



Great Books Foundation

How to Start a Great Books Discussion Group

Advice and Resources for New Great Books Groups

Including

The Shared Inquiry™ Handbook

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About the Great Books Foundation

Since 1947, the Great Books Foundation has provided people of all ages with the opportunity to read, discuss, and learn from outstanding works of literature. Foundation instructors provide training in the Shared Inquiry method to thousands of teachers, parent volunteers, and adult discussion group leaders each year. Anthologies published by the Foundation are widely used in K-2 classrooms and by hundreds of book groups throughout the country.



The **GreatBooks** Foundation

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Dear Friend of the Great Books Foundation,

Thank you for your interest in starting a Great Books discussion group. We know you have questions, and we hope this document will help answer them. Starting a Great Books group is not hard, and we can help with advice, materials, and Great Books workshops for leaders and group participants.

Most new Great Books groups have similar challenges: how to find interested participants, how to select literature that is especially suitable for discussion, how to lead and participate in discussion, and how to keep your group going strong. You'll find advice about all of these topics here.

You'll also find a sample agenda for your first meeting, a set of guidelines for Shared Inquiry discussion, and several short reading selections that your group might want to read and discuss in your start-up meeting.

As you may know, Great Books groups conduct discussions using a unique discussion method called Shared Inquiry™. Shared Inquiry is a distinctive kind of Socratic discussion that focuses on significant questions raised by the text. Some groups like to write their own questions for discussion, but most groups—especially new ones—find that the questions we provide help ensure a rewarding experience. Almost all the anthologies published by the Great Books Foundation include interpretive questions after each selection, as do the sample readings in this document.

To help you get a handle on Shared Inquiry, this document also contains the new ***Shared Inquiry Handbook***. This 32-page introduction to Shared Inquiry discussion is also available as a convenient print booklet. This and other resources are described on page A-23 of this document. To order any of our publications or materials, or for more information, visit our website at www.greatbooks.org/startagroup or call me at 800-222-5870, ext. 282.

Congratulations on your decision to explore the rewarding world of Great Books. If your group is like hundreds of other Great Books groups, we know you can look forward to many hours of stimulating discussion.

Welcome to the most thoughtful community of readers in America today.

Sincerely,

Daniel Born
Vice President for Post-Secondary Programs
Editor, *The Common Review*
The Great Books Foundation

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Starting a Great Books Discussion Group

What is a Great Books discussion group?

A Great Books discussion group attracts people who want to talk about outstanding writings in history, literature, philosophy, politics, science, theology, and other disciplines. Although Great Books discussion groups have traditionally focused on works that have stood the test of time, many also explore contemporary writings that speak to the ideas that people find perennially compelling: the nature of justice, the ways of love, the meaning of truth, and the experience of beauty, among others.

But Great Books discussion groups are also defined by the way they approach these writings. We advocate the use of an approach to discussion called Shared Inquiry™, which follows a few simple guidelines designed to make a discussion more rewarding by keeping the group's attention focused firmly on the text and its interpretation. For more about Shared Inquiry, see the *Shared Inquiry Handbook*, following page A-23. But from experience, we can tell you that the best way to learn about Shared Inquiry is to just do it!

How do we get started?

Starting a Great Books group is a lot like starting any book group. It's a simple process with few requirements: a meeting place, a group of people interested in getting together on a regular basis, a discussion leader, and a list of readings that all the members want to discuss. If you begin with a small core of dedicated people, the group will grow to a comfortable size through word-of-mouth recommendations and a little advertising.

Also, be sure to check to see if a local Great Books council is operating in your area. Many metropolitan areas have informal or formal organizations that support local Great Books groups. Visit **www.greatbooks.org** to see if there's a council or existing book group near you.

Where do we meet?

Your meeting room should be in a quiet location and should permit a seating arrangement so that everyone can see one another. Rooms with a large conference table or a circular arrangement of tables and chairs work well. Libraries, community centers, businesses, churches, schools, and many residential buildings have meeting rooms available to the public, often free of charge; some Great Books groups meet in private homes. Major chain bookstores and independent booksellers welcome book groups as well.

How do we attract participants?

The best resource for finding participants for your Great Books group is people you know—friends, neighbors, and colleagues. In addition, you may want to advertise your intention to start a group in your community about five weeks before your first meeting. Designate your first meeting as a start-up meeting and an introduction to Great Books discussion. Post announcements listing the time and location of your meeting in libraries, bookstores, coffee shops, and other community centers.

We recommend that you list your group and contact information in our online directory to help people who may want to join a group find you. We will list your name, phone number, e-mail address, and your meeting location. If you would like to be listed, please contact us at 800-222-5870, ext. 282 or 227, or e-mail us at agb@greatbooks.org.

How many group members do we need?

The optimum number of people for a Great Books discussion varies from group to group. Some groups are very small (6–10 people), with lively, talkative participants who keep the conversation flowing. Others are much larger (18–25 people), with a very involved core of participants carrying most of the discussion and others joining in less frequently. The ideal is a group in which each person is fully engaged in the discussion.

When and how often should we meet?

The time of day you meet will be determined by the participants who express interest in forming a group; most groups meet in the evening when more people are free to attend. Discussions are generally scheduled to last one to two hours. (One sign of a successful Great Books discussion is that everyone wants to continue talking at the end of the discussion.) We suggest that new groups meet once a month so that leaders and participants can thoroughly prepare. A monthly schedule is more accommodating to busy schedules and a challenging reading load. Once your group is up and running, you might decide to meet more frequently.

Who leads the discussion?

Groups usually become stronger when members take turns leading from meeting to meeting, rather than depending on one person as leader. Those who lead improve their skills as participants as well. Some groups use coleaders, with two people preparing for and then leading a discussion together. Great Books Foundation anthologies provide discussion questions for each reading selection to help leaders prepare.

No supplementary reading or special knowledge is required to lead or participate in a Great Books discussion, and no training or certification in Shared Inquiry is required to lead a Great Books discussion. However, our experience shows that the quality of discussion is enhanced when some or all of the members of a Great Books discussion group have attended a Shared Inquiry workshop.

The Great Books Foundation can conduct a Shared Inquiry workshop for your group, or one may already be scheduled nearby. Everyone who attends will learn how to prepare for, lead, and take part in Great Books discussions. You can also attend one of the hundreds of scheduled courses for teachers who use Shared Inquiry in their classrooms. Call 800-222-5870, ext. 282, to schedule or ask about a Shared Inquiry workshop in your area.

