

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

# Poetry Dive

After you listen to Andrea Davis Pinkney read her poem about Booker T. Washington (available at Scope Online), read the poem a few times yourself. Then read the annotations, or notes, on the copy of the poem below. Work with your classmates to answer the questions on the next three pages.

*His hands dug*

"Up from Slavery" is the title of Booker T. Washington's 1901 autobiography.

2 ▲ *Up from Slavery.*

Yanked the weeds

4 Sprouted from seeds  
sown on the Civil War's battleground:

6 *Once emancipated, stay enslaved to common labor.*

Grassroots means "of or relating to the common people."

8 ▲ But this grassroots griot

fed his people the true story.

He believed black men and women could rise

10 by starting down on their knees

to build, brick by brick,

12 the foundation for a school

to call their own.

A griot [GREE-oh] is a traveling musician, poet, historian, and/or storyteller in West Africa.

Booker T. Washington became the first principal of Tuskegee Institute, now called Tuskegee University, in 1881. He was its director until his death in 1915.

14 ▲ Tuskegee—

the all-black Institute for an "industrial education."

16 A kind of learning that comes

with Grade-A elbow grease

18 to teach  
its lessons.

20 Eager Educator.

The "Great Accommodator."

22 Preached the Gospel According to Booker T.:

*To achieve racial harmony*

24 *Black people should take pride*

*in skilled service-work*

26 *rendered with the utmost dignity.*

This is a nickname Washington was called during his lifetime—and it wasn't meant in a nice way. Many African-American leaders criticized Washington for being too willing to cooperate with white people, too willing to tolerate discrimination as he helped black people learn job skills.

Dignity means worthy of honor or respect. If you have dignity, you have self-respect.

**1**

In the annotations, we defined some of the tricky words in the poem. Are there any other words you’re not sure about? Look them up and briefly define each one here.

**2**

To whom does “His” refer in line 1?

How do you know? What clues in the poem tell you who it is about?

**3**

Reread lines 1–6.

Let’s jump to line 6. What is “common labor”?

(Hint: Reread the section “Truly Free?” in *Scope’s* “Up From Slavery.”)

Put the idea of line 6 in your own words.

Now go back to line 3.

What are weeds (not the weeds in the poem—just regular weeds)? Why do people often dislike weeds?

The weeds in line 3 are a metaphor. What do they stand for? Why do you think the poet chose weeds for her metaphor, instead of plants or flowers?

**4**

Lines 7–8 state that Washington “fed his people the true story.” What was the false story they were being fed?

According to the poem, what is the true story that Washington told his people? Explain in your own words.

**5**

Reread lines 9–13

What ideas in these lines might seem contradictory?

Line 9 says, “He believed black men and women could rise.” Where else in the poem does the poet refer to rising?

**6**

Reread lines 14–19. Why do you think the poet describes lessons at the Tuskegee Institute as coming with “elbow grease”? What does she mean? (Hint: Consider what you read in *Scope*’s “Up From Slavery” about what students learned at Tuskegee. Also consider line 25 in the poem.)

**7**

Reread lines 20–26.

As the annotation for line 21 explains, some black leaders criticized Washington for not demanding full equality immediately. Washington believed that education and good jobs were what freedmen and freedwomen needed most immediately, and that having these was the first step on the path to equality.

Lines 22-26 say something about how Washington believed African-Americans should perform their jobs.

•••••

According to the poem, Washington said that black people should perform their skilled service work in what way?

As it is used in line 22, what does gospel mean? What does the phrase “Preached the Gospel According to Booker T.” (line 22) tell you about Washington?

**8**

Notice that line 6 and lines 23–26 are indented and in italics. What is the connection between these lines?