BRITFILMS #9 – Accompanying material for media education

SELMA

USA 2014, 123 min.

German certification: minimum age 12
recommended for 14 years and older
Language: English/English with German subtitles

Director	Ava DuVernay
Script	Paul Webb
Cinematography	Bradford Young
Editing	Spencer Averick
Cast	David Oyelowo, Tom Wilkinson, Carmen Ejogo, André Holland, Giovanni Ribisi, Cuba Gooding Jr., Tim Roth and others

About SELMA

Although by the summer of 1965, the Civil Rights Act had legally ended segregation in the South, equality was still far from achieved. For the majority of Black Americans, there were bureaucratic barriers that kept them from registering to vote. And if you can't vote, you have no opportunity to shape your life or society. Martin Luther King took on the challenge to change this situation. He launched a campaign based in Selma, Alabama, a place where very few black citizens could vote. To raise national attention, he organized a march from Selma to the state capital in Montgomery, approximately 85 kilometres away. However, he was met with the resistance of the local, racist officials.

This film is about the three historic marches from Selma to Montgomery, the result of which was the signing by President Lyndon B. Johnson of the Voting Rights Act. By focusing on a piece of King's work and life, the film attempts to provide insights into King's private life as well as giving space to other perspectives that doubted King's non-violent strategies.

The following worksheets will address

- who Martin Luther King was and how differently the US teaser poster and the German poster portray him
- the historical references
- how the second march from Selma to Montgomery is staged and the role of the camera's perspective and shot size in this staging

Publishing information

Publisher:
AG Kino – Gilde deutscher Filmkunsttheater
Rankestraße 31
10789 Berlin

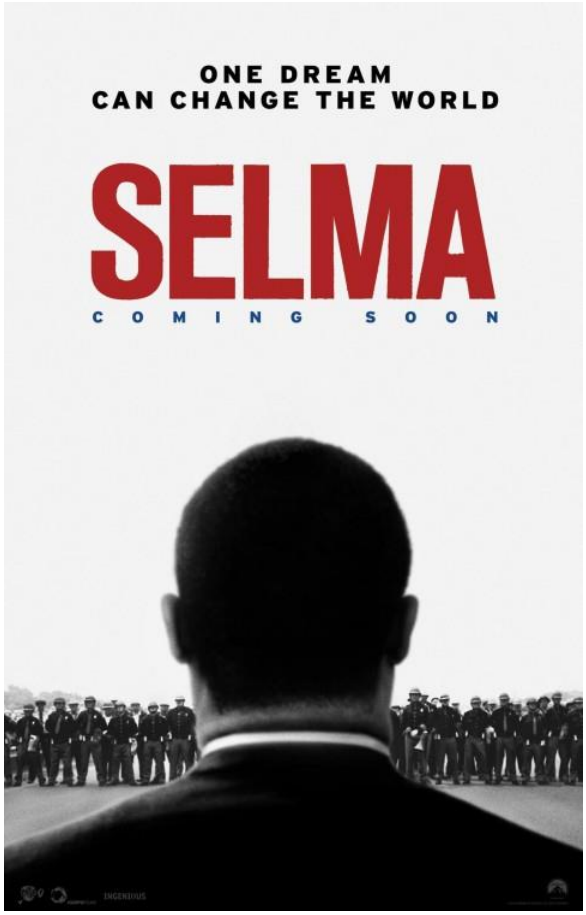
Author:
Stefan Stiletto
stiletto@filme-schoener-sehen.de

Photo credits: Arthaus
(All the stills are from the DVD of SELMA, published in Germany by Arthaus. They serve as image quotations, to enable study of the film's content, and not as illustrations.)

Before the film: Martin Luther King
Who was Martin Luther King? In the form of a timeline, list the most important events in his life and compile a short lexicon text that describes King's historical significance.

Film posters and comparing what they say
On the left is a teaser poster for the film seen in the USA. And on the right is the German poster.

Compare both motifs: What situation is being depicted? How is Martin Luther King characterized? What role does the colour design have?



US Teaser Poster

German Poster

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Before the watching the movie: Historical references
SELMA assumes a basic knowledge of the struggles of African Americans for civil rights. In small groups prepare a short presentation or information board on the following topics or persons:

Civil Rights Act	Black Consciousness Movement	Segregation
Malcom X	Montgomery Bus Boycott	March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom

In the presence of the President
During a visit to the White House Martin Luther King once again disagrees with President Lyndon B. Johnson. In the background above the fireplace you can see a portrait of a former United States president.

Whose portrait is on the wall?

_____

What is his significance in American history?

_____

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In the film still above the portrait seems to hover over King and Johnson. What meaning could this have?

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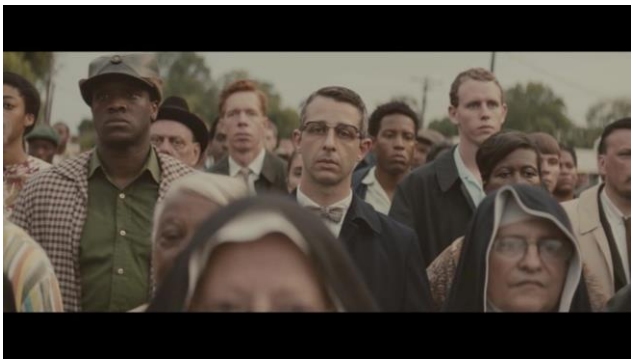
The second march from Selma to Montgomery

The following stills are from the scene in the movie in which the second march from Selma to Montgomery is shown.

1



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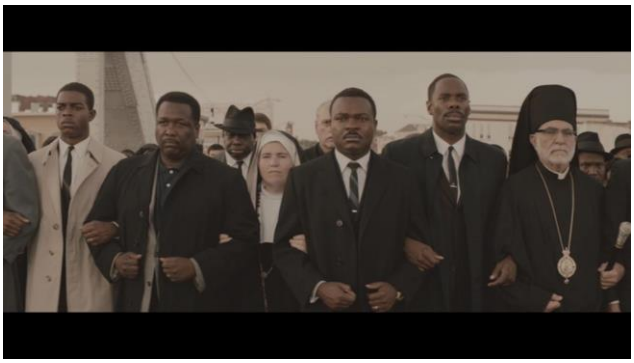

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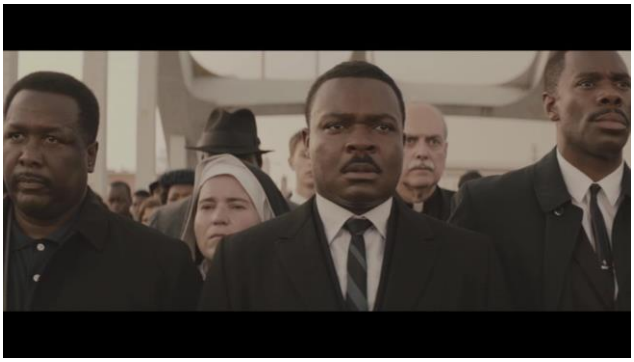

8

What shot size is used to film the demonstrators, and in contrast, the shot size used to film the police? Explain what shot size can reveal and how in doing so the film takes a particular side.

Image	Shot size	Information on the person depicted
Images 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8		
Image 6		
Image 7		

In this scene the director chooses to highlight certain demonstrators. Who specifically?

Image 1	
Image 2	
Image 3	
Image 5	
Image 6	
Image 8	

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Discuss together with the class: Why do you think it was important for the director to give these demonstrators a face and not focus exclusively on Martin Luther King?