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THE MOVIE *SELMA* AND *BECAUSE THEY MARCHED:* A COMPARISON

- ❖ Draw a comparison between the way Annie Lee Cooper is portrayed in the movie and in Freedman’s book. How does she grow from a lesser-known figure among the marchers to a bigger personality?
- ❖ The movie *Selma* reveals tension between the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. What is the basis of the disagreement? Discuss why John Lewis elects to march with King from Selma to Montgomery.
- ❖ There is much discussion about the way President Lyndon B. Johnson is portrayed in *Selma*. Based on information garnered from *Because They Marched* and *Freedom Summer: The 1964 Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi*, debate whether Johnson is portrayed accurately.
- ❖ What is J. Edgar Hoover’s attitude toward Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. in the movie? How does he try to blackmail King? Why does he think he can “weaken the dynamic” if he “dismantles the family”?
- ❖ The philosophy of Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. was “Negotiate, Demonstrate, and Resist.” How does his philosophy differ from that of Malcolm X? How is his skill at negotiating, demonstrating, and resisting evident in the movie, and in *Because They Marched* and *Freedom Walkers*?
- ❖ The marchers suffered great violence at the hands of Sheriff Jim Clark and his posse. How does seeing the violence in *Selma* make it more real than reading about it? Define “hate speech.” Cite examples of overt and covert hate speech in the movie, and in photographs in *Because They Marched*. How does hate speech leave lasting wounds? Discuss how John Lewis has dealt with his wounds.
- ❖ In an Op-Ed piece for the *Los Angeles Times* (January 17, 2015), Rep. John Lewis says, “The role of art in our society is not to reenact history but to offer an

interpretation of human experience.” He believes that *Selma* is a work of art. How is it impossible for a movie or any work of art to completely “reenact history”? Explain how the movie interprets the human experience of that historic event.

- ❖ John Lewis credits the march from Selma to Montgomery to the vision of people of Selma and their unwavering determination to gain the right to vote. Compare and contrast how the movie portrays these “ordinary people” with the way Freedman tells their story in *Because They Marched*. Discuss the efforts of the “ordinary people” in *Freedom Walkers* and *Freedom Summer: The 1964 Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi*.
- ❖ Martin Luther King III feels that the movie may help young people engage in conversation about the racial struggle of the past and draw a comparison with racial tensions of the twenty-first century. Debate the connection between past and present racial issues in this country. What might today’s youth learn from Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the people who marched from Selma to Montgomery?
- ❖ Common and John Legend won Golden Globe Awards for the song “Glory” used in the film. How does the song relate to the events in Selma, Alabama, in 1965 and to more recent racial issues?

WRITING

- ❖ Movie director Ava DuVernay couldn’t use the actual speeches of Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. because the family had already licensed them to another studio. Have students write a paper that discusses the effectiveness of the speeches written by DuVernay. Do they portray the essence of the man and his cause? How do the speeches support John Lewis’s idea that *Selma* is art?
- ❖ Have students write a review of *Selma*. Instruct them to compare the facts presented both in the film and in Freedman’s book. Rate the movie on a scale of one to five (five being the best).
- ❖ Rosa Parks ignited what became known as the “Modern Civil Rights Movement” when she took a seat in the front of the bus in Montgomery, Alabama, in 1955. Take information gathered from *Freedom Walkers*, *Because They Marched*, *Freedom Summer: The 1964 Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi*, and the movie *Selma* and construct a timeline of the major events of the civil rights movement. Title the timeline “From Montgomery to the Edmund Pettus Bridge.”