Do you have reading lists?

The Great Books Foundation offers a range of inexpensive anthologies that we recommend specifically for use by Great Books discussion groups. Most selections are relatively short to encourage rereading in preparation for discussion.

We suggest that new groups select an anthology from one of the following Great Books Foundation series:

- ❖ The ongoing Great Conversations series, with selections by both classic and contemporary authors, ranging from fiction to philosophy, social science, and poetry
- ❖ The Great Books Reading and Discussion Program, which offers a selection of traditional Western classics
- ❖ The 50th Anniversary series, each volume of which focuses on a different theme and includes a mix of classic and contemporary works from around the world
- ❖ The Introduction to Great Books series, which works well for new discussion groups looking for shorter readings
- ❖ The Great Books science series, with readings in biology, environmental science, and physics

Many groups are also interested in

- ❖ *The Seven Deadly Sins Sampler*, a collection of fourteen short story masterpieces
- ❖ *The Civically Engaged Reader*, more than forty provocative readings in literature, philosophy, and religion with a focus on civic involvement and service to the community

The complete tables of contents of these books can be found in the bookstore on our website at **www.greatbooks.org**.

You can order books from the Great Books Foundation through our online bookstore or by calling our customer service department at 800-222-5870.

How do we conduct our first meeting?

Participants do not need to prepare for your start-up meeting. Use this meeting to introduce everyone to the Great Books discussion model and decide on your reading list and schedule.

Begin by welcoming everyone and gathering names and contact information, including e-mail addresses. Describe the goals of a Great Books discussion and explain the guidelines for Shared Inquiry; then conduct a brief discussion using, if you like, one of the short readings following page A-9. (Participants can read any of these selections in about 20 minutes or less.) Having a short discussion is the best way for everyone to understand what Shared Inquiry is really like and how it is effective.

After the discussion, you may wish to hold a brief session to allow participants to comment and ask questions about the discussion and the guidelines for Shared Inquiry. Then plan a schedule of meetings and readings, using the Great Books Foundation catalog to select an anthology that interests everyone. Participants may also be interested in one or more of the resources and opportunities for groups listed on page A-23. (See, for example, membership in the Foundation; membership premiums include a free anthology and a 20 percent discount on book purchases for a year.)

Finally, let everyone know you'll be sending an e-mail message before the next meeting, reminding them of the meeting time and place and the selection you've all agreed to discuss.

A sample start-up meeting agenda is included on page A-7.

Where can we get guidance?

The Great Books Foundation website at www.greatbooks.org can provide you with more information about Great Books discussion groups, the Shared Inquiry method of discussion, and the volunteer Great Books councils in many major metropolitan areas that can assist you in starting a new group. For an in-depth explanation of Shared Inquiry, read the Great Books Foundation's *Shared Inquiry Handbook*, included in this document following page A-23. You may also want to order copies of the handbook in

a convenient booklet form for all the members in your group. A Great Books Group Starter Pack, containing materials for each member of your group, is also available. Information on these and other resources is on page A-23. If you have any questions, please call the post-secondary program directors for the Great Books Foundation at 800-222-5870, ext. 282 or 227, or e-mail us at agb@greatbooks.org.

First Meeting Agenda for Great Books Groups

- Make introductions and collect contact information (5 minutes)
- Explain the guidelines for Shared Inquiry (handout) (5 minutes)
- Read a short selection (15–20 minutes)
- Hold a brief discussion (30–45 minutes)
- Take post discussion comments and questions from the group (10 minutes)
- Determine your reading list (review catalog; decide whether to order as a group or individually; consider membership) (15 minutes)
- Agree on readings and a meeting schedule; identify leaders (10 minutes)
- Agree on next steps (10 minutes)

Person(s) Responsible	Next Steps Task
_____	Order books
_____	Contact the Great Books Foundation to add the group to the online directory
_____	Inform the meeting-space host (bookstore or library) of your group schedule; request ongoing advertising to attract new members and publicize your upcoming discussions
_____	Identify the leader for your next discussion
_____	Plan refreshments for next meeting
_____	Send a reminder e-mail to each group member one week before the next discussion
_____	Maintain a list of contact information for the group
_____	Continue recruiting new members

Guidelines for Shared Inquiry Discussion

In Shared Inquiry, participants help one another search for answers to questions raised by a work that they all have read.

The leader focuses discussion on an interpretive question about the text, a question that has more than one possible answer, based on evidence from the piece. As participants respond to the question, the leader asks follow-up questions to help participants clarify and support their ideas and consider proposed interpretations.

Here are the basic guidelines for Shared Inquiry discussion:

- 1. Read the selection carefully before participating in the discussion.** This ensures that all participants are equally prepared to talk about the ideas in the work.
- 2. Support your ideas with evidence from the text.** This keeps the discussion focused on understanding the selection and enables the group to weigh textual support for different answers.
- 3. Discuss the ideas in the selection and try to understand them fully before exploring issues that go beyond the selection.** Reflecting on the ideas in the text and the evidence to support them makes the exploration of related issues more productive.
- 4. Listen to other participants and respond to them directly.** Directing your comments and questions to other group members, not always to the leader, will make the discussion livelier and more dynamic.
- 5. Expect the leader to only ask questions.** Effective leaders help participants develop their own ideas, with everyone gaining a new understanding in the process. Participants should look to the leader for questions, not answers.

Short Readings for Your First Meeting

Each of the following three selections can be read in 20 minutes or less by people who come to the initial meeting. Use one of the interpretive questions that follow each selection to start a discussion and give participants an idea of how a Shared Inquiry discussion works. Few things are more important to the successful beginning of a Great Books group than an opportunity to experience the lively exchange of ideas that a stimulating reading and provocative questions can provide.

After participants have explored their ideas about the basic interpretive question, you can ask one or two evaluative questions. Evaluative questions help the group judge whether what the author has written is true in light of their own experience. For more on using interpretive and evaluative questions in discussion, see the *Shared Inquiry Handbook* following page A-23.

The three selections are:

“The Two Brothers” by Leo Tolstoy

The Declaration of Independence

“Because I Could Not Stop for Death” by Emily Dickinson

Each selection is in the public domain and can be copied freely.

For more Great Books publications, visit our online bookstore at

www.greatbooks.org.

The Two Brothers by Leo Tolstoy

Two brothers set out on a journey together. At noon they lay down in a forest to rest. When they woke up they saw a stone lying next to them. There was something written on the stone, and they tried to make out what it was.

