



Gather @Grand Speaker Series



Hidden Figures Film Study Guide (Movie # 8)

Lead Characters

- Katherine (Goble) Johnson - was the Mathematician.
 - Dorothy Vaughn - was the head of the West Computing Group
 - Mary Jackson - was assigned to the aerodynamics department.
 - Al Harrison - was Head of the Space Task Group at Langley Research Center
 - Paul Stafford – Lead Engineer at Langley
 - Vivian Mitchell – Supervisor (had blond hair)
 - Ruth – Al Harrison's assistant (red hair)
1. What is the setting for movie "Hidden Figures": location, time, and describe the racial climate in America?
 2. What is the significance of the scene with the policeman, early in the movie? How does it set the tone of white superiority that runs throughout the film and real life? What does it say about discrimination then (1961) and now (2021)?
 3. The film shows the strong relationships that Katherine, Mary and Dorothy have with each other and with their families. Why do these relationships matter?
 4. What is the role of the Black church during the civil rights movement? Why was the church scene important to include?

5. What do you think the coffee and the coffee pot symbolize in "Hidden Figures"? Why?
6. Growing up, what was your knowledge/experience with pearls? What do you think the strand of pearls symbolize in "Hidden Figures"? Why?
7. What do the characters Vivian Mitchell and Ruth (Al Harrison's assistant) show us about how white women in America, working at NASA felt during this time?
8. Think about Mary Jackson's petition to the judge (played by Frank Hoyt Taylor) to be allowed to attend classes offered by the University of Virginia offered at all-white Hampton High School. Why was Mary successful? An excerpt from the beginning of script is below:

Mary: "Mary Jackson. Petition to attend courses at Hampton High School. Good morning, your honor."

Judge: "Hampton High School is a white school, Mrs. Jackson."

Mary: "Yes, your Honor. I'm aware of that."

Judge: "Virginia is still a segregated state. Regardless of what the Federal Government says, or regardless what..Supreme Court says our law..is the law."

Mary: "Your Honor, if I may. I believe there are special circumstances to be considered."

Judge: "What would warrant a colored woman attendin' a white school?"

Mary: "May I approach the bench, sir?"

9. Comment on how characters are "transformed" in the movie? Think about the closing shot of Johnson's main antagonist, Paul Stafford (Jim Parsons), serving her a cup of coffee, or Vaughan's supervisor, Vivian Mitchell (Kirsten Dunst),

promoting her to the job she had already been doing, or Ruth giving Katherine a strand of pearls for her wedding gift.

10. What do you think was the bigger hurdle for the women of West Computing to overcome: being black or being female? Briefly describe your reason.
11. Al Harrison, Katherine's boss, saw Katherine's genius. Unfortunately, Al was oblivious to the discrimination Katherine was experiencing in the Space Task Group, until the confrontation regarding "where Katherine disappeared too every day." Katherine's response was a vivid image of the racism she experienced daily working at NASA. Why do you think Al Harrison was unaware of this? Did Al Harrison's response end racism at NASA or did he just redecorate?
12. Do you think NASA was a socially progressive organization in 1961? Why or why not? Why do you think the culture and environment at Langley were more conducive to integration, during an era when much of the country was not?
13. The events that occurred in the lives of Katherine, Dorothy, and Mary has emotional power. These women were respectful. They never argued or contradicted with their colleagues or leaders. When Mary Jackson was in court appealing to the judge, she painted a compelling shared vision with him. The movie "Hidden Figures" allows us to celebrate the personal accomplishments of the three women, in pursuit of justice. What must we do to get people to see that the ultimate goal is civil-rights – a goal of a universal equality based on humanity alone, extended to the ordinary as well as to the exceptional?

Additional Information about Hidden Figures



<https://www.nasa.gov/modernfigures>



NASA Remembers Hidden Figure Katherine Johnson

YouTube · NASA

Feb 24, 2020

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E8wBJ71zJ34>

Glass ceilings are not created equal: Confronting the barriers black women face in Corporate America- Published on September 13, 2019

<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/glass-ceilings-arent-created-equal-confronting-barriers-minda-harts>

Next Movie/Documentary: (Study guide available on August 15, 2021)

Necessary, searing, and engaging, *13th* — from *Selma* director Ava DuVernay — is a primer on the historical context and moral urgency behind a lot of today's most pressing public issues, from **mass incarceration** and **the war on drugs** to **police brutality** and **private prisons**. It also thoroughly explores the dovetailing motivations behind the **Black Lives Matter** movement. The documentary is a compelling whirlwind tour through America's long history of racism and, perhaps more importantly, America's long history of *denying* its racism, and the ways that its denial has affected the country's justice system.

How to watch it: *13th* is streaming **on Netflix** and **on YouTube**.