

# The Great Debaters Discussion Questions Answers



THE GREAT DEBATERS DISCUSSION QUESTIONS ANSWERS CAN PROVIDE A DEEPER UNDERSTANDING OF THE THEMES, CHARACTERS, AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT PRESENTED IN THE FILM. "THE GREAT DEBATERS," DIRECTED BY DENZEL WASHINGTON, IS INSPIRED BY THE TRUE STORY OF THE WILEY COLLEGE DEBATE TEAM IN THE 1930S. IT EXPLORES ISSUES OF RACE, JUSTICE, AND THE POWER OF WORDS WHILE HIGHLIGHTING THE IMPORTANCE OF EDUCATION AND CRITICAL THINKING. THIS ARTICLE WILL ADDRESS A SERIES OF DISCUSSION QUESTIONS THAT CAN ENHANCE YOUR VIEWING EXPERIENCE AND PROVOKE THOUGHTFUL DIALOGUE.

## Key Themes in "The Great Debaters"

BEFORE DELVING INTO SPECIFIC DISCUSSION QUESTIONS, IT'S IMPORTANT TO UNDERSTAND SOME OF THE KEY THEMES PRESENT IN "THE GREAT DEBATERS":

1. RACIAL INJUSTICE: THE FILM IS SET AGAINST THE BACKDROP OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION IN THE UNITED STATES, SHOWCASING THE STRUGGLES OF AFRICAN AMERICANS DURING THE JIM CROW ERA.
2. THE POWER OF WORDS: THE IMPORTANCE OF ELOQUENCE, RHETORIC, AND DIALOGUE IS EMPHASIZED THROUGHOUT THE FILM, ILLUSTRATING HOW WORDS CAN INSPIRE CHANGE AND CHALLENGE SOCIETAL NORMS.
3. EDUCATION AND EMPOWERMENT: THE MOVIE CELEBRATES EDUCATION AS A MEANS OF EMPOWERMENT, HIGHLIGHTING THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF KNOWLEDGE AND CRITICAL THINKING.
4. COURAGE AND RESISTANCE: THE CHARACTERS EXEMPLIFY COURAGE IN THE FACE OF ADVERSITY, STANDING UP AGAINST OPPRESSION AND FIGHTING FOR THEIR BELIEFS.

UNDERSTANDING THESE THEMES WILL HELP YOU ENGAGE MORE MEANINGFULLY WITH THE SUBSEQUENT DISCUSSION QUESTIONS.

## Discussion Questions and Answers

### 1. WHAT ROLE DOES DEBATE PLAY IN THE LIVES OF THE CHARACTERS?

DEBATE IS CENTRAL TO THE CHARACTERS' IDENTITIES AND ASPIRATIONS. FOR MELVIN TOLSON, THE COACH, IT IS A TOOL FOR EMPOWERMENT AND SOCIAL CHANGE. FOR THE STUDENTS, PARTICIPATING IN DEBATES ALLOWS THEM TO EXPRESS THEIR IDEAS, CHALLENGE SOCIETAL INJUSTICES, AND DEVELOP THEIR OWN VOICES. THE FILM ILLUSTRATES HOW DEBATE CULTIVATES CONFIDENCE AND CRITICAL THINKING, ENABLING THE CHARACTERS TO CONFRONT RACIAL DISCRIMINATION AND ADVOCATE FOR JUSTICE.

## 2. HOW DOES THE FILM PORTRAY THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EDUCATION AND SOCIAL CHANGE?

THE FILM SUGGESTS THAT EDUCATION IS VITAL FOR SOCIAL CHANGE. WILEY COLLEGE'S DEBATE TEAM EMBODIES THE IDEA THAT KNOWLEDGE EQUIPS INDIVIDUALS WITH THE TOOLS TO CHALLENGE THE STATUS QUO. THE CHARACTERS' DEDICATION TO THEIR EDUCATION HIGHLIGHTS THE BELIEF THAT INTELLECTUAL RIGOR CAN LEAD TO GREATER SOCIAL AWARENESS AND ACTIVISM. AS THEY ENGAGE IN DEBATES, THEY NOT ONLY ENHANCE THEIR KNOWLEDGE BUT ALSO INSPIRE OTHERS TO QUESTION SOCIETAL INJUSTICES.

