

Thomas Sowell: Common Sense in a Senseless World

Suggested Ages: 13+

Runtime: ~57 minutes

Themes: Economics • History • Civics • Character • Critical Thinking

Before Viewing

- 1 Set the stage: Ask students what they think 'common sense' means in public life.
- 2 Preview Sowell: Economist, author, raised in Harlem, served in the Marines, earned a Ph.D. from Chicago under Milton Friedman.
- 3 Prompt curiosity: What does 'evidence over emotion' mean? Why might someone challenge mainstream opinion?

During Viewing

Encourage light note-taking around three lenses:

- Economics: Incentives, trade-offs, unintended consequences
- Society: Education, race, equality of opportunity vs. outcome
- Personal Life: Sowell's journey and what shaped his perspective

After Viewing Discussion (choose 3–5)

- 1 How does Sowell define common sense in contrast to ideology?
- 2 Which of his life experiences most shaped his thinking?
- 3 What are examples of trade-offs we face in everyday life?
- 4 How does evidence challenge or confirm the way media presents issues?
- 5 What responsibilities come with having more information than opinion?
- 6 How might these ideas apply to how we run households, schools, or governments?

Optional Writing or Project Ideas

- Essay: 'Describe a policy or rule you know that created unintended consequences. How could it be improved?'
- Debate: Equality of opportunity vs. equality of outcome.
- Finance tie-in: Identify a recent financial decision (family budget, market event, or business choice) and analyze it through the lens of incentives.
- Biographical research: Trace Sowell's academic path and how it differed from typical scholars of his time.