"Whoever finds this stone," they read, "let him go straight into the forest at sunrise. In the forest a river will appear; let him swim across the river to the other side. There he will find a she-bear and her cubs. Let him take the cubs from her and run up the mountain with them, without once looking back. On top of the mountain he will see a house, and in that house he will find happiness."

When they had read what was written on the stone, the younger brother said:

"Let us go together. We can swim across the river, carry off the bear cubs, take them to the house on the mountain, and together find happiness."

"I am not going into the forest after bear cubs," said the elder brother, "and I advise you not to go. In the first place, no one can know whether what is written on this stone is the truth—perhaps it was written in jest. It is even possible that we have not read it correctly. In the second place, even if what is written here is the truth—suppose we go into the forest and night comes, and we cannot find the river. We shall be lost. And if we do find the river, how are we going to swim across it? It may be broad and swift. In the third place, even if we swim across the river, do you think it is an easy thing to take her cubs away from a she-bear? She will seize us, and instead of finding happiness, we shall perish, and all for nothing. In the fourth place, even if we succeeded in carrying off the bear cubs, we could not run up a mountain without stopping to rest. And, most important of all, the stone does not tell us what kind of happiness we should find in that house. It may be that happiness awaiting us there is not at all the sort of happiness we would want."

"In my opinion," said the younger brother, "you are wrong. What is written on the stone could not have been put there without reason. And it is all perfectly clear. In the first place, no harm will come to us if we try. In the

second place, if we do not go, someone else will read the inscription on the stone and find happiness, and we shall have lost it all. In the third place, if you do not make an effort and try hard, nothing in the world will succeed. In the fourth place, I should not want it thought that I was afraid of anything.”

The elder brother answered him by saying: “The proverb says: ‘In seeking great happiness small pleasures may be lost.’ And also: ‘A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.’”

The younger brother replied: “I have heard: ‘He who is afraid of the leaves must not go into the forest.’ And also: ‘Beneath a stone no water flows.’ ”

Then the younger brother set off, and the elder remained behind.

No sooner had the younger brother gone into the forest than he found the river, swam across it, and there on the other side was the she-bear, fast asleep. He took her cubs, and ran up the mountain without looking back. When he reached the top of the mountain the people came out to meet him with a carriage to take him into the city, where they made him their king.

He ruled for five years. In the sixth year, another king, who was stronger than he, waged war against him. The city was conquered, and he was driven out.

Again the younger brother became a wanderer, and he arrived one day at the house of the elder brother. The elder brother was living in a village and had grown neither rich nor poor. The two brothers rejoiced at seeing each other and at once began telling of all that had happened to them.

“You see,” said the elder brother, “I was right. Here I have lived quietly and well, while you, though you may have been a king, have seen a great deal of trouble.”

“I do not regret having gone into the forest and up the mountain,” replied the younger brother. “I may have nothing now, but I shall always have something to remember, while you have no memories at all.”

Interpretive Questions

- ❖ Why is each brother happy with his own life?
- ❖ Why does the younger brother believe the message on the stone, and the elder brother mistrust it?
- ❖ Does the writing on the stone tell the truth?

Evaluative Questions

- ❖ Must we be willing to take risks in order to achieve happiness?
- ❖ If you were faced with the same choice as the two brothers, which course of action would you take?

Declaration of Independence

In Congress, July 4, 1776

The unanimous Declaration of the thirteen United States of America

When in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. That whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shown, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such government, and to provide new guards for their future security. Such has been the patient sufferance of these colonies; and such is now the necessity which constrains them to alter their former systems of government. The history of the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over these states. To prove this, let facts be submitted to a candid world.

He has refused his assent to laws, the most wholesome and necessary for the public good.

He has forbidden his governors to pass laws of immediate and pressing importance, unless suspended in their operation till his assent should be obtained; and when so suspended, he has utterly neglected to attend to them.

He has refused to pass other laws for the accommodation of large districts of people, unless those people would relinquish the right of representation in the legislature, a right inestimable to them and formidable to tyrants only.

He has called together legislative bodies at places unusual, uncomfortable, and distant from the depository of their public records, for the sole purpose of fatiguing them into compliance with his measures.

He has dissolved representative houses repeatedly, for opposing with manly firmness his invasions on the rights of the people.

He has refused for a long time, after such dissolutions, to cause others to be elected; whereby the legislative powers, incapable of annihilation, have returned to the people at large for their exercise; the state remaining in the meantime exposed to all the danger of invasion from without and convulsions within.

He has endeavored to prevent the population of these states; for that purpose obstructing the laws of naturalization of foreigners; refusing to pass others to encourage their migration hither, and raising the conditions of new appropriations of lands.

He has obstructed the administration of justice, by refusing his assent to laws for establishing judiciary powers.

He has made judges dependent on his will alone, for the tenure of their offices, and the amount and payment of their salaries.

He has erected a multitude of new offices, and sent hither swarms of officers to harass our people, and eat out their substance.

He has kept among us, in times of peace, standing armies without the consent of our legislatures.

He has affected to render the military independent of and superior to the civil power.

He has combined with others to subject us to a jurisdiction foreign to our constitution, and unacknowledged by our laws; giving his assent to their acts of pretended legislation:

For quartering large bodies of armed troops among us:

For protecting them, by a mock trial, from punishment for any murders which they should commit on the inhabitants of these states:

For cutting off our trade with all parts of the world:

For imposing taxes on us without our consent:

For depriving us in many cases, of the benefits of trial by jury:

For transporting us beyond seas to be tried for pretended offenses:

For abolishing the free system of English laws in a neighboring province, establishing therein an arbitrary government, and enlarging its boundaries so as to render it at once an example and fit instrument for introducing the same absolute rule into these colonies:

For taking away our charters, abolishing our most valuable laws, and altering fundamentally the forms of our governments:

For suspending our own legislatures, and declaring themselves invested with power to legislate for us in all cases whatsoever.

He has abdicated government here, by declaring us out of his protection and waging war against us.

He has plundered our seas, ravaged our coasts, burnt our towns, and destroyed the lives of our people.

He is at this time transporting large armies of foreign mercenaries to complete the works of death, desolation, and tyranny, already begun with circumstances of cruelty and perfidy scarcely paralleled in the most barbarous ages, and totally unworthy the head of a civilized nation.

He has constrained our fellow citizens taken captive on the high seas to bear arms against their country, to become the executioners of their friends and brethren, or to fall themselves by their hands.