## 3. IN WHAT WAYS DOES "THE GREAT DEBATERS" ADDRESS THE THEME OF COURAGE?

COURAGE IS DEPICTED THROUGH THE CHARACTERS' WILLINGNESS TO CONFRONT THE OPPRESSIVE SYSTEMS AROUND THEM. FOR INSTANCE, JAMES FARMER JR. SHOWS COURAGE WHEN HE DEBATES AGAINST RACISM AND ADVOCATES FOR CIVIL RIGHTS, EVEN WHEN FACED WITH HOSTILITY. SIMILARLY, THE CHARACTERS DEMONSTRATE MORAL COURAGE BY STANDING UP FOR THEIR BELIEFS, DESPITE THE PERSONAL AND SOCIAL RISKS INVOLVED. THE FILM ULTIMATELY PORTRAYS COURAGE AS AN ESSENTIAL QUALITY FOR ENACTING MEANINGFUL CHANGE.

## 4. WHAT IS THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CHARACTER OF MELVIN TOLSON?

MELVIN TOLSON SERVES AS A MENTOR AND CATALYST FOR CHANGE, EMBODYING THE FILM'S CENTRAL THEMES OF EDUCATION AND ACTIVISM. HIS CHARACTER REPRESENTS THE STRUGGLE OF AFRICAN AMERICAN INTELLECTUALS DURING THE 1930s. TOLSON'S COMMITMENT TO TEACHING HIS STUDENTS ABOUT THE POWER OF RHETORIC AND CRITICAL THOUGHT REFLECTS HIS BELIEF IN THEIR POTENTIAL TO EFFECT CHANGE. ADDITIONALLY, HIS INVOLVEMENT IN ORGANIZING LABOR MOVEMENTS HIGHLIGHTS THE INTERSECTION OF EDUCATION AND SOCIAL JUSTICE.

## 5. HOW DOES THE FILM DEPICT THE IMPACT OF RACISM ON INDIVIDUALS AND SOCIETY?

"THE GREAT DEBATERS" PORTRAYS RACISM AS A PERVERSIVE FORCE THAT AFFECTS EVERY ASPECT OF THE CHARACTERS' LIVES. THE FILM ILLUSTRATES THE EMOTIONAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL TOLL OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION, AS SEEN THROUGH THE EXPERIENCES OF THE DEBATE TEAM MEMBERS. THEIR ENCOUNTERS WITH PREJUDICE REVEAL THE SOCIETAL BARRIERS THAT RESTRICT THEIR OPPORTUNITIES. THE FILM EMPHASIZES THAT RACISM NOT ONLY HARMS INDIVIDUALS BUT ALSO STUNTS SOCIETAL PROGRESS, UNDERSCORING THE NEED FOR COLLECTIVE ACTION AGAINST INJUSTICE.

## 6. WHAT ROLE DOES FAMILY PLAY IN THE LIVES OF THE CHARACTERS?

FAMILY IS A CRUCIAL ELEMENT IN THE FILM, INFLUENCING THE CHARACTERS' MOTIVATIONS AND DECISIONS. FOR EXAMPLE, JAMES FARMER JR. IS INSPIRED BY HIS FATHER'S ACTIVISM, WHICH SHAPES HIS OWN ASPIRATIONS. THE SUPPORT AND EXPECTATIONS OF FAMILY MEMBERS SERVE AS BOTH A SOURCE OF STRENGTH AND PRESSURE FOR THE CHARACTERS. THE FILM ILLUSTRATES THAT FAMILY DYNAMICS CAN SIGNIFICANTLY IMPACT AN INDIVIDUAL'S PATH, ESPECIALLY IN THE CONTEXT OF HISTORICAL STRUGGLES FOR CIVIL RIGHTS.

