

“Hidden Figures” starring Taraji P. Henson, Octavia Spencer, Janelle Monáe, 2016, PG, 127 minutes

Major themes:

- Space Exploration
- NASA
- Discrimination
- Sexism
- Racism
- Mathematics
- Community
- Perseverance
- Teamwork
- Hard work

Major characters:

- Katherine Goble Johnson
- Dorothy Vaughan
- Mary Jackson
- Al Harrison
- Vivian Mitchell
- Paul Stafford

Movie Nights for Thinkers and Seekers

Background info:

- Mercury-Atlas 6 (MA-6) was the first American orbital spaceflight, which took place on February 20, 1962.
- This film is based on Margot Lee Shetterly's nonfiction book *"Hidden Figures,"* about a group of Black female mathematicians that helped NASA win the Space Race.
- Film taglines include, *"Meet the women you don't know, behind the mission you do", "They wanted a chance to change their lives, but they got a chance to change history",* and *"Genius has no race. Strength has no gender. Courage has no limit."*
- This film was shot primarily in Atlanta, on the campus of Morehouse College and at Lockheed Martin Aeronautics at Dobbins Air Reserve Base.
- Colors were a key component in setting the mood of the film. The rooms at NASA where calculations took place were filmed in cold, sterile whites, grays, and silvers, in sharp contrast to the warm tones utilized in Al Harrison's office and the women's homes.
- Scriptwriter Allison Schroeder grew up by Cape Canaveral, interning at NASA where two of her grandparents also worked.
- Mathematics professor Rudy Horne from Atlanta's Morehouse College (an Historically Black College) served as a mathematics consultant to ensure correct pronunciation of "Euler," accurate equations on the blackboards, and to teach the cast how to get excited about mathematics!
- At age 98, Katherine Johnson was the only survivor of the "Hidden Figures" trio to view this film depicting their achievements. In November 2015, she was awarded a Presidential Medal of Freedom by President Obama for her work at NASA. The following year, NASA named a building in her honor – the Katherine G. Johnson Computational Research Facility in Hampton, VA.

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Scriptures:

Proverbs 31:8-9 (NLT) – *“Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves; ensure justice for those being crushed. Yes, speak up for the poor and helpless, and see that they get justice.”*

James 1:12 (NIV) – *“Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him.”*

James 2:2-4,8-9,12-14,17 (NLT) – *“Suppose someone comes into your meeting dressed in fancy clothes and expensive jewelry, and another comes in who is poor and dressed in dirty clothes. If you give special attention and a good seat to the rich person, but you say to the poor one, ‘You can stand over there, or else sit on the floor’—well, doesn’t this discrimination show that your judgments are guided by evil motives? . . . Yes indeed, it is good when you obey the royal law as found in the Scriptures: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ But if you favor some people over others, you are committing a sin. You are guilty of breaking the law . . . So whatever you say or whatever you do, remember that you will be judged by the law that sets you free. There will be no mercy for those who have not shown mercy to others. But if you have been merciful, God will be merciful when he judges you. What good is it, dear brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but don’t show it by your actions? Can that kind of faith save anyone? . . . So you see, faith by itself isn’t enough. Unless it produces good deeds, it is dead and useless.”*

Isaiah 1:17 (The Message) – *“Say no to wrong. Learn to do good. Work for justice. Help the down-and-out. Stand up for the homeless. Go to bat for the defenseless.”*

Galatians 3:28 (The Message) – *“In Christ’s family there can be no division into Jew and non-Jew, slave and free, male and female. Among us you are all equal.”*

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Discussion points:

1. What hurdles were the women of West Computing faced with, that others around them were not?
2. What changes do you notice regarding racial discrimination portrayed in this film set in the 1960's and the present? What changes still need to occur?
3. In what ways did Katherine, Dorothy, and Mary succeed? What factors helped them the most?
4. Mary showed great perseverance and courage as she pursued her goals. She noted that "*someone has to be the first.*" What barrier in our society that needs to be broken do you notice that will require someone with perseverance, courage, and the willingness to be the first?
5. There were several places in this film where someone stood up or spoke up on behalf of someone else. Which of those was the most meaningful to you?
6. How has the world changed for women in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) since the 1960's? What other changes are needed?