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Great Books Discussion Leaders E-Newsletter

November 21, 2022

Calling All Discussion Leaders

Since no one has complained, the content of the first two Discussion Leader e-Newsletters must have been on target for you. If so, send Yes or if not send No to briancnngam@gmail.com. Of course, you could say more if you



wish. If you have used a Great Books published anthology you liked or disliked, tell us about that too so we can share it with other discussion leaders. Finally, if there is a subject relating to leading a Shared Inquiry discussion and about which you would like more information, let us know that too. We'll do our best to get useful information for you. Notwithstanding rumors to the contrary, silence is not golden.

Please, archive this E-Newsletter! There is a lot of useful information here, hopefully not too much: The usual cogent pointers from our Training Leader, Louise Morgan, and an interview with Jim Hall, one of our most experienced discussion leaders. As a special addition we present excerpts from our recently completed Guidebook. These excerpts will tell you everything you want to know about Local Discussion Groups. Also, we've included links to our Youtube channel, Zoom discussion information and our calendar with links to events. But if we missed anything or have gotten something wrong, again, please let us know.

Brian Cunningham
Assistant E-Newsletter Editor



But I Have So