## 7. HOW DOES THE USE OF HISTORICAL CONTEXT ENHANCE THE FILM'S NARRATIVE?

THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF THE 1930s SERVES TO AMPLIFY THE FILM'S THEMES AND CHARACTER STRUGGLES. BY SITUATING THE STORY DURING A TIME OF PROFOUND RACIAL INEQUALITY, THE FILM PROVIDES A BACKDROP THAT UNDERSCORES THE IMPORTANCE OF THE DEBATE TEAM'S ACHIEVEMENTS. HISTORICAL EVENTS, SUCH AS THE LYNCHING OF AFRICAN AMERICANS AND THE FIGHT FOR CIVIL RIGHTS, ADD DEPTH TO THE CHARACTERS' MOTIVATIONS AND HIGHLIGHT THE STAKES INVOLVED IN THEIR PURSUIT OF JUSTICE.

## 8. WHAT ARE SOME KEY RHETORICAL STRATEGIES USED IN THE DEBATES?

THE FILM SHOWCASES VARIOUS RHETORICAL STRATEGIES THAT THE CHARACTERS EMPLOY TO PERSUADE THEIR AUDIENCES.

THESE INCLUDE:

- ETHOS: ESTABLISHING CREDIBILITY BY SHARING PERSONAL EXPERIENCES AND QUALIFICATIONS.
- PATHOS: EVOKING EMOTIONAL RESPONSES THROUGH POWERFUL STORYTELLING AND RELATABLE ANECDOTES.
- LOGOS: UTILIZING LOGICAL ARGUMENTS AND FACTUAL EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT CLAIMS.

BY MASTERING THESE STRATEGIES, THE CHARACTERS ARE ABLE TO EFFECTIVELY CONVEY THEIR MESSAGES AND CHALLENGE OPPOSING VIEWPOINTS.

## 9. HOW DOES THE CLIMAX OF THE FILM REFLECT THE OVERALL MESSAGE?

THE CLIMAX OF "THE GREAT DEBATERS" OCCURS DURING THE FINAL DEBATE AGAINST HARVARD UNIVERSITY, WHERE THE STAKES ARE HIGHEST. THIS MOMENT ENCAPSULATES THE FILM'S OVERALL MESSAGE ABOUT THE POWER OF WORDS AND THE IMPORTANCE OF STANDING UP FOR ONE'S BELIEFS. THE DEBATE SERVES AS A CULMINATION OF THE CHARACTERS' GROWTH AND PREPARATION, DEMONSTRATING HOW THEIR EDUCATION AND EXPERIENCES HAVE EQUIPPED THEM TO TACKLE COMPLEX SOCIAL ISSUES. THE OUTCOME REINFORCES THE IDEA THAT WHILE THE BATTLE AGAINST INJUSTICE IS ONGOING, THE PURSUIT OF TRUTH AND JUSTICE IS ALWAYS WORTHWHILE.

## 10. WHAT LESSONS CAN MODERN AUDIENCES TAKE FROM "THE GREAT DEBATERS"?

MODERN AUDIENCES CAN DRAW SEVERAL LESSONS FROM "THE GREAT DEBATERS," INCLUDING:

- THE IMPORTANCE OF EDUCATION: EDUCATION REMAINS A POWERFUL TOOL FOR PERSONAL AND SOCIETAL CHANGE.
- THE POWER OF RHETORIC: EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION IS CRUCIAL IN ADVOCATING FOR JUSTICE AND INFLUENCING PUBLIC OPINION.
- COURAGE IN THE FACE OF ADVERSITY: STANDING UP FOR ONE'S BELIEFS IS ESSENTIAL, EVEN WHEN FACED WITH CHALLENGES.
- COMMUNITY AND SUPPORT: BUILDING A SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITY CAN EMPOWER INDIVIDUALS TO PURSUE THEIR GOALS AND EFFECT CHANGE.

