

Note Catcher Answer Key

Conspiracy of Silence Comprehension Questions

1. What is the “conspiracy of silence”? Why did it happen?

This was the act of White Tulsans covering up the evidence of the Tulsa Race Massacre to destroy evidence of crimes that were committed. Black Tulsans often did not want to further hurt their families by discussing the events of the massacre. This resulted in a community that chose not to discuss or share the history of the massacre in public spaces for 75 years after the massacre took place, thereby engaging in a cover-up.

2. How did White Tulsans cover-up the events of the Tulsa Race Massacre?

Immediately after the massacre, while Black residents were detained, the bodies of Black Tulsans who were murdered during the massacre were buried in unmarked graves. Public records, such as newspaper articles, fire marshal records, and insurance claims were also destroyed.

3. How did an investigation to uncover the truth begin?

At the 75th year anniversary of the massacre the Oklahoma City bombing occurred, and several reporters heard of the massacre. Pressure from reporters and Black leaders led to the development of the Commission to Study the Tulsa Race Riot of 1921 who conducted a full investigation of the massacre.

Oklahoma Commission to Study the Tulsa Race Riot of 1921 Video Questions

1. What was the task (job) of the Commission?

The commission was organized to identify people who were residents of Greenwood, determine an accurate death account, identify survivors and record testimony, provide an accurate idea of the property losses, and to locate missing documents and preserve them.

2. Who was interviewed by the Commission as part of their investigation of the massacre?

Black massacre survivors and their relatives as well as White accounts of the massacre.

3. Besides interviews, what else did the Commission do to try to uncover what happened during the massacre?

Claims, archival material, newspaper accounts, and insurance records.

4. In the video, Commissioner Eddie Faye Gates says no research can replace eyewitness testimony. Why are the oral histories, particularly those of the survivors, so valuable in learning about the Tulsa Race Massacre?

The cover-up worked to silence the voices of the Greenwood community, so oral histories provide a first-hand account of what they experienced. Their testimonies can help to identify an accurate death account, understand the impact of the massacre on Black residents, and corroborate with written documentation to identify, as best they can, what happened during the massacre.

Oral Histories

Survivor	Impact: What happened to the survivor during the massacre? What impact did it have on their life?	Did They Talk About It? Explain whether or not the survivor discussed the massacre with their family <i>and why</i> .
Elwood Lett	<p>Elwood remembers his grandparents called him to come inside the house saying it wasn't safe outside since there was gunfire. Four or Five White men came to the house, so he was put under the bed with his sister to be safe. His grandfather got a wagon so they could leave. As they were leaving some men shot his grandfather. He doesn't remember how but his mother took him to Skiatook, Oklahoma to get assistance from his father, who was a White man married to another woman. He said the massacre had always scared him.</p>	<p>Before the interview he said he didn't speak about it or think about it, he "didn't want to open up a can of worms." The Oklahoma State Senators Don Ross and Maxine Horner asked him to talk about it. He believes the work of telling the story now is helpful to young people, knowing that Tulsa has not always been the way it is now. He also said he believed that Black Americans would never completely achieve freedom.</p>
Eldoris McCondichie	<p>Eldoris woke up to her mother telling her Black people were getting killed by a White mob and she needed to escape. As she left, terrified, she saw bullets raining down from airplanes.</p> <p>She describes seeing Greenwood following the massacre, with bombed and burned out buildings.</p>	<p>She said they didn't talk about it and so she said "her attitude about it grew less and less" over time since her childhood.</p>
Essie Johnson Beck	<p>Essie explains that she had to leave her house and there were planes dropping fire bombs on the houses around her.</p> <p>She then describes how she had nightmares and was afraid. Essie said they had nothing since everything was burned, no clothing and had to wait in line for food. They had one tent for the whole family. She said this was a part of her hurt that they were never able to completely overcome, since it was deep.</p>	<p>Essie said that if the topic was brought up with students at school she didn't want to talk about it. Her family also didn't want her to have to speak about it since the experience itself was so horrible. Her family didn't talk much about it since they wanted the massacre to be something from the past, and didn't want it to be the biggest part of their lives.</p>

S-I-T Discussion: Surprising, Interesting, Troubling

After watching the videos identify the following:

1. One Surprising fact or idea

Student responses will vary.

2. One Interesting fact or idea

Student responses will vary.

3. One Troubling fact or idea

Student responses will vary.

Response to Guiding Questions

1. What role did the Oklahoma Commission to Study the Tulsa Race Massacre have in ending the “conspiracy of silence” around the massacre?

Student responses will vary.

2. How can we learn about the Tulsa Race Massacre using oral histories from survivors?

Student responses will vary.