He has excited domestic insurrections amongst us, and has endeavored to bring on the inhabitants of our frontiers, the merciless Indian savages, whose known rule of warfare is an undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes, and conditions.

In every stage of these oppressions we have petitioned for redress in the most humble terms: our repeated petitions have been answered only by repeated injury. A prince whose character is thus marked by every act which may define a tyrant is unfit to be the ruler of a free people.

Nor have we been wanting in attention to our British brethren. We have warned them from time to time of attempts by their legislature to extend an unwarrantable jurisdiction over us. We have reminded them of the circumstances of our emigration and settlement here. We have appealed to their native justice and magnanimity, and we have conjured them by the ties of our common kindred to disavow these usurpations, which would inevitably interrupt our connections and correspondence. They too have been deaf to the voice of justice and consanguinity. We must, therefore, acquiesce in the necessity, which denounces our separation, and hold them, as we hold the rest of mankind, enemies in war, in peace friends.

WE, THEREFORE, the Representatives of the UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, in General Congress assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions, do, in the name, and by authority of the good people of these colonies, solemnly publish and declare, that these United Colonies are, and of right ought to be FREE AND INDEPENDENT STATES; that they are absolved from all allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political connection between them and the state of Great Britain, is and ought to be totally dissolved; and that as Free and Independent States, they have full power to levy war, conclude peace, contract alliances, establish commerce, and to do all other acts and things which Independent States may of right do. And for the support of this declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor.

Interpretive Questions

- ❖ Why do the colonists feel a need to proclaim to the world their reasons for declaring independence?
- ❖ Why do the signers of the Declaration think it is their duty, as well as their right, to change their system of government?
- ❖ Why do the signers of the Declaration proclaim that the equality of all people is “self-evident” and their rights “unalienable”? Why do they maintain that democracy is ordained by the laws of Nature?

Evaluative Questions

- ❖ Is democracy stronger when Americans think of themselves as “one people,” or as many distinct groups of people?
- ❖ Does the term “unalienable rights” mean the same now as what the signers of the Declaration meant? Can “unalienable rights” change?

Because I Could Not Stop for Death by Emily Dickinson

Because I could not stop for Death—
He kindly stopped for me—
The Carriage held but just Ourselves—
And Immortality.

We slowly drove—He knew no haste
And I had put away
My labor and my leisure too,
For His Civility—

We passed the School, where Children strove
At Recess—in the Ring—
We passed the Fields of Gazing Grain—
We passed the Setting Sun—

Or rather—He passed Us—
The Dews grew quivering and chill—
For only Gossamer, my Gown—
My Tippet—only Tulle—

We paused before a House that seemed
A Swelling of the Ground—
The Roof was scarcely visible—
The Cornice—in the Ground—

Since then—'tis Centuries—and yet
Feels shorter than the Day
I first surmised the Horses' Heads
Were toward Eternity—

Interpretive Questions

- ❖ Why does the speaker personify Death as a gentleman caller, perhaps even as a courtly lover?
- ❖ Why does the speaker go willingly with Death, putting away her labor and her "leisure too, / For His Civility"?
- ❖ Why does the speaker say that the carriage holds Immortality as well as herself and Death?
- ❖ Why are we told that the carriage "paused," rather than stopped, before the grave?

Evaluative Questions

- ❖ Would you be inclined to face death as calmly as the speaker of this poem does?
- ❖ Is it possible to find happiness in this life while holding to a belief in life after death?

Maintaining Your Group

Many Great Books groups meet regularly for years and years; some have been meeting for thirty or forty years. Here's how to keep your group going strong.

The most important factor that determines group longevity is how rewarding the discussions are. People respond to this even when they don't happen to like a particular reading. Shared Inquiry is the key to consistency. That's why it is so important that everyone in your group knows and understands the guidelines for discussion, has an opportunity to ask about the guidelines, and agrees to follow them. Every time someone joins the group, take time to go over the guidelines together. This not only introduces the new participants to the process but also reminds the veterans. Another good practice is to rotate the role of discussion leader. This produces better participants and therefore better discussions. If possible, schedule a Great Books workshop for your whole group, to make certain that everyone has the same idea of what they're trying to accomplish.

Remember that a Great Books discussion is a social as well as intellectual activity. Socializing strengthens the group. Many groups provide food and refreshments at or after the discussion or follow the discussion with a visit to a nearby coffee shop or restaurant.

Groups with staying power also never stop recruiting. Everyone in the group should be encouraged to recruit. Also, be sure to recruit more participants than your ideal number for discussion. If you want twelve to be the discussion group size, then you'll need fifteen or more, because not everyone will be able to attend every discussion.

Some groups have business cards printed with contact information. Word-of-mouth advertising works, but the single most powerful recruitment tool is the experience of a strong Great Books discussion. Give a demonstration discussion at a library or bookstore. Encourage interested parties to come to a session, even if they only want to observe.

Publicize your group. Post your group's contact information on the Great Books Foundation website. Post your discussion schedule and contact information in libraries, bookstores, and on social calendars. Get your contact information and discussion dates listed on local calendars and newsletters. Suggest that the local newspaper do a story on the group or some interesting participant in the group. If possible, create a group website to publicize your meetings and activities.

To add interest and variety, plan one or more special events each season. Read and discuss a play or movie being shown in your area and then attend as a group. Or discuss a piece related to a museum exhibit and then visit the exhibit together. At the end of your discussion season, have a picnic or a holiday gathering where you discuss something timely.

Another good idea is to attend a local, regional, or national Great Books conference. Go as a group or send one or two representatives. Attend Great Books Chicago—the annual gathering of Great Books enthusiasts in Chicago each spring—or one of the regional conferences sponsored by the Great Books councils. Great Books conferences are wonderful opportunities to meet participants from around the country. Often, other groups will have found solutions to problems you may be trying to solve. But in any case, you'll experience a lot of enthusiasm for Great Books in these meetings, and you'll glean plenty of ideas for your own group. Visit our website for more information on these and other Great Books events.

Here are a few other tips:

- ❖ Get plenty of input when choosing the group readings. Some groups don't want a mix of genre. They prefer a steady diet of fiction. Other groups crave a mix. Length is an important consideration. Longer works produce fewer participants and fewer well-prepared participants.
- ❖ Because discussion often focuses on complex—and sometimes controversial—ideas, it is important for the group to insist that discussions remain civil and that all opinions be treated with respect. A group will break down when discussions become tense and confrontational. Some good advice for everyone: Come with an open mind and a sense of humor.

