

Introducing, Selma Blair

Image of logo that reads "discovery+ original, Introducing Selma Blair"

Discussion Guide

Introducing, Selma Blair is a film that spotlights a woman battling multiple sclerosis (MS) as she grapples with challenges such as dissecting myths about beauty, fear around disability and mortality, and the struggle for self-acceptance. Complete with her trademark humor, the film follows Blair as she reconciles a life-altering diagnosis and begins on a journey of monumental transition.

This discussion guide, to use after you watch the film, will help you digest your reactions to the film and begin deepening your understanding of illness and disability.

What is Multiple Sclerosis?

Multiple sclerosis (MS) is an auto-immune disease that impacts the central nervous system and communication between the brain and other parts of the body. For more information about MS, visit the [National Institute of Health's Neurological Disorders and Stroke](#) information page on MS.

How to Start Your Discussion:

[Stream this film here on discovery+.](#) Consider an access check-in to understand the needs of your audience. This is an opportunity for participants to check in with their bodies and minds, to note any specific needs they may have, and to share what support or understanding they need. The goal of an access check-in is to reinforce the idea that all bodies have needs, not just disabled bodies. Keep in mind: There is no one specific way to talk about disability because there is not one specific way to experience disability. Don't shy away from using the word "disability" or "person with a disability."

Discussion Topics

Disability and Media Representation

Selma Blair publicly identifies as disabled. What is your definition of disability, and did it change after watching this film? In the documentary, we see Selma talking about her previous roles in film and how she was portrayed by the media both before and after her diagnosis.

- How is disability and chronic illness portrayed in the media?
- Does *Introducing, Selma Blair* portray disability and chronic illness differently than other films? How can you tell?
- How do you see disability and chronic illness represented in other types of media? (i.e. articles, news, advertisements, social media and podcasts)

Key Takeaway: People with disabilities and chronic illnesses deserve authentic representation in both film and other forms of media.



Family and Community Support Systems

In the film, Selma's family and friends provide her with emotional, spiritual, and physical support as she is undergoing her treatments. The film also documents the community reception of Selma Blair's first public appearance using a cane.

- Discuss three examples of when Selma received support, or did not receive support, from others in the film, whether physical, emotional, mental or spiritual.
- Who are the people in your life that you feel supported and held by?
- Having community support can have a profound impact on a chronically ill or disabled person's experience. How has Selma's experience been shaped by Hollywood and/or the disability community?

Key Takeaway: Everyone needs support from someone, even people without chronic illness or disability. No one can thrive alone.



Humor and Joy

"You can't twerk with MS!" One theme we see consistently in the film is Selma's use of humor. Whether it is her sarcasm, the silly joyful moments she shares in the hospital, or punchy ways she pokes fun at herself, Selma is a multi-dimensional and radiant person.

- How does Selma use humor to convey her experience with disability and chronic illness?
- What was your favorite line in the film?
- Historically, the media has often portrayed disability as tragic or heartbreaking. How does Selma break this stereotype?

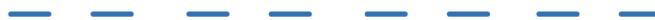
Key Takeaway: Disabled people can be funny too. The disability experience is not simply tragic.

Navigating Medical Systems

Selma shares very intimate scenes of her stem cell transplant process and navigating medical systems. Historically, women have been dismissed by doctors, which can lead to medical trauma. Studies have shown that women are less likely to have their pain be taken seriously and often misdiagnosed compared to men.

- Have you ever been dismissed, misdiagnosed or ignored by a doctor?
- How do you think it feels to be told that your symptoms are made up or not real?
- How does the film document Selma's experience navigating medical systems and reaching a treatment plan for her diagnosis of MS? Is she taken seriously by her doctors, or not?

Key Takeaway: It can be traumatizing to not have your medical needs taken seriously by medical professionals.



Grief and Transformation

"Tomorrow is my new body's birthday. Happy birthday."

Throughout the film, Selma has a complicated relationship with transformation and grief, both of which are common experiences in the disability community.

- Where does grief present itself in the film?
- Have you ever experienced a transformation that was not your choice? How did it impact you?
- In the last few years, our society has experienced collective grief and transformation. What areas have you seen this transformation take place?

Key Takeaway: Experiencing self-acceptance after a transformative experience of loss can be challenging.



For more information about living with MS, visit the [Multiple Sclerosis Association of America website](#).

Written in partnership with [LaVant Consulting, Inc.](#)