

Ladder for Booker T Washington, 1996 by Martin Puryear [1941-

1. What is this object?
2. How is it different from most ladders?
3. Describe the side rails and rungs of this ladder.
4. What does this ladder rest on?
5. What illusion does Puryear create by making the ladder narrower at the top than bottom.
6. What is the reference to the African American spiritual “We Are Climbing Jacob’s Ladder.”
Does this ladder seem tall enough to reach to the heavens?
7. Ask students if they think the ladder would be difficult to climb and why.
8. What can ladders symbolize? Think of phrases like “climbing the ladder to success” and “getting to the top.” Note the title of this sculpture, *Ladder for Booker T. Washington*.
9. The title of Washington’s autobiography was *Up from Slavery*. Why is this ladder is an appropriate symbol for this title?
10. How does the fine craftsmanship of this ladder represent some of Washington’s beliefs?
11. Where does the ladder lead?
12. What might the fact that the ladder is raised off the ground symbolize?
13. Have students discuss how a person might climb this ladder to success, and where it might lead.

Historical Connections: slavery; Reconstruction; civil rights; Pan- Africanism

Historical Figures: Booker T. Washington; W. E. B. DuBois

Civics: Fifteenth Amendment; Voting Rights Act of 1965

Literary Connections and Primary Documents: *Roll of Thunder, Hear my Cry*, Mildred D. Taylor (middle); *Up from Slavery*, Booker T. Washington (secondary); *Invisible Man*, Ralph Ellison (secondary); Atlanta Address of 1895, Booker T. Washington (secondary); Emancipation Proclamation (1863), Abraham Lincoln (elementary, middle)

Arts: abstract art