

EDUCATIONAL GUIDE

Miss Alma Thomas

— A LIFE IN COLOR —



FILM SYNOPSIS:

Alma W. Thomas, a Black woman painter, broke color barriers on and off the canvas, yet did not receive national attention until she was 80 years old. “Miss Alma Thomas” is the first documentary film that explores Thomas’ incredible life through the lens of curators, art specialists, scholars, her family, and award-winning actress Alfre Woodard as the voice of Miss Thomas.

FILM GUIDE OBJECTIVES:

To provide prompts that allow students to think more deeply about the concepts presented in the film, and to find creative ways to connect those concepts to their own lives.

CONTENTS: Questions & Prompts in the following categories

1. Biographical
2. Historical
3. Media Literacy



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BIOGRAPHICAL

SKILLS ENGAGED: Hypothesize, Cite Evidence

Reflection: After reviewing the film, why do you think the filmmakers thought it important to document the story of Alma Thomas? Provide specific examples from the text to support your viewpoint.

SKILLS ENGAGED: Apply Concepts, Create

Reflection: In the film Miss Alma talks about living in a cultured home and provides a few examples.

1. How do you define culture and how does it show up in your life?
2. Partner with two other classmates and share your definitions of culture. How are they similar? How are they different?
3. Create a collage that visually represents culture that includes both your perspective and that of your classmates.

SKILLS ENGAGED: Create

Reflection: Miss Alma had a designer create an outfit whenever she had a new exhibition. It reflected the colors of her art.

1. Using a piece of art of your choosing, design an outfit for the artist to attend their newest exhibition.

SKILLS ENGAGED: Identify, Relate

Reflection: The film listed a number of firsts that were attained by Alma Thomas.

1. Name two of those firsts.
2. When have you seen a “first” in your lifetime? What significance did it hold for you? For your community?



EDUCATIONAL GUIDE

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HISTORICAL

SKILLS ENGAGED: Analyze, Develop a Logical Argument

Reflection: An expert in the film shares that although Miss Alma lived during tumultuous times, she chose not to paint them.

1. From your perspective what is the role of the artist in a society? Identify specific artists (musicians, actors, painters, etc.) that support and oppose your perspective.

SKILLS ENGAGED: Research, Create

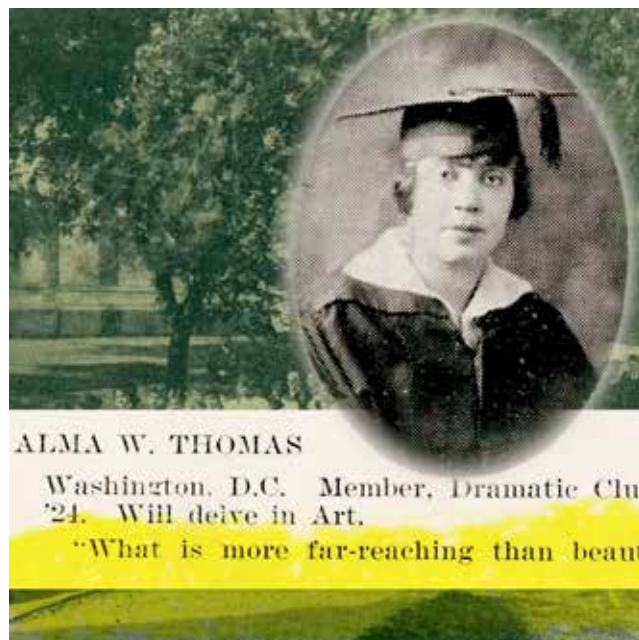
Reflection: Miss Alma attended a World's Fair.

1. Which fair did she attend? What was the theme that year?
2. What is the purpose of a World's Fair? Do they still exist? Cite Research.
3. Working in small groups, create a model World's Fair as you would envision it today.

SKILLS ENGAGED: Research, Analyze, Inference, Compare

Reflection: In 1972, Miss Alma's art was exhibited at the Corcoran, a place she mentions visiting for the first time in 1908. Yet, according to Miss Alma, in 1908, "they didn't want Negroes [in the Corcoran] particularly."

1. What changed over time that allowed Miss Alma to exhibit at a site that previously she was not even welcomed to enter?
2. Using the National Archives or the Library of Congress, find a photograph of one location in Washington, DC taken in 1908 and again in 1972. Compare and contrast the images. Identify changes and similarities. If there are changes, discuss why they might have occurred.



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MEDIA LITERACY

SKILLS ENGAGED: Analyze, Deconstruct

Reflection: Who, what, when, why, where, how?

1. What is the purpose of this film? To persuade, inform, entertain?.
2. Who made this film? Who funded it? Does that impact your perception of the film?
3. What was left out of the film?

SKILLS ENGAGED: Critique, Cite Evidence, Revise

Reflection: Think about the experts interviewed in the film.

1. Do you find them credible? Why? Why not? Choose two and defend your perspective.
2. What is the role of the individuals interviewed? If you did not have access to these individuals, how else might you tell the story of Alma Thomas?

SKILLS ENGAGED: Analyze, Critique, Revise

Reflection: The filmmaker(s) used a variety of techniques to tell the story - interviews, animation, archival footage.

1. How did each of these techniques inform the film?
2. Would you do anything differently?

SKILLS ENGAGED: Research, Inference, Revise

Reflection: The filmmakers chose to have an actor read as Alma.

1. Who was the actress? Why might they have chosen that particular actress?
2. If you were casting for Alma's voice, based on what you learned in the documentary, who would you choose and why?

