



# Thomas Sowell: Maverick Intellect

## Opening Questions

*These questions should be given to students for either group discussion or individual responses before they have been presented with the story of Thomas Sowell's life. After the presentation, students can be asked to reconsider their original answers.*

What is "social theory"? What kinds of issues do social theorists think, talk, and write about?

What does the expression "pull yourself up by the bootstraps" mean when applied to arguments about personal responsibility? In what contexts have you heard this phrase? Who advocates for or believes in this ideal of self-help, if anyone? Is it positive or negative?

How can society create opportunities for low-income people, ethnic minorities, and other potentially marginalized groups to build prosperity and security for themselves?

When in your life were you most angry or discontented with your circumstances? What kinds of dangerous or self-destructive behaviors did you engage in? Describe some changes, influences, or opportunities that helped put you back on track to a more fulfilling life.

Why do many government programs designed to fight poverty fail to help the poor? Why do many of them continue despite their failure? Which programs have actually been successful?

What causes political and philosophical polarization in America and elsewhere? Why do people who come from the same ethnic, religious, and socio-economic background often see the world in radically different ways? What are the forces that shape your worldview?

When did education (in or out of school) make a profound difference in your life? What did you learn that was so important, who did you learn it from, and why is it so important?

What's the difference between public schools, private schools, and charter schools? How are charter schools created and operated? What issues drive the demand for charter schools? Which people and organizations oppose the expansion of charter schools, and why?

What is an "intellectual"? What roles do intellectuals play in modern life? Name some prominent figures you consider to be "public intellectuals." What influence do they have in shaping national discussions around history, education, government policy, and other issues?