

## Discussion Starters for *Hidden Figures* by Margot Lee Shetterly

- 1 What is the significance of the title? Would you have given the book a different title? If so, what would you choose?
- 2 *Hidden Figures* uncovers the story of the women whose work at NACA and NASA helped shape and define U.S. space exploration. Taken as a whole, why is their story significant to our cultural, social, and scientific history?
- 3 In advocating for herself to work on the Mercury capsule launch, Katherine says to her bosses, "Tell me where you want the man to land, and I'll tell you where to send him up." How are the women in *Hidden Figures* able to express confidence in their work and abilities? In what ways is that confidence validated by their coworkers? Why is this emotional experience such an important part of their story?
- 4 In what way(s) did the space race parallel the civil rights movement? What kinds of freedoms were being explored in each?
- 5 Would you consider NACA and NASA socially progressive institutions for their time? Why or why not?
- 6 What surprised you most about the book? What scene(s) resonated most with you personally in either a positive or negative way? Why?
- 7 In the book, we learn that some people thought that spending money on space exploration was wasteful when there were so many other problems in the United States. Do you think the U.S. achieved a balance between innovation in space exploration and advancing the civil rights of all its citizens during this time period? Would you have done things differently?
- 8 How do you think Langley employees reconciled the difference between the work they did that was innovative and advanced humankind with the work that they did that destroyed it?
- 9 Think about the world around you. Who are the hidden figures (people) in it? How can you help bring them into the light?
- 10 We might know more—scientifically and technologically—than the characters in the book and film, but we don't know everything. What are we longing to know? What new discoveries are waiting to be made? How can you participate in discoveries waiting to be made?