- ❖ Exchange phone numbers and e-mail addresses or draw up a group contact sheet for everyone. Some discussion leaders appreciate having access to someone who can review their questions, and it's not uncommon for participants to want to continue discussing an idea long after the group discussion is over.
- ❖ When new participants join the group, welcome them warmly and make them feel comfortable. After their first discussion, call them to answer any questions or address any concerns. This is always appreciated and it's a good opportunity to encourage them to return. Let them know the group hopes they will continue.
- ❖ When participants don't show up for a few discussions, give them a call. Find out if there is a problem you can help with. Let them know when the next session is scheduled and that the group hopes to see them back in the near future.
- ❖ Keep in touch with your group between discussions. In the week after your start-up meeting, send a follow-up message to encourage those who attended to return for your next meeting. If your next meeting is more than a week away, send out a reminder e-mail a few days before the next meeting. Making this a habit before each meeting will increase your monthly participation.

Resources for Your Group

In addition to this document, the Great Books Foundation offers a variety of publications and services that can help your group get started and have consistently rewarding discussions.

- ❖ ***The Shared Inquiry Handbook***. Our new guide to leading Shared Inquiry discussions (included in this file) in a convenient 32-page booklet.
- ❖ **The Great Books Group Starter Pack**. The Starter Pack includes:
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 - Ten catalogs of the Foundation's recommended books for discussion to help your group select texts
 - Ten tent cards to identify participants in your group
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Shared Inquiry™ Handbook



The Great Books Foundation

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Shared Inquiry and the Great Books Foundation

Robert Maynard Hutchins and Mortimer Adler established the Great Books Foundation in 1947 after many years of leading Great Books discussion seminars at the University of Chicago. Their purpose was to expand the opportunities for people in other settings to read and talk about many of the most significant books in the Western intellectual tradition.

To help discussion participants explore, interpret, and evaluate the sometimes complex and challenging ideas in these works, Hutchins and Adler developed a method of seminar discussion that has come to be known as Shared Inquiry™. All of the Foundation's reading and discussion programs for grades K–12, colleges, institutes for continuing education, and book groups use this method. Through its anthologies and training programs, the Foundation promotes the reading of classic and contemporary works from diverse disciplines. Although this handbook cannot replicate the experience of a training workshop conducted by Great Books Foundation staff or cover the full range of Shared Inquiry activities and topics, it does provide an overview of Shared Inquiry practice. As such, it will be particularly helpful to those who do not have the opportunity to attend a workshop.

Principles of Shared Inquiry

Shared Inquiry discussion is an intellectually rigorous group

activity that focuses on the interpretation of meaning in written texts. It is Socratic in style and firmly text-based. It makes use of questioning techniques that help participants read actively, pose productive questions of their own about the ideas in a text, and listen and respond effectively to others.

The Shared Inquiry method does not propose a formula for finding truth, and its purpose is not to determine the conclusions that an individual or discussion group might reach. It is based on the conviction that participants can gain a deeper understanding of a text when they work together and are prompted by a leader's skilled questioning. In the process, participants enjoy the benefit of diverse points of view, focused exploration, and common discovery.

Reading a challenging piece of writing and thinking about its ideas cannot be a passive process. Each participant is engaged in an active search for the meaning of the selection at hand. With the energy and encouragement of the group, participants articulate ideas, support assertions with evidence from the text, and grapple with different possibilities of meaning. Often, this results in individuals learning how to build on one another's insights and perspectives.

A discussion typically begins with the leader asking a basic *interpretive question*—that is to say, the sort of question likely to generate more than one answer based on the passage that everyone has read. Usually this question reflects some unresolved problem of meaning in the leader's mind; it is not rhetorical but genuine. The leader's role is to carefully question the participants, focusing on their ideas and generally not offering or suggesting a

personal opinion. As participants respond, the leader follows up by asking how their comments relate to the initial question, to other ideas put forward by the group, and to the reading.

It is important to state that Shared Inquiry is not a freewheeling exchange of opinions or testimonials; discussion and interpretation must remain grounded in the reading. In this way, participants can develop their initial thoughts and reactions, clarify their ideas, and build a network of interpretive possibilities.

Both the leader and participants need to prepare in order to make the process work. It is strongly recommended that prior to gathering, participants read the selection at least twice and take notes on their reading. The leader prepares in much the same way, locating important problems of meaning in the piece and refining the interpretive questions to be asked.

The section of this booklet headed *How Shared Inquiry Works* (page 7) will help everyone in your group prepare for, lead, and take part in Shared Inquiry discussions.

Guidelines for Shared Inquiry Discussion

In Shared Inquiry, participants help one another search for answers to questions raised by a work that they have all read. The discussion leader provides direction and guidance by asking questions that reflect genuine doubt about the text. Rather than regard the leader as an expert, the group should look to the leader for questions, not answers.

Participants come to the discussion with their own unique views about the selection, then build on this understanding by

sharing ideas. The leader focuses discussion on an interpretive question about the text, a question that has more than one possible answer based on evidence from the piece. As participants respond to the question, the leader asks follow-up questions to help participants clarify and support their ideas and consider proposed interpretations.

These are the basic guidelines for Shared Inquiry discussion:

- 1. Read the selection carefully before participating in the discussion.** This ensures that all participants are equally prepared to talk about the ideas in the work.
- 2. Support your ideas with evidence from the text.** This keeps the discussion focused on understanding the selection and enables the group to weigh textual support for different answers.
- 3. Discuss the ideas in the selection and try to understand them fully before exploring issues that go beyond the selection.** Reflecting on the ideas in the text and the evidence to support them makes the exploration of related issues more productive.
- 4. Listen to other participants and respond to them directly.** Directing your comments and questions to other group members, not always the leader, will make the discussion livelier and more dynamic.
- 5. Expect the leader to only ask questions.** Effective leaders help participants develop their own ideas, with everyone gaining a new understanding in the process. Participants should look to leaders for questions, not answers.

Criteria for Great Books Selections

Since its inception, the Great Books Foundation has published anthologies that present readers with works of lasting value and that lend themselves to rewarding group discussions.

The writings included in Great Books Foundation anthologies range across many fields of knowledge and include both classic and contemporary works. They often raise fundamental and enduring questions about the human experience. Many of these writings were chosen because they have shaped the way people think about perennial concerns such as the nature of justice, truth, and beauty. In addition, each selection is a significant part of an ongoing conversation across time and place that readers can enter into by reading these works and talking about them. (See page 27 for more information about Great Books Foundation anthologies ideally suited for Shared Inquiry discussion.)

