

Try and Be Somebody

Reading Group Topics for Discussion

- What is the significance of the title, “Try and Be Somebody?”
- How might these words have influenced young Henry Lake Dickason?
- As the book opens, Lake is on the front porch with his parents. What family entertainment did they share? How have evening activities change since 1892? Are the changes positive?
- What are the similarities and differences between Lake’s early schooling at Chestnut Grove School and yours?
- Early in the book, it is disclosed that Lake’s sister, Hattie, is sick. How does her battle (and those of other loved ones) with tuberculosis influence Lake’s adult life?
- In Chapter 7, what did Nancy mean, “Marsa Samuel left me in his will to his daughter ...?” Could this happen today? Why or why not?
- Compare your daily life as a child to Lake’s life at the same age.
- Formality in dress, manners, even in the written word, was typical during this era. Contrast the life of Lake and other students at Bluefield Colored Institute with high school students today.
- Segregated schools were an obvious obstacle to Lake getting an education. What other, more subtle forms of racism did he face? Are there other examples of these continuing today?
- What do you think gave Lake the courage to go to the Ohio State University where he would be one of only 28 black students in the student body of 3,000 students?
- Lake was married twice. What qualities did his wives, Grace and Flossie, have in common?
- Lake’s childhood was spent as a farm laborer yet he evolved to fit into the academic world as a college president. What evidence is there that he did not forget his family and upbringing?
- Grandpa Raeburn said, “Every path has puddles.” What puddles did Lake face as a college president?
- Lake’s grandpa, parents, and wives had high expectations for him. What expectations did he have for others? How do we know?
- Why do you think education is so important to Lake’s family?
- How did life for Lake and Blacks in the United States change from 1903 to 1957? How have things changed since then?
- Who do you think shaped Lake and enabled him to accomplish all the things he did? What did he/she do to influence him?
- Why do you think the author wanted to share the story of Henry Lake Dickason?