BY REFLECTING ON THESE LESSONS, VIEWERS CAN APPLY THE FILM'S MESSAGES TO CONTEMPORARY ISSUES, FOSTERING A COMMITMENT TO SOCIAL JUSTICE AND ACTIVISM.

## CONCLUSION

"THE GREAT DEBATERS" IS NOT JUST A FILM ABOUT DEBATE; IT IS A PROFOUND EXPLORATION OF THE ROLE OF EDUCATION, COURAGE, AND THE POWER OF WORDS IN THE FIGHT AGAINST INJUSTICE. ENGAGING WITH THE GREAT DEBATERS DISCUSSION QUESTIONS ANSWERS CAN DEEPEN YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF THESE THEMES AND ENCOURAGE MEANINGFUL CONVERSATIONS ABOUT RACE, JUSTICE, AND THE IMPORTANCE OF ADVOCACY. AS WE REFLECT ON THE STRUGGLES OF THE PAST, WE ARE REMINDED OF OUR RESPONSIBILITY TO CONTINUE THE FIGHT FOR EQUALITY AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN OUR OWN LIVES.

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### WHAT ARE THE CENTRAL THEMES EXPLORED IN 'THE GREAT DEBATERS'?

THE CENTRAL THEMES INCLUDE THE POWER OF EDUCATION, THE IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL JUSTICE, THE STRUGGLE AGAINST OPPRESSION, AND THE VALUE OF CIVIL DISCOURSE.

### HOW DOES THE FILM PORTRAY THE ROLE OF DEBATE IN SHAPING ONE'S IDENTITY?

THE FILM ILLUSTRATES THAT DEBATE IS NOT JUST A COMPETITIVE ACTIVITY BUT A MEANS FOR INDIVIDUALS TO EXPRESS THEIR BELIEFS, DEVELOP CONFIDENCE, AND ASSERT THEIR IDENTITIES IN A SOCIETY THAT OFTEN MARGINALIZES THEM.

## WHAT IMPACT DOES THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT HAVE ON THE CHARACTERS' MOTIVATIONS IN 'THE GREAT DEBATERS'?

THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF THE JIM CROW ERA DEEPLY INFLUENCES THE CHARACTERS' MOTIVATIONS, DRIVING THEM TO FIGHT AGAINST RACIAL INJUSTICE AND SEEK EQUALITY THROUGH EDUCATION AND ELOQUENCE.

## HOW DOES THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE STUDENTS AND THEIR PROFESSOR INFLUENCE THEIR DEVELOPMENT?

THE RELATIONSHIP SERVES AS A MENTOR-STUDENT DYNAMIC WHERE THE PROFESSOR INSPIRES THE STUDENTS TO THINK CRITICALLY, CHALLENGE SOCIETAL NORMS, AND PUSH THE BOUNDARIES OF THEIR POTENTIAL.

## IN WHAT WAYS DOES 'THE GREAT DEBATERS' EMPHASIZE THE IMPORTANCE OF CIVIL RIGHTS?

THE FILM EMPHASIZES CIVIL RIGHTS BY SHOWCASING THE CHARACTERS' DEBATES ON CRUCIAL SOCIAL ISSUES, HIGHLIGHTING THE STRUGGLES FOR EQUALITY, AND PORTRAYING THEIR DETERMINATION TO ADVOCATE FOR JUSTICE.

## WHAT LESSONS CAN BE DRAWN FROM THE CHARACTERS' EXPERIENCES IN 'THE GREAT DEBATERS'?

KEY LESSONS INCLUDE THE SIGNIFICANCE OF PERSEVERANCE IN THE FACE OF ADVERSITY, THE POWER OF WORDS TO EFFECT CHANGE, AND THE NEED FOR UNITY IN THE FIGHT FOR JUSTICE AND EQUALITY.

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