The purpose of Shared Inquiry discussion is to provide the opportunity for inquisitive and rewarding examinations of literature rich in language and ideas. Selections that can support extended interpretive discussion must raise genuine questions of meaning for the reader.

How Shared Inquiry Works

Shared Inquiry discussion is likely to be most successful if all involved—leaders and participants—receive some formal training in the method by participating in one of the Great Books Foundation’s workshops. If this is not possible, the following sections will be helpful for both leaders and participants in learning how to put the theory into practice.

At its core, Shared Inquiry is a method of learning carried out through asking and responding to questions. It is useful to distinguish between three kinds of questions: *factual*, *interpretive*, and *evaluative*. Generally, a factual question asks what an author has written; an interpretive question asks what an author’s words mean; and an evaluative question asks whether what an author writes is true.

Interpretive Questions

Many of the questions raised in Shared Inquiry discussion are interpretive. They are called interpretive because they ask for the possible meaning of some aspect of a written work about which there is likely to be a variety of opinion. Interpretive questions are grounded in the text being discussed and usually refer to something specific in it.

The following questions are interpretive:

- *Why do the signers of the Declaration of Independence proclaim that the equality of all people is “self-evident” and their rights unalienable?*
- *Why do the colonists feel a need to proclaim to the world their reasons for declaring independence?*

The leader's opening question should be interpretive, because its specific reference to details in the piece will help focus the attention of the participants on the text and the author's meaning. *The interpretive question is the leader's primary tool.*

A stimulating interpretive question should be of genuine interest to the person asking it. Composing interpretive questions is the best preparation for discussion, because it forces readers to engage with the piece and helps them form preliminary ideas about its meaning. A leader should encourage participants to bring their own interpretive questions to each discussion.

See page 21 of this booklet for a sample Shared Inquiry discussion reading as well as some interpretive questions a leader might ask.

Characteristics of Interpretive Questions

- Interpretive questions call for a careful assessment of what the author means in a work. To decide whether a question is interpretive, use this simple test: you should be able to write at least two different answers to it, supporting each answer with evidence from the text.
- The question should express genuine doubt and curiosity. You may have several answers in mind which seem equally compelling, or you may believe that satisfying answers will be found through Shared Inquiry discussion (if you've been unable to discover them on your own). Your honest doubt encourages others to take the question seriously.

- The question should be specific to the text under discussion. If the question can be asked, with only minor changes, about other written works, then it is probably too general. For example, the question *Why does Antigone have a sad ending?* is not sufficiently specific. But *Is Antigone doomed because she is the daughter of Oedipus, or does she determine her own fate?* is more specific and therefore easier to address.
- The question should be clear, and easy for another person to grasp immediately. Use simple and direct language. If the group you are leading doesn't seem to understand your question, either rephrase it or retrace the thinking that led you to it.

Genuine Doubt

Use your own uncertainty as the starting point for questions. Some questions will occur to you spontaneously as you read; some may start out only half-formed—just a question mark or an exclamation point you have scribbled in the margin of the text. By the end of your second reading, you will have eliminated some of these questions as unworthy of fruitful discussion, and be ready to pursue your remaining ones further.

Important Ideas in the Text

Trust your own sense of what is significant in a selection. The phrases, sentences, and passages that you have underlined are likely to lead to issues of interpretation that explore important problems of meaning.

In works of fiction, think about beginnings, endings, moments of crisis or decisive change, and passages in which characters reflect upon their situations. In nonfiction, focus on statements of the author's aim, definitions of terms, summaries, and conclusions. Authors may repeat the ideas that are most important to them by drawing parallels, developing contrasts or variations on a theme, and making restatements or summaries.

Complexity and Apparent Contradiction

In fiction, a conflict of motives in a character or an intricate chain of events in the plot often calls for interpretation. The author's attitude toward a character (if it is ambivalent or unclear) may also raise interpretive questions.

In addition, the narrator (if any) may be a source of questions, especially if the narrative point of view is complex. Does the narrator speak for the author, or not? Are the narrator's statements accurate and reliable?

In nonfiction, steps in the argument that you don't follow, examples that seem inappropriate, and passages in which the author presents an opposing view can all bring the selection's issues into focus so that you can formulate questions. If points in an argument seem to contradict each other, try first to resolve the contradiction; if you can't, express your puzzlement in a question.

Your Subjective Responses

Your immediate, subjective response to a work can help you identify its important interpretive issues. Maybe you

feel intensely sympathetic toward a character in a text, or you feel annoyed by a statement in an argument; trust such responses. Your reaction suggests that the author has raised an issue that is important to you. Step back and consider just what that issue is, and then how it is developed throughout the work. Appreciate and try to justify the opposing view. When you can see other sides of the issue clearly, you can more effectively pose an interpretive question. Challenge the author's argument—but keep an open mind and continue to focus on the text.

Details of Language

Unusual combinations of words, vivid images, metaphors, rhetoric, and narrative tone can reveal important problems of meaning in a text. If a detail attracts your attention, stop to ponder it. Ask questions about it, relating it to the larger meaning of the work.

Factual and Evaluative Questions

In addition to interpretive questions, factual and evaluative questions are integral to Shared Inquiry discussion.

Factual questions can bring to light evidence in support of an interpretation and can clear up misunderstanding about the details of a reading. By citing or paraphrasing the author's words, such questions help participants recall factual details in the selection. A disagreement over facts can be resolved quickly if participants simply turn to the relevant passage and reread it.

Since the aim of Shared Inquiry is to understand the text's meaning, the "facts of the matter" are the facts in the selection—the author's words, which all participants have in front of them. A question of fact, unlike an interpretive question, has only one correct answer. For example, *According to the text of the Declaration of Independence, who endows humans with "certain inalienable rights"?*

However, facts *about* a selected work—its historical background and influence, the conditions alluded to in it, the remarks of scholars about it, details of the author's life—should be used sparingly in the discussion, to keep it focused on the selection as much as possible. The leader should let background information be introduced only when it seems critical to understanding some vital aspect of the reading.

