



Woodson Principles: Critical Thinking & Discussion Questions

Robert L. Woodson Sr. is an American civil rights activist. Can you name some other civil rights activists?

Which do you think is more effective: neighborhood-based initiatives to revitalize low-income communities or government intervention? Or both? Do you have any other ideas for ways to improve communities that are struggling?

What are some of the challenges faced by people in low-income communities? What has been tried to help? What are some things that haven't been tried yet?

Bob Woodson worked as a Social Worker. What does a Social Worker do? What other kinds of jobs help people in communities where they live?

Civil Rights activism

Bob Woodson has worked with groups such as the NAACP, the National Urban League, and the American Enterprise Institute. Have you heard of any of these groups before? What kinds of things do these groups do?

What kinds of groups and organizations interest you? Do you belong to any community groups or clubs?

Take a look through a list of local groups and organizations in your community. Are there any that interest you? Are you old enough to join?

When there is a situation that needs to be improved, does it make more sense to you to focus first on what's going wrong or on what's going right? Why?

What sort of qualities make someone a leader? From where does a leader draw inspiration and guidance?

Do you have leadership potential? Can you see yourself as a neighborhood or even national leader? If so, what would you stand for?

If you were (or are) a school or community leader, what issues would you want to focus on? What would you do to try to improve matters?



Here are the 10 Woodson Principles for empowerment and uplifting others:

Competence – What does “competence” mean? In what areas are you already competent? In what areas would you like to develop more competence?

Do you agree with Bob Woodson that people do not always have to have degrees to be experts?

What is “practical” or “first-hand” knowledge? How is it different from theoretical knowledge?

Integrity – What does “integrity” mean?

Who are some people in your life who demonstrate integrity? Have you ever had to deal with someone who lacked integrity? What was that like? Which type of person are others going to want to do business with?

How is integrity related to the idea of having a “reputation?” What kind of reputation do you want to have in life? How can you become a person of integrity?

Transparency – What does Bob Woodson mean by the word “transparency,” as a principle?

Do you currently face or have you already had to overcome significant challenges in your life? Have you ever talked about these challenges with others? What might happen if you opened up about some of your struggles? Or about some of your successes?

What do you think when you hear another person describe hardships in their own life? Are you ever moved to want to help?

Is it possible that some people in your life might be hiding some personal struggles, and keeping difficulties to themselves?

Resilience – What does it mean for a person to have “resilience?”

Have there been times when you had to bounce back from a loss, a defeat, or a disappointment? How did you manage to do it? What capacities make it possible for a person to overcome disappointment and keep going?

What is the opposite of resilience?



Witness – The word witness can mean someone who saw a crime being committed, and is called to testify in court. But it can also mean someone who’s been through an ordeal—or even a positive experience—who can now speak about what it was like, in order to educate or inform others.

Does a former criminal or former gang member have something to teach others? What about someone who has survived cancer, or overcome addiction?

Do you have any personal stories that would be uplifting or inspirational to others?

What is it about having an actual witness that makes their stories so compelling?

Innovation – What does the word “innovation” mean? How about the word “entrepreneur?”

Are there any innovators or entrepreneurs in your neighborhood community? What about in your school?

Would you like to work for an independent entrepreneur? Have you ever thought about becoming one?

If you had \$100,000 to start a business, what kind of business might you open? What sort of people would you want to employ? How would you want your employees to treat the customers?

Inspiration – What inspires you? Who inspires you? Who can you inspire?

How can we celebrate even small accomplishments by those around us, in order to build more inspiration?

Agency – what does it mean to have “agency?”

Do you feel like you are the one who makes things happen in your own life? Or do you sometimes feel like life just happens to you?

When do you feel most in control of your own life? How can you increase those moments and expand on those situations?

Do you think that you can help another person only by giving them money or things? What other kinds of things do people need? How much should people be doing for themselves?

Do poor people have something to offer and to give to others? Is it important that they be allowed to do so? Why?



What does the word “reciprocity” mean? If someone gives you a gift or does you a favor, do you feel like you need to do something good for them in return? Why is that?

Access – Have you ever felt like you were denied access to somewhere or something? What was it? How did that make you feel?

What are some barriers to access that people may experience? Are there ways to overcome these?

Are there any laws prohibiting denial of access to people? Can you name any of them?

Are any restrictions on access legitimate? For instance, amusement parks often require that someone be a certain age or height to go on certain rides. Why do they do that?

Grace – What does the word “grace” mean to you?

How about the word “class” or “classy?” Do you know anyone who embodies the word “grace” or the word “class?” What is it about that person that sets them apart?

What do you want to be known for? How can you move a bit closer to that ideal today?

Are you able to forgive hurts and let minor annoyances go?

Do you look for the good in people or for the worst in people? What do you think happens when you look for the good in people first?

Are there some people you have to watch out for, in life? How can you protect yourself from bad people while maintaining grace?

What do you think about these 10 principles?

Which interest you the most? Do you already possess or practice any of these principles? Which ones do you think would be hardest for you to practice right now? How might you begin to develop this principle in your own life? Which traits do you want to pass on to your children?



Look over the 10 Woodson Principles again, and mark (or list) the #1, #2, and #3 traits that you believe you possess or embody:

- Competence
- Integrity
- Transparency
- Resilience
- Witness
- Innovation
- Inspiration
- Agency
- Access
- Grace

Then list the one that feels the least like you right now: _____.

Take another look at the list, and beside each trait, try to list a person that you think most embodies each trait. It can be someone you know personally, a historical figure, or someone who is well-known. What can you learn from each of these people, in order to become more like them?

Vocabulary

Capacity, Competence, Integrity, Agency, Resilience, Innovation, Credibility, Transparency, Reciprocity, and Entrepreneur.