



# Selma

Director: Ava DuVernay

Ratings info: moderate violence, racist language, infrequent strong language



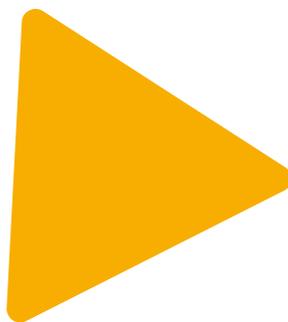
## Synopsis

Selma is a US drama based on the marches from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama in the 1960s involving Martin Luther King Jr.

## About the film

Directed by Ava DuVernay, Selma stars actor David Oyelowo as Martin Luther King Jr. The film received critical acclaim, with particular praise given to DuVernay's direction and Oyelowo's performance.

Selma was viewed on 5 December 2014 by two Examiners. It was submitted without a category request. However, the film was not classified until 15 December 2014. This is because the film required further viewing by senior members of the BBFC before it was classified.



## BBFC age rating and about the film

The film is rated **12A for moderate violence, racist language, infrequent strong language**



The original viewing team agreed that *Selma* should be rated 12A. However, some of the classification issues, particularly the violence and racism, registered quite strongly and, the team recommended that the film be viewed again by Senior Examiners to confirm the proposed 12A rating.

After the film was seen again, the team confirmed the 12A rating for moderate violence, racist language and infrequent strong language.

### So what was it in terms of classification that was so challenging in *Selma*?

Well, racism is one of the key classification issues in the film. At 12A, our Classification Guidelines state that 'Discriminatory language or behaviour must not be endorsed by the work as a whole. Aggressive Discriminatory language or behaviour is unlikely to be acceptable unless clearly condemned'.

In *Selma*, the issue of racism is clearly condemned by the narrative. However, there are several scenes which include aggressive uses of racist language ('n\*\*\*\*r'), as well as scenes of racially motivated violence.

While these scenes are distressing, and could potentially upset younger audiences, the issues are strongly contextualised within the historical and social context in which the film is set. The film also has strong educational value and has particular merit for younger viewers who may be starting to engage with the history of the American Civil Rights Movement, or on issues of activism and anti-racism. As a result, we concluded that there were strong contextual mitigations to permit the racism at 12A.

The violence in the film is similarly challenging because it is racially motivated and therefore registers more strongly than other types of violence. However, there is limited sight of blood and injury detail and the violence is contextually justified within the narrative as it reinforces the unjust crimes committed against the African American community. Consequently, it was acceptable at 12A.

Additionally, the strong language ('f\*\*k') is infrequent and comfortably contained at the 12A level.

Other issues include a scene in which Coretta Scott King plays her husband a tape that includes a recording of him having sex with another woman; sexual moaning can be heard, albeit briefly.

The process of referral that happened with *Selma* is quite common and films that are high profile, sit near or on the borders of particular age ratings, or raise novel or interesting policy issues are often viewed by multiple members of staff. We do this so we make sure we get the ratings right.



## Discussion Points

- The film doesn't shy away from the personal failings of Dr. King and depicting the impact his work has on his family life. Why do you think the director chose to highlight his personal struggles in the narrative? How does this inform your reading of Dr. King? What are the differences between his personal and public life?
- In what ways do you think the issues raised in the film are relevant to today?
- Can you see any similarities or differences between the Civil Rights Movement depicted in this film and the Black Lives Matter movement?
- What techniques does the director use in the 'Bloody Sunday' sequence to reinforce the horrors of violence perpetrated against the peaceful protestors?
- The film is rated 12(A). Do you agree with the rating? Would you argue for a lower or higher classification and if so, why?

## Further Viewing

*Malcom X* (Spike Lee, 1992) 15

*13th* (Ava DuVernay, 2016) 15

*Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom* (Justin Chadwick, 2014) 12

*Curriculum links: This case study can be used for those studying 'American film since 2005: Section B: Comparative Study of Contemporary American Independent Cinema (post 2005) - Mainstream film' on the WJEC AS/A-level specification.*