Evaluative questions ask us to judge whether what an author has written is true in light of our own experience, including other works we may have read. For example, *Is the Declaration of Independence still relevant today, or is its interest mainly historical?* Evaluative questions are typically broad and often range beyond the selection being considered. Evaluative questions help us make connections between the insights gained through discussing great writings and how we live our lives. They tend to be more rewarding if they are grounded in the work being considered and based on sound interpretations developed by participants in the course of discussion. Although evaluative questions can arise at any time, a leader will often set aside time at the end of the discussion to consider them.

Leading Shared Inquiry Discussions

The leader of a Great Books group prepares interpretive questions to initiate a discussion, then moderates its course. A leader challenges participants' responses, follows those responses with more questions, asks for evidence from the work being considered, and invites further response. If participants digress from the main point, it is the leader's responsibility to redirect attention with a question. A leader must recognize when a question seems to have run its course and then should move the group in a new direction by posing a new interpretive question.

A leader should not pose questions that are really statements in disguise and should resist the temptation to guide the group on a fixed route through the selection. Also, a leader should refrain from readily offering personal opinions or making definitive statements. To do so (or to answer one's own questions) will only make a group less responsive. In addition, the leader may be tempted to turn the discussion into a lecture; such a scenario is exactly the opposite of Shared Inquiry's purpose to give participants the opportunity to develop their own ideas.

Thinking of a stimulating question in the midst of a discussion is a demanding task. A leader needs to devote complete attention to listening to participants and responding with questions that explore the author's meaning. For this reason, it is vital that a leader comes to the gathering with some interpretive questions prepared and remains open

to others that emerge as the discussion progresses.

During discussion, the leader uses follow-up questions to build on interpretive questions and draw out their implications. Effective follow-up questions will:

- **Clarify a comment** (*What do you mean by that?*). If you are uncertain what a participant meant in a previous remark, ask the person to explain further or to rephrase a comment so that everyone accurately understands the opinion being expressed.
- **Get textual support for an opinion** (*Where in the text do you see that?*). Ask participants to explain where in the text their opinion is supported. This can help participants consider which ideas are most convincing and prompt them to reflect more closely on their own opinions.
- **Solicit additional opinions** (*Do you agree or disagree with that? Do you have another idea about that part of the text?*). Encouraging additional opinions can help participants think about the relationships between the ideas being examined; it can also help draw quieter participants into contributing.
- **Test an idea** (*How would you explain this part of the text, given your answer?*). This kind of follow-up question helps participants consider the implications of an expressed opinion in depth and how consistent it is with what the text says. Bear in mind that such questions are not intended to prove that any speaker is “wrong.”

Participating in Shared Inquiry Discussions

The following suggestions can help both leaders and participants develop the practices that will make Shared Inquiry most rewarding.

Concentrate on the selection. Refer frequently to the selection itself to support statements with quotations and paraphrases. When questions are asked, point out in the text the specific paragraphs, sentences, or even words that support the questions, and help others do the same in their responses. The more closely the group follows what the author actually says, the more rewarding the discussion will be, because it will be based on specific material rather than vague impressions of what is in the reading.

Address the question. A leader's questions are intended to focus on important issues in the work. Participants should speak to the issues the leader is currently addressing. If different issues intrigue them, they can raise them separately.

Speak up. Participants should state their opinions and be ready to explain them. A participant who does not understand something another participant has said should say so. Though it may seem to slow down the process, a leader's request for further reasons, examples, or evidence enriches everyone's understanding of the selection being considered. Disagreement can bring out the contradictions in an opinion or reveal the complex nature of a question. If participants disagree with one another, the leader should ask them to state (and to support with evidence from the text) their different interpretations.

Listen carefully. Participants will learn more after hearing their ideas challenged, supported, and modified by other participants during discussion. A leader should encourage participants to listen carefully to what others say and pursue the implications of others' thoughts, even if they disagree with them.

Discuss the author's ideas, not the author's life and times. Referring to books or articles written about the text being examined can easily lead to futile disagreement, especially because not everyone has equal access to such background knowledge. Facts about a selection—its historical background and impact, remarks of famous scholars about it—may be allowed at the leader's discretion, but are not pivotal to discussing it. The text itself is always central.

Knowing about the specific occasion on which Lincoln's second inaugural address was delivered and the contemporary issues of March 1865 can certainly contribute to an understanding of Lincoln's meaning. Nevertheless, documents that have endured typically have the unique quality of addressing all people at all times as if they are contemporaries. Such documents can be read and discussed rewardingly with a minimum of contextual information.

Close Reading in Shared Inquiry

The quality of a discussion is based on the participants' sound understanding of what a text actually says. If interpretive questions are not eliciting responses, or if participants need to focus more closely on the text, the group can read portions of

the work in careful detail to clarify understanding.

In close reading, the group examines a single passage of a work line by line—and sometimes word by word—raising questions about its meaning. Difficult passages, or ones exceptionally rich in meaning, are good candidates for close reading. You may notice such passages while you are reading a work, or you may find yourself referring frequently to a particular section as you respond to interpretive questions. The following procedure is often helpful:

- 1. The leader asks someone to read the passage in question aloud.**
- 2. The group reviews the context of the passage.** In a work of fiction, identify who is “speaking” in the passage—the author, a fictitious narrator, or a character—and recall what events have occurred in the plot up to that point. In nonfiction, note the position of the passage in the argument as a whole. For example, if the passage is placed at the beginning of the selection, consider its purpose there. Does it provide background information for the argument? Does it introduce assumptions and definitions? Does it take issue with another author? Does the passage state a theory the author hopes to prove?
- 3. The group goes over the passage line by line,** with the leader asking questions about each word, phrase, and sentence that is not clear to participants.

By paraphrasing the text, defining its terms, untangling sentences, and explaining metaphors and examples, the group will clarify the sense of the author’s words. But as you reach

agreement on what this sense is, you may still disagree about its meaning. Close reading can then serve as a springboard to interpretive discussion.

Close reading is worthwhile both for readers who do not understand a work and for those who do. For the first group, it is an opportunity to clarify thought about the reading and probe more deeply into its meaning; for the other, it is a way of collecting initial thoughts about the work.

We recommend that a good dictionary or two be available during discussions. Sometimes interpretations may depend on the precise meaning of a specific word in a text, and a dictionary can be used to settle such questions.

Preparing for Discussion

First and Second Readings

To prepare for Shared Inquiry discussion, read the text twice, taking notes and forming questions as you read. Read a selection first just to comprehend its overall scope. There is no need to understand everything fully at first, provided that you plan to return to the selection and read it more closely a second time.

