



The following excerpt is from *People Person: The Story of Sociologist Marta Tienda*. This biography is part of the *Women's Adventures in Science* series, sponsored by the National Academy of Sciences and published by Scholastic and Joseph Henry Press.

When Marta wasn't making her neighbors look glamorous, she attended Huff Junior High School. What a change from Max Paun Elementary! The school was huge, with staircases leading up three stories. Finding her classrooms and storing her gear in lockers took some getting used to. And then there were the older girls. Many of them had come from Catholic schools, where the discipline was rigid. Now, granted the relative freedom of a public junior high school, they ran wild. With their purple eye shadow, tight skirts, and ratted hair, they struck Marta as exotic creatures.

English was one of Marta's favorite classes. Her teacher, Mrs. Miller, wore elegant sweaters and pearl necklaces and had a shock of wavy, sandy-colored hair. Recognizing Marta's smarts and sensitivity, Mrs. Miller treated her with kindness.

Mrs. Miller also saw how hard Marta worked—a trait that put her far ahead of the class. She wanted to encourage Marta to keep challenging herself, so Mrs. Miller set up a nook in the back of the classroom where Marta could do higher-level work. For several weeks, Marta sat in the study nook doing her own advanced work while the rest of the class followed the regular curriculum.

One day, Mrs. Miller asked Marta to do some extra work on gerunds—verbs used as nouns, such as running and thinking. Marta was concentrating so intently that she jumped at the click-clack of Mrs. Miller's approaching heels. As the teacher looked over her work, Marta said a silent prayer that she had done everything correctly. When she glanced up at Mrs. Miller, the teacher had a far-off look in her eyes. What is she thinking? Marta wondered. Then Mrs. Miller sat down at an empty desk next to Marta.

"Marta, what do you want to do when you grow up and finish school?"

"I want to be a beautician," Marta replied.

"A beautician? Why do you say that?"

"Because I'm really good at it," Marta said proudly, "and I like it."

"But don't you want to go to college?" Mrs. Miller asked.

College? The possibility had never occurred to Marta. Her father had always spoken of graduating from high school—something he had never achieved—as a lofty goal in life. But he had never mentioned college as part of his dream for his children. So Marta shook her head and said, "No."

"You're such a smart girl. Why not?"

"College is for rich people," Marta said simply. She wasn't angry—it was just the way she thought

things were. Marta knew she was poor—much poorer than her classmates.

Then Mrs. Miller said something that would change Marta Tienda's life: "You could get a scholarship, you know."