

# BOOK DISCUSSION TIPS FOR FACILITATORS

Book Group Tune-Up, February 10, 2007

Presented by Jennifer Baker and Linda Johns, The Seattle Public Library

**Come prepared:** You can't lead a discussion if you haven't done your homework. Read the whole book and take notes. Do some background research on the author, find book reviews and critical articles. Find publisher's discussion questions where available, and/or write out at least 15 discussion points you can raise to keep the discussion going.

**Agree on a common goal:** Your book discussion group is not a platform for teaching or prolonged personal sharing. It is a conversation, not a class and you are not the teacher (and neither is anyone else, by the way). The goal could be to relate the book to the group; to discuss political issues raised by the book; to debate; to have fun with your friends; to talk about the book and nothing else; or to have an interruption-free hour to chat with adults. Make sure everybody agrees to the same goal(s).

**State your conversational guidelines:** For example, making sure that everyone gets a chance to talk, that all opinions are treated with respect and that no one interrupts.

**Address any problems immediately.** If someone is talking too much, interrupting or over-informing the group and it's making people uncomfortable, stop the discussion and remind everyone of your conversational guidelines. If you stick to the guidelines, you will dispel discomfort and build trust.

**Best discussion is among** the members, not between the facilitator and individuals in the group. Ideally the discussion leader speaks only to direct or redirect the conversation: the group will talk among themselves. A good facilitator rarely talks.

**Be a great listener:** focus intently on the speaker, acknowledge every comment made (nod enthusiastically, say "that's interesting" or "what do you think?"), summarize and redirect if necessary, do not interrupt.

**No "right" answers.** Your group may not agree on issues raised by the book and that's fine. Respect each other's opinions and agree to disagree. As facilitator, you do not need to force consensus. You do, however, need to keep the discussion civil.

**Discuss the book.** Try not to get off topic. Personal revelations and reactions will always occur, especially with controversial books, but keeping the conversation focused on the book is paramount. Unless your discussion is designed to get to know each other better, use your time together to talk about the book.

**Value the moment.** Not many of us have a chance to talk about literature and the issues it raises in any other grown-up, uninterrupted and non-critical setting.

**Summarize** at the end (consensus not necessary) – and say thank you.