



Leading a Book Discussion

STEP #1: Read the book

1. But first...do some research

- About the book – read summary, reviews, etc.
- About the author
- Discussion questions – If they already exist, read them before you read the book

2. Read critically

- Pay attention to details
- Identify discussion points
- Take notes

3. Take your time

- Stop and review discussion questions as you read
- Think about it

STEP #2: Prepare discussion questions

1. If they already exist

- review and revise

2. Write your own – make the questions fit the book

- The five Ws and the H (See the Discussion Questions Template)

3. Things to remember

- Avoid yes or no questions
- Ask for opinions, not facts
- Use examples and be specific
- Address broad themes and concepts

4. If we're not all friends here

- Sharing personal experiences and feelings optional



STEP #3: Talk about the book

1. Your job—facilitate

- Make eye contact – discussion leader sits at the end of the table
- Ask an icebreaker question to get started
- Let others talk first
- Don't teach, don't preach
- Everyone gets to talk, no one has to
- Be flexible
- Summarize, clarify, redirect, make connections

2. Make it interesting

- We don't have to agree
- Don't avoid controversial subjects
- Play devil's advocate

3. Also your job—mediate

- No one's right, no one's wrong
- Keep it about the book
- Everyone gets to talk, no one gets to talk all the time
- Dealing with difficult people

4. Wrap it up

- Bring the discussion to a conclusion when time is up



Use the following questions as guidelines to customize your own questions that pertain to the specific characters, plot, setting, etc. of the book.

#1. Who – The Characters

- Were the characters believable? Why or why not?
- Were the characters sympathetic? Why or why not?
- What motivates the characters? Why do they do what they do?
- Consider gender, age, race, economic status, nationality, cultural background, personality flaws, past experiences, etc. How do these influence the character's actions, attitudes or motivations?
- Compare/contrast two or more characters
- Discuss secondary characters
- Do the characters change or grow? How? Why?

#2. What – The Plot

- Does the story have a clear beginning, middle and end? If not, how does the absence thereof affect your reading of the book?
- What are the main themes in the book?
- Does the plot drive the characters or do the characters drive the plot?
- Did you "figure it out" before the end? How? Did that affect your reading of the rest of the book?
- What subplots are present? Why are they there? Are they important to the story or distracting?
- Is the ending satisfactory? What happened next?

#3. When – Historical Context

- How is the period in which the book is set important?
- Is the historical period adequately identified and explained?
- How would the story be different if set in a different time?
- When was the book published? Is this relevant in any way?

#4. Where – The Setting

- What is unique or noteworthy about the setting?
- Is the particular setting necessary to the story, or could the book have been set anywhere?
- How does the book's setting affect the story? the characters?
- Does the author's writing make you feel like you are there? How?
- Are nature and the environment important? How?

#5. Why – The Book as a Whole

- Why did the author write this book? Is s/he trying to satisfy an agenda or make a point with the book? What is it? Did s/he succeed?
- Who is narrating the story? Why is this person telling this story? Is the narrator reliable?
- What does the book's title mean?
- Why did this book win an award? get made into a movie? etc.

#6. How – The Author

- How does the author's writing style and/or use of language affect your reading of the book?
- How does the author use literary techniques such as symbolism, imagery, irony, etc.?
- How effective (or not) are any literary devices used, i.e. multiple narrators, flashbacks, concurrent storylines, telling the story through letters and diaries, etc.?
- What does the book reveal about the author's world view?



Discussion Questions Online

Resource sites where discussion questions for various books may be found.

*Publisher web site

About.com

<http://bestsellers.about.com/od/bookclubquestions>

Book Browse

http://www.bookbrowse.com/reading_guides

Bookletters

www.booksite.com/texis/scripts/bookletter/showfab.html?sid=5166&qlname=ALLBD

The Books*

www.twbookmark.com/books/reading_guides.html

Harcourt*

www.harcourtbooks.com/BookSearch/readingGuides.asp

HarperCollins*

www.harpercollins.com/Readers/readingGroups.aspx

Houghton Mifflin*

www.houghtonmifflinbooks.com/readers_guides

Hyperion*

www.hyperionbooks.com/readinggroups/index.htm#Reading_Group_Guides

Penguin Group*

<http://us.penguingroup.com/static/html/readingguides/index.html>

Reading Group Choices

www.readinggroupchoices.com

Reading Group Essentials*

www.holtzbrincklibrary.com/index.php?a=groups

Reading Group Guides

www.readinggroupguides.com

Simon Says*

www.simonsays.com/content/index.cfm?sid=519