

## ***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](http://www.bookbrowse.com/reading_guides)

Bookletters

[www.booksite.com/texis/scripts/bookletter/showfab.html?sid=5166&qlname=ALLBD](http://www.booksite.com/texis/scripts/bookletter/showfab.html?sid=5166&qlname=ALLBD)

The Books\*

[www.twbookmark.com/books/reading\\_guides.html](http://www.twbookmark.com/books/reading_guides.html)

Harcourt\*

[www.harcourtbooks.com/BookSearch/readingGuides.asp](http://www.harcourtbooks.com/BookSearch/readingGuides.asp)

HarperCollins\*

[www.harpercollins.com/Readers/readingGroups.aspx](http://www.harpercollins.com/Readers/readingGroups.aspx)

Houghton Mifflin\*

[www.houghtonmifflinbooks.com/readers\\_guides](http://www.houghtonmifflinbooks.com/readers_guides)

Hyperion\*

[www.hyperionbooks.com/readinggroups/index.htm#Reading\\_Group\\_Guides](http://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](http://www.readinggroupchoices.com)

Reading Group Essentials\*

[www.holtzbrincklibrary.com/index.php?a=groups](http://www.holtzbrincklibrary.com/index.php?a=groups)

Reading Group Guides

[www.readinggroupguides.com](http://www.readinggroupguides.com)

Simon Says\*

[www.simonsays.com/content/index.cfm?sid=519](http://www.simonsays.com/content/index.cfm?sid=519)