



Creating and Facilitating a Productive Group

Below are ideas on how to run a book discussion. These ideas have been collected from teachers, *Connections* facilitators, and previous *Connections* program managers.

Hold on to those that resonate with you; at the same time, you'll discover your own that suits your style and the readers you work with.

Group Agreements

Some facilitators set up group agreements for how the group will function.

This can keep a group respectful and productive.

For example:

- Why we're here: to have fun reading and exploring ideas in the words and illustrations.
- Hearing different people's point of view on meaning can help us imagine different meanings.
- Everybody has equal air time.
- Everybody listens with care to whoever is speaking.
- Speak from your own experience - no need to generalize.
- It's okay to disagree; focus on the idea, not the person.

What would you add?

The Facilitator...

Asks questions and listens with care; remembers that the main goal is to make discussion happen.

Makes room for everyone's voice;

Makes everyone comfortable by breaking the ice. A simple device is best – a personal question that is concrete and invites and arouses interest from the group.

Is willing to wait through silence without filling it in;

Welcomes different points of view and does the dance well around respecting each speaker and using the readers' different realities to inspire group discussion;

Knows that readers bring their own cultures, languages, and life experiences to the story;

Does little of the talking but asks questions to engage the group in dialogue with one another;

Intervenes if two people are arguing about a point; thanks them for their ideas and opens the question out - or a version of the question - to others in the group.

One facilitator said, "I have had great plans for a discussion, and written them out, but often find the group comes from some angle I had not considered and I can more easily facilitate *that* discussion as they are already interested. I find if I make notes on their interests, answer them and come back to their interests, we have a deeper discussion."

The facilitator, in the end, listens well, doesn't lecture, summarizes points, clarifies ideas, builds transitions among ideas, acknowledges each speaker, holds readers to the agreements. And brings closure to the conversation with thanks to all.

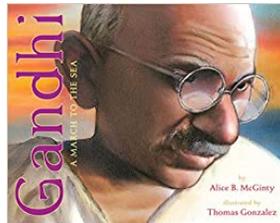
Ideas on engaging with books

Show images, bring music, bring artifacts, bring movement, bring food to the group as it relates to the book you are discussing. These support materials play on the senses and invite readers to experience ideas, scenes, and characters they are reading about.

Read aloud passages that stick to the wall, sentences that will be intriguing to follow up on in discussion.

Ask what students remembered best in the story. Maybe it's a character or a place. Maybe it is an action that changes things.

Stop to talk about the book with the class while reading.



Ask open-ended questions. In a book about Gandhi, for example, you might ask,

"What is nonviolence? Why do you think Gandhi fought without violence?"

Divide the class into two groups and give each group a question of interpretation to discuss about the book. Then bring their discussion back to the whole group.

- Create a writing prompt that arises from the book and offer a five-minute free write to allow people to explore and articulate their own ideas. Some students are more comfortable writing their ideas than speaking.
- Use the New Hampshire Humanities handbook, *Tell Me More: encouraging and developing the voices of English learners*, a wealth of first hand prompts and activities to enter stories we read and one's own stories. *Tell Me More* is written by NH teachers, writers, and facilitators and is available online at <http://nhhumanities.org/Connections>

Some Ideas for Using Books and Book Discussions in Your Class

You will have countless ideas for ways to use books and discussions. Below are some to imagine, as well. Story is key to our lives; we live and think about our lives through the narratives we tell. A narrative in a work of literature can even be the basis of a curriculum.

- Use the books as the center of your curriculum, a jumping off place to explore points of grammar and all the topics of your curriculum;
- Run a 4-week book discussion program;
- Run a monthly book discussion program;
- Incorporate the book discussions into themes or topics of your curriculum;
- Coordinate the book discussions around field trips that relate by theme to the books and class lessons;
- Plan the book club with an author studies unit or literature unit;
- Select books for the focus of the class such as Citizenship, Civics, Living in the U.S.;
- Run book discussions as part of a Conversation Club;
- Run a parent or grandparent AND child fun program with picture books and demonstration on reading aloud to children and eating snacks that relate to the books;

Please share your plan for your book discussions with NH Humanities!

For more ideas around leading your own book discussion or applying for a book grant, please contact Mary Nolin, *Connections* Program Manager at mnolin@nhhumanities.org or 224-4071 ext. 112.