

Rosenwald Schools: Critical Thinking & Discussion Questions

The first Rosenwald schools were built in Alabama in 1913-14, and construction across the American South began around 1917. Do you know any other important historical events that were happening around this time?

There was a great deal of poverty in the American South, among both Blacks and Whites, during the first half of the 20th century. What are some of the reasons?

Have you heard of Booker T. Washington before? What other things do you know about him?

What do you think it must have been like to have been born a slave, to become free, and then have to make a new life for yourself? What sort of obstacles would you have to face? What kinds of opportunities would you have?

Imagine going from illiteracy to becoming an educator. What sorts of traits would you have to develop in yourself, in order to do that?

In the slideshow about the Rosenwald schools, it states that Booker T. Washington believed that lifting Black America out of poverty came primarily through economic advancement. Do you agree or disagree? Why do you think that?

Have you heard of Hampton Institute or the Tuskegee Institute? What do you know about them?

Why do you think that a wealthy person from the North (Chicago) would be concerned about the plight of Southern Blacks living in poverty?

Have you ever read ***Up From Slavery***? Would you like to?

[There is an excerpt attached to this lesson, with accompanying comprehension and reflection questions.]

“Rosenwald schools” refers to the thousands of schoolhouses that were built in the rural American South, beginning with Washington's original vision in 1912 and continuing into the 1930s. What happened in the 1930s that might have slowed the construction of new Rosenwald schools?

In the Slideshow on the Rosenwald schools, it says that: “Washington’s vision guided both the physical design and the substance of the schools’ educational curriculum.” Why would Booker T. Washington be a good person to decide on the type of curriculum that would be best to offer in the Rosenwald schools?

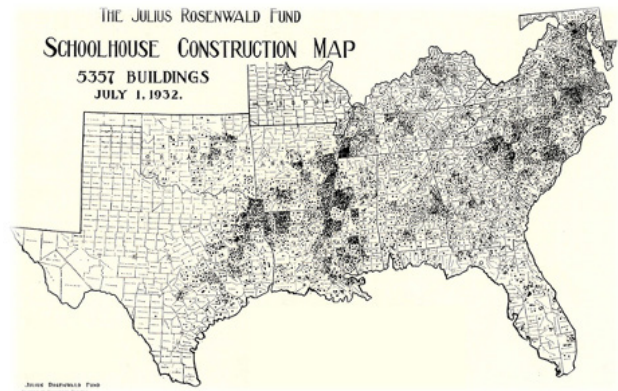
If you were designing a group of schools for children, what type of curriculum would you recommend? Do you think that everyone should receive the exact same curriculum? Why or why not?

Thousands of Rosenwald schools were built.

Take a look at this map: Which states had the most?

What do the states on this map have in common?

What do you think schooling was like in other states?



The schools continued to flourish into the 1950s, only to be abandoned and largely demolished after the Supreme Court ruled school segregation unconstitutional in 1954. Which court case ended school segregation in the United States of America?

What do you know about the Jim Crow segregation laws or the Jim Crow era? Has anyone in your family ever told you any stories about school integration or “busing?” Do you think that it was hard to integrate schools in America? Do you think that they are fully integrated now? Are there still improvements to be made? What improvements would you suggest, if you were in charge? What progress do you see that has already been made?

Do you think that it’s important for people to have a sense of ownership in a project? Why or why not?

Is school spirit important? What about community involvement in a school?

Would you like to attend a small, one-room schoolhouse? What do you think that would be like?

Have you ever visited the American South or seen one of the Rosenwald school Museums?

Do you agree that these aging buildings are still worth preserving? Why or why not?

What do you think is the most important lesson from the story of the Rosenwald schools?

Vocabulary

Disparities
Collaborative
Segregation
Desegregation
Integration
“Jim Crow”
Stakeholder
Philanthropist
Pragmatic
Antebellum
Demise
Icons
Progressive
Seclusion