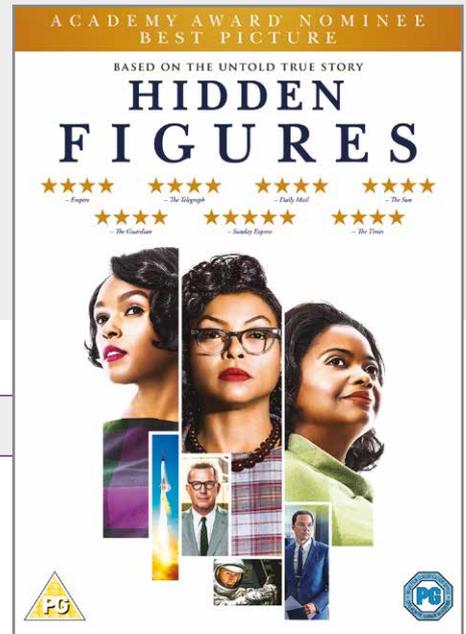




Leader's Guide



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Background Information

- As the United States raced against Russia to put a man in space, NASA found untapped talent in a group of African-American female mathematicians.
- *Hidden Figures*, available on Blu-ray and DVD from July 3rd, tells the true story of Katherine Johnson (Taraji P. Henson), Dorothy Vaughn (Octavia Spencer) and Mary Jackson (Janelle Monáe) who, in 1962, played crucial roles in calculating the launch of astronaut John Glenn into orbit, and guaranteeing his safe return.
- They overcame gender, race, and professional discrimination with their abilities and diligence.

Discussion Questions

1. Given that the true events in this film happened in 1962, why has it taken so long for their stories to be told?
2. Al Harrison, the project leader played by Kevin Costner, says 'We all get there together or we don't get there at all.' To what extent is that true in our society?
3. Theodore Melfi, who directed the film, describes the women as 'the heroes behind the scenes'. In our society, in what ways does the value placed on people in the media affect how we value those whose back-room roles are hidden?
4. Kevin Costner, who played the project leader Al Harrison, says 'It's a story of three women whose God-given abilities were allowed to flourish'. How might the belief that all abilities are 'God-given' make a difference to the way in which we value them, and allow them to flourish?
5. These women's roles are only now publicly recognised because they were portrayed in a film. It could be argued that this reinforces the assumption that abilities are only valued if they are depicted in the media. Do you agree or disagree, and why?

A Key Concept: Intersectionality

- The concept of intersectionality has its origins in the 19th Century, but became prominent in discussions about black feminism in the 1960s and '70s.
- Intersectionality suggests that categories of someone's identity – such as gender, race, class and ability – are not separate, but interact with each other to define a person's place in society.
- It was first named by American race theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw, who argued that black women were 'multiply-burdened' because they were subject to racism and sexism, and sometimes class discrimination as well.