

# the great debaters movie questions and answers

**The Great Debaters** is a powerful film that tells the true story of a debate team from Wiley College in Texas during the 1930s. The movie, directed by Denzel Washington, explores themes of racism, social justice, and the power of words. As it navigates through intense emotional landscapes and historical contexts, it raises numerous thought-provoking questions. This article aims to provide insightful answers to some of the most compelling questions surrounding "The Great Debaters."

## Overview of The Great Debaters

Before diving into the questions and answers, it's essential to provide a brief overview of the film.

"The Great Debaters" centers around the Wiley College debate team, led by their professor, Melvin B. Tolson, played by Washington. The team includes notable characters like James Farmer Jr., Henry Lowe, and Samantha Booke. The movie depicts their journey as they challenge the status quo, engage in rigorous debates, and eventually face Harvard University's prestigious debate team.

The film is not only a celebration of intellectual achievement but also a critique of the societal norms and injustices of its time.

## Frequently Asked Questions about The Great Debaters

### 1. What are the main themes of The Great Debaters?

The movie encapsulates several critical themes:

- **Racism and Social Injustice:** The film highlights the racial discrimination prevalent in the 1930s, showcasing the struggles faced by African Americans.
- **Power of Words:** The importance of rhetoric and debate is emphasized, illustrating how words can inspire change.
- **Education and Empowerment:** The story underscores the role of education in empowering individuals to challenge societal norms.
- **Determination and Resilience:** The characters exhibit unwavering determination in overcoming obstacles, reflecting a broader struggle for equality.

## 2. Who are the main characters, and what roles do they play?

The film features several pivotal characters, each contributing to the overarching narrative:

1. **Melvin B. Tolson (Denzel Washington):** The passionate and unorthodox professor who mentors the debate team.
2. **James Farmer Jr. (Denzel Whitaker):** A talented debater whose journey reflects personal growth and the fight for civil rights.
3. **Henry Lowe (Nate Parker):** A charismatic and rebellious member of the team who grapples with his identity and beliefs.
4. **Samantha Boone (Jurnee Smollett):** The first female debater on the team, representing the struggles of women in academia.

## 3. How does *The Great Debaters* portray the role of education?

Education is depicted as a transformative force. The characters use their academic pursuits as a means to challenge societal expectations and injustices.

Key points include:

- The debate team's rigorous preparation illustrates the importance of knowledge and critical thinking.
- Professor Tolson's unconventional teaching methods inspire students to think independently and challenge authority.
- The film portrays education as a pathway to empowerment, encouraging students to advocate for social change.

## 4. What is the significance of the debates in the film?

The debates serve multiple purposes:

1. **Conflict Resolution:** They provide a platform for characters to express their beliefs and conflict with opposing viewpoints.
2. **Symbol of Resistance:** Competing against prestigious institutions symbolizes the fight

against systemic racism.

3. **Character Development:** Each debate challenges the characters, allowing them to grow and evolve in their beliefs and strategies.

## 5. How does the film address the issue of gender?

Gender plays a significant role in the film, particularly through the character of Samantha Boone.

Key points include:

- Samantha's inclusion in the debate team challenges traditional gender roles, showcasing women's capabilities in a male-dominated environment.
- The film highlights her struggles as she faces both racial and gender discrimination. Her character symbolizes the intersectionality of oppression.
- Her success in debates serves as an inspiration for future generations of women, promoting the idea that gender should not limit one's potential.

## 6. What historical context does The Great Debaters provide?

The film is set during a tumultuous time in American history, reflecting the realities of the Jim Crow era.

Essential historical elements include:

1. **Racial Segregation:** The film illustrates the institutionalized racism that African Americans faced, including segregation in schools.
2. **Civil Rights Movement:** Though set before the movement gained momentum, the film foreshadows the fight for civil rights that would follow.
3. **Intellectualism in African American Culture:** The film highlights the contributions of African Americans to academia and public discourse, countering stereotypes.

## 7. What is the role of mentorship in the film?

Mentorship is a central theme, particularly the relationship between Professor Tolson and his students.

Key aspects include:

- Professor Tolson serves as a guiding figure, nurturing the students' talents and pushing them to excel.
- His mentorship goes beyond academic instruction; he encourages them to embrace their cultural heritage and fight for justice.
- The impact of his guidance is evident in the students' growth, demonstrating the importance of supportive mentors in achieving one's goals.

## 8. What are some memorable quotes from *The Great Debaters*?

The film is rich with impactful dialogue that resonates with viewers. Here are some notable quotes:

1. **"The time is always right to do what is right."** - A reminder of the importance of standing up for justice.
2. **"We do what we have to do, so we can do what we want to do."** - Emphasizing the necessity of hard work and perseverance.
3. **"Debate is an art, and it is through art that we find our voice."** - Highlighting the significance of expression in advocating for change.

## 9. How does *The Great Debaters* conclude?

The film concludes with the Wiley College debate team facing off against Harvard. The climactic debate serves as a culmination of their struggles, showcasing their growth and determination.

The resolution reinforces the idea that while they may face setbacks, the fight for justice and equality continues. The film ends on a hopeful note, suggesting that change is possible through perseverance and the power of words.

## 10. What impact has *The Great Debaters* had on audiences and

## **society?**

"The Great Debaters" has left a lasting impact on audiences by:

- Inspiring discussions about race, education, and activism.
- Encouraging young people to engage in debate and public speaking.
- Highlighting the importance of historical narratives in understanding contemporary issues.

In conclusion, "The Great Debaters" is more than just a film about a debate team; it is a poignant exploration of race, identity, and the enduring power of words. It invites viewers to reflect on their roles in the ongoing struggle for justice and equality, making it a timeless piece of cinema.

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **What is the main theme of 'The Great Debaters'?**

The main theme of 'The Great Debaters' revolves around the power of education, the importance of free speech, and the fight against racial injustice.

### **Who directed 'The Great Debaters'?**

'The Great Debaters' was directed by Denzel Washington.

### **Which real-life event inspired the story of 'The Great Debaters'?**

The film is inspired by the true story of the Wiley College debate team and their historic debates in the 1930s.

### **What significant debate do the Wiley College team members participate in?**

The Wiley College team debates against Harvard University, marking a significant moment in the film and in the history of collegiate debating.

### **Which character in 'The Great Debaters' represents the mentor figure?**

The character Melvin B. Tolson, portrayed by Denzel Washington, serves as the mentor figure for the Wiley College debate team.

## **What role does the setting of the 1930s play in the film?**

The 1930s setting highlights the racial tensions and social injustices of the era, providing context for the struggles faced by the characters.

## **How does 'The Great Debaters' address the concept of civil disobedience?**

The film illustrates civil disobedience through the characters' actions and debates, emphasizing the importance of standing up against unjust laws and societal norms.

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