



## Discussion Guide for Group Members

Welcome to the **Open Discussion Project**, from the National Coalition Against Censorship in partnership with the American Booksellers Association and the National Institute for Civil Discourse.

The **Open Discussion Project** promotes civil conversation across divisions. We hold different values and beliefs, and have different faiths, needs, and priorities. To move forward, we must step outside our echo chambers and engage one another. Our democracy depends on it.

**This discussion starts with mutual respect. And we know this can be hard.**

We all want to be heard and understood. But only when we actively listen to another person, and they really listen to us, can we avoid fruitful discussion becoming winner-take-all debate.

**The goal is not conversion; it's conversation.**

We want you to feel free to express yourself. We also want to maintain a civil dialogue. There should be no winners and losers.

**How the facilitator helps:** The facilitator is not here to lead conversation or provide the “right” answer. The facilitator will help keep the discussion moving and civil. To help maintain a discussion, rather than a debate, please observe some ground rules.

### Ground Rules

1. No personal attacks
2. Listen respectfully and thoughtfully
3. It's OK to disagree! Expect conflicting viewpoints. We're here to explore them.
4. What's said here, stays here
5. Try not to dominate the discussion, give everyone opportunity to speak
6. Try building on the ideas of others by using language like “yes, and...”, instead of negating ideas (“yes, but...”)
7. Please respect time limits

**Please add any other ground rules you agree to as a group.**



### Discussion Questions

These questions will help you explore how you responded to the book and its ideas. Feel free to jot down notes to help you better organize your thoughts.

This is not a script!

1. What is main idea of the book? What problems or issues are raised? Are they personal, religious, societal, cultural, global, political, economic, etc?
  
2. What is the book's context and/or cultural setting? How do they differ from yours?
  - a. What was most surprising, intriguing, or hard to understand aspect of the book?
  - b. Why do you think that was?
  
3. What does the author celebrate? Criticize? Does the author advocate preservation or reform?
  - a. Do you agree with the author's take? Why or why not?
  
4. Did you find the book controversial? How so? How does your unique perspective inform your opinion?

5. How did the author support the argument? Personal observations? Facts? Statistics? Opinions? Historical documents? Scientific research? Quotations from authorities?
  - a. Is the evidence convincing? Relevant? From authoritative sources? Speculative...how speculative?
  - b. Did the author make claims you felt were unsupported or poorly explained?
  - c. Did the book convince you? Which parts? Why or why not?
  
6. Did the author write objectively? Passionately? Did the language seem polemical? Sarcastic?
  - a. Does the language help or undercut the author's premise?
  
7. What are the implications for the future in this book?
  - a. Are consequences to the issues raised positive or negative? Affirming or frightening?
  - b. What did they make you think about?
  
8. Does the author—or can you—offer solutions? Who would implement those solutions?
  - a. Does the author call readers to action—individually or collectively?
  - b. Is that call realistic? Idealistic? Achievable?
  
9. Did you learn something new? Did the book broaden your perspective about a personal or societal issue?



### **Wrapping Up the Discussion**

Reflect on the experience of reading this book and participating in this discussion.

Take a moment to write down what you've learned. If you are willing, please share these notes anonymously with the facilitator.

**Thank you for working towards repairing the deep divides in our society.**

**Keep talking.**