

hidden figures study guide

Hidden Figures Study Guide

The film "Hidden Figures" tells the remarkable true story of three African American women mathematicians who played crucial roles at NASA during the early years of the U.S. space program. This study guide is designed to provide insights into the film's themes, characters, and historical context, helping viewers to better understand the significance of these women's contributions and the societal challenges they faced. Whether you're a student, educator, or simply a film enthusiast, this guide aims to enhance your viewing experience and comprehension of "Hidden Figures."

Overview of Hidden Figures

"Hidden Figures," directed by Theodore Melfi and based on the book by Margot Lee Shetterly, highlights the lives of Katherine Johnson, Dorothy Vaughan, and Mary Jackson. Set during the 1960s, a time of racial segregation and gender discrimination in the United States, the film showcases how these brilliant women overcame obstacles to help launch astronaut John Glenn into orbit.

Main Characters

Katherine Johnson

Katherine Johnson, portrayed by Taraji P. Henson, is a brilliant mathematician whose calculations were essential for NASA's early space missions. Her ability to perform complex equations and her tenacity in the face of discrimination make her a compelling character.

Dorothy Vaughan

Dorothy Vaughan, played by Octavia Spencer, is a talented mathematician and computer programmer. As a supervisor, she advocates for her colleagues and eventually teaches herself and others how to program the first IBM computers at NASA.

Mary Jackson

Mary Jackson, portrayed by Janelle Monáe, is an engineer who fights for the right to attend segregated classes to further her education. Her

determination to become an engineer in a male-dominated field exemplifies her resilience and passion.

Key Themes

Overcoming Adversity

"Hidden Figures" emphasizes the theme of overcoming adversity, showcasing how Katherine, Dorothy, and Mary faced and triumphed over systemic racism and sexism. Their stories inspire viewers to confront their own challenges and advocate for change.

Importance of Education

Education plays a critical role in the film, highlighting how knowledge and skills empower individuals to break barriers. The film illustrates how continuous learning and self-improvement are vital in pursuing one's dreams.

Teamwork and Collaboration

The collaboration between the three women and their colleagues at NASA showcases the importance of teamwork in achieving common goals. The film demonstrates that diverse perspectives contribute significantly to problem-solving and innovation.

Gender and Racial Equality

"Hidden Figures" sheds light on the societal issues of race and gender discrimination. The film serves as a reminder of the struggles faced by women of color in professional environments and the ongoing fight for equality.

Historical Context

The Space Race

The backdrop of "Hidden Figures" is the Space Race, a period during the Cold War where the United States and the Soviet Union competed for supremacy in space exploration. The film provides insight into how this competition propelled advancements in technology and science, while also highlighting the significant contributions of African American women.

Segregation and Civil Rights Movement

The film is set against the backdrop of the Civil Rights Movement, illustrating the harsh realities of segregation that the characters faced daily. It highlights both the struggles and triumphs of the movement, showcasing how these women navigated their professional and personal lives amidst societal upheaval.

Discussion Questions

To deepen your understanding of the film and its themes, consider the following discussion questions:

1. What obstacles did each of the main characters face, and how did they overcome them?
2. How does the film portray the importance of mentorship and support among women?
3. In what ways do the characters' contributions influence the success of NASA's missions?
4. How does "Hidden Figures" challenge stereotypes about women and people of color in STEM fields?
5. What lessons can contemporary society learn from the experiences of Katherine, Dorothy, and Mary?

Activities to Enhance Learning

To further engage with the themes and history presented in "Hidden Figures," consider the following activities:

- Research the real-life contributions of Katherine Johnson, Dorothy Vaughan, and Mary Jackson. Create a presentation or a report highlighting their achievements.
- Host a discussion group or book club to explore the themes of the film and how they relate to current issues in society.
- Visit a local museum or historical site that focuses on civil rights or space exploration to gain a deeper understanding of the context in which the film is set.

- Watch other films or documentaries that highlight the contributions of women and minorities in history, and compare their stories to those presented in "Hidden Figures."

Conclusion

"Hidden Figures" is not just an inspiring story about three remarkable women but also a powerful reminder of the importance of diversity, education, and perseverance in the face of adversity. By using this study guide, viewers can gain a deeper appreciation for the film's historical context and the significant contributions of Katherine Johnson, Dorothy Vaughan, and Mary Jackson. As we reflect on their stories, let us be inspired to advocate for equality, celebrate diversity, and continue pursuing knowledge and innovation in our own lives.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the main theme of 'Hidden Figures'?

The main theme of 'Hidden Figures' is the intersection of race, gender, and mathematics, highlighting the crucial contributions of African American women to NASA during the Space Race.

Who are the three main characters featured in 'Hidden Figures'?

The three main characters are Katherine Johnson, Dorothy Vaughan, and Mary Jackson, each of whom played significant roles at NASA.

What challenges did the women in 'Hidden Figures' face at NASA?

The women faced racial segregation, gender discrimination, and limited opportunities for advancement in a male-dominated and predominantly white workplace.

How did Katherine Johnson contribute to the Space Race?

Katherine Johnson made critical calculations for flight trajectories, including those for John Glenn's historic orbit around Earth, ensuring the success of the missions.

What role did Dorothy Vaughan play in the development of computing at NASA?

Dorothy Vaughan was a mathematician who became an expert in programming the IBM computers and ensured her team's transition from manual calculations to computer-based work.

What impact did Mary Jackson have on engineering at NASA?

Mary Jackson became NASA's first African American female engineer, advocating for women in engineering and breaking barriers in a field dominated by men.

How does 'Hidden Figures' address the issue of representation in STEM fields?

The book and film highlight the historical lack of representation for women of color in STEM, emphasizing the importance of diversity and inclusion for innovation and progress.

What lessons can readers learn from the story of 'Hidden Figures'?

Readers can learn about perseverance, the importance of standing up against discrimination, and how teamwork and collaboration can lead to groundbreaking achievements.

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