

Getting Ready

Prepare yourself ahead of time.

Read and re-read and think about the book. Ask yourself questions such as:

- Who are the characters? What do they think? How do they behave?
- What choices do the main characters face? How do they relate to others?
- What is the setting of the book – the time and place of the story?
- What themes or ideas does the book address? Does it show conflicts?
- Is any language especially powerful? Might you read some parts aloud?
- Does the book express values or carry a message?
- Will you need to define or explain certain words or ideas?
- How does the story relate to life here and now?

Imagine how someone from another culture might relate to the book.

Make a list of topics or questions to use during the discussion.

Learn about the author and the illustrator – check with your librarian.

Think of stories from your own life that connect to the book.

Think of several possible ways to begin the discussion.

Gather objects, stories, poems, or songs that relate to the book.

Get a good night's sleep or rest up.

Plan to get to the discussion a bit early.

Managing the Discussion

Clarify the group's purpose.

Reading a book is partly about exploring its different meanings; hearing different people's point of view can help us do that. Tell people we're here to have fun discussing the book(s) and learning from each other's point of view. Remind people that everyone is welcome to speak, but

no one should feel pressured to speak. Speaking in turn, rather than interrupting, will give everyone a chance. It's fine to disagree, but not to judge someone else's ideas.

Start the discussion with general questions.

Ask people to notice and comment on the illustrations.

Read a page or portion of the book aloud; ask a question about that part.

Remind people about the story by asking about characters and setting:

- Who are the main people or animals in the story?
- What are they like?
- Where and when does the story take place?

Ask the group to summarize the plot, especially if you think some people haven't read the story.

- What happened in the story?
- How does it begin? And then what happens?

You might start the discussion with something you found humorous or especially meaningful.

Encourage and acknowledge each person's participation.

- Make eye contact with people in the group.
- Listen carefully to each person's comments, and ask questions that build on what is said.
- Mention people's contributions in your next questions. For example: "Christie says that seeing the bear in the cage made her feel angry about zoos. Did anyone else feel either the same or different?"
- Ask participants if anything in the book reminds them of their own lives.
- Ask participants how children reacted or might react to the book.

Encourage people to engage with each other.

If someone asks a question, repeat the question to the group.

You might try dividing the group into groups of two or three for a five-minute mini-discussion about one or two issues or questions.

Ask: "Who has a reaction to Joe's opinion/feelings/concerns about this?"

Manage the discussion to ensure maximum participation.

Silences are OK to give people time to think, but be prepared with questions, stories, objects, etc. to keep the discussion moving.

Interrupt people who repeatedly take up more than their share of time: “You’ve given us a lot to think about, Jane; let’s see what others have to say.”

If two people are arguing over a specific point, intervene with: “These are two very interesting points of view; does anyone else have an opinion?”

Feel free to present interesting information and personal stories, but avoid lengthy lectures.

Ask questions people can respond to even if they haven’t read the book.

If appropriate, take time to go around the circle so people can participate without having to claim the floor. Tell the group it’s OK to pass.

If discussion is heated, suggest that people use a “talking stick.” Whoever has the stick can speak and they invite the next speaker by passing on the stick. You can call back the stick as necessary. Again, the students can pass.

Ask questions that elicit thoughtful, short answers: If you were going to rename this book, what would you call it?

Connect the book’s themes to participants’ lives and choices.

Ask:

- Does this book remind you of anything in your own experience?
- What do you think the author might want us to learn from this book?
- If you were the main character, would you have made the same choice?
- Which character in the book reminds you most of yourself? Why?
- How are your experiences similar to and different from the people portrayed in the book?

Closing the Discussion

Create a sense of closure in order to end the discussion.

Say: “We only have five minutes left before we need to end. Does anyone have any final thoughts?”

Summarize the different points of view expressed.

Compare the two or three different books discussed during the session.

Remind people about the date and time of the next meeting.

Mention what you learned or enjoyed from the session.

Thank people for their participation. Acknowledge everyone, whether they contributed verbally or not.

Adapted from Christie Sarles' First Guide for *Connections* Facilitators