During your second reading, concentrate on specific portions of the work that interest or puzzle you, analyzing and relating them to its argument or story as a whole. For a work of fiction, ask yourself why its characters act as they do, why events or conclusions follow one another, and what the author thinks or feels about them. For a work of nonfiction, sort out the terms and structure of the author's argument.

Active Reading

Active reading is crucial. In preparing for Shared Inquiry discussion, locate passages that seem especially revealing or profound and reflect on them. These may sum up an argument, give advice, offer predictions, provide examples illustrating an idea, or serve as occasions for direct reflection by the author or a character. Or they may simply be a particularly eloquent, beautiful expression of an idea.

Jot down your insights, questions, arguments with the author, and anything else that occurs to you about the selection as you read it. This ensures that such observations will not be lost between reading sessions, and that your understanding will have a greater chance to grow. Moreover, by forcing yourself to write down your responses, you will keep your mind active while you read. Here are some ways to note your responses:

- Mark passages you find especially interesting or puzzling, making brief notes of the ideas and questions they suggest to you.
- Pencil in your own titles for sections, paragraphs, or pages so that you can follow the selection more easily and refer to it more readily in discussion.
- Outline the selection. During your first reading, make check marks in the margin when the author seems to shift subjects. Then review the selection, numbering the major points and noting the examples and arguments that support them, so that the margins are marked like an outline.

- Draw rough diagrams or charts to help you make sense of complex passages or the overall plot or structure.
- Underline any term that the author seems to use in a special way. Trace the term throughout the work in order to understand what it means in different contexts.

Sample Reading with Interpretive Questions

Second Inaugural Address

Abraham Lincoln

March 4, 1865

At this second appearing to take the oath of the presidential office, there is less occasion for an extended address than there was at the first. Then a statement, somewhat in detail, of a course to be pursued, seemed fitting and proper. Now, at the expiration of four years, during which public declarations have been constantly called forth on every point and phase of the great contest which still absorbs the attention, and engrosses the energies of the nation, little that is new could be presented. The progress of our arms, upon which all else chiefly depends, is as well known to the public as to myself; and it is, I trust, reasonably satisfactory and encouraging to all. With high hope for the future, no prediction in regard to it is ventured.

On the occasion corresponding to this four years ago, all thoughts were anxiously directed to an impending civil war. All dreaded it—all sought to avert it. While the inaugural address was being delivered from this place, devoted altogether to *saving* the Union without war, insurgent agents were in the city seeking to *destroy* it without war—seeking to

dissolve the Union, and divide effects, by negotiation. Both parties deprecated war; but one of them would *make* war rather than let the nation survive, and the other would *accept* war rather than let it perish. And the war came.

One eighth of the whole population were colored slaves, not distributed generally over the Union, but localized in the Southern part of it. These slaves constituted a peculiar and powerful interest. All knew that this interest was, somehow, the cause of the war. To strengthen, perpetuate, and extend this interest was the object for which the insurgents would rend the Union, even by war; while the government claimed no right to do more than to restrict the territorial enlargement of it. Neither party expected for the war, the magnitude, or the duration, which it has already attained. Neither anticipated that the *cause* of the conflict might cease with, or even before, the conflict itself should cease. Each looked for an easier triumph, and a result less fundamental and astounding. Both read the same Bible, and pray to the same God; and each invokes His aid against the other. It may seem strange that any men should dare to ask a just God's assistance in wringing their bread from the sweat of other men's faces; but let us judge not that we be not judged. The prayers of both could not be answered; that of neither has been answered fully. The Almighty has His own purposes. "Woe unto the world because of offenses! for it must needs be that offenses come;

but woe to that man by whom the offense cometh!”
If we shall suppose that American slavery is one of those offenses which, in the providence of God, must needs come, but which, having continued through His appointed time, He now wills to remove, and that He gives to both North and South, this terrible war, as the woe due to those by whom the offense came, shall we discern therein any departure from those divine attributes which the believers in a Living God always ascribe to Him? Fondly do we hope—ferently do we pray—that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue, until all the wealth piled by the bondman’s two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash, shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said “the judgments of the Lord, are true and righteous altogether.”

With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation’s wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan—to do all which may achieve and cherish a just, and a lasting peace, among ourselves, and with all nations.



The following interpretive questions from the Great Books Foundation anthology *Politics, Leadership, and Justice* (1997) are designed to stimulate and sustain a probing examination of Lincoln's second inaugural address. There is one overarching interpretive question, followed by several follow-up questions the leader might use to focus and structure the discussion. Each question has more than one answer that can be supported with evidence from the text.

Interpretive Question for Discussion

In his second inaugural address, why does Lincoln adopt the attitude of “judge not that we be not judged,” even though he believes slavery to be an offense to God?

Follow-Up Questions

1. Why doesn't Lincoln feel triumphant regarding the successful course of the war? Why does he make no predictions about the war's outcome, but only express “high hope” for the future?
2. According to Lincoln, did the North “accept” war because of its wish to preserve the Union or because of its abhorrence of slavery?
3. Does Lincoln blame the South for causing the war?
4. Why does Lincoln point out that “the government claimed no right to do more than to restrict the territorial enlargement” of slavery? Is he suggesting that, in so compromising, the North was trying any means possible to avert bloodshed, or avoiding its moral responsibility?
5. According to Lincoln, why were people who had so much

in common—even praying to the same God—unable to avoid such a terrible conflict?

6. Why does Lincoln suggest that both North and South are being punished by God for the offense of American slavery?
7. Why does Lincoln avoid calling for vengeance against the side who “would *make* war rather than let the nation survive”?
8. Why does Lincoln think that, rather than a detailed speech outlining a course of action for the next four years, a brief statement about the sin of slavery and his wish that the nation bear “malice toward none” is the appropriate subject for his address?

Great Books Foundation Anthologies for Shared Inquiry Discussion

Selecting readings that will stimulate lively, probing discussion is a challenge for both book groups and classroom instructors. For more than sixty years, editors at the Great Books Foundation have been creating anthologies of selections by some of the world's greatest writers, both classic and contemporary, in a wide range of disciplines, including literature, philosophy, history, political science, and natural science. We choose each selection for the importance of its ideas, for its significance among the writings of the world, and for its outstanding stylistic qualities. Equally important, these selections stimulate and sustain rewarding Shared Inquiry discussions.

Please visit the Foundation's website, www.greatbooks.org, for a complete listing of publications, including detailed tables of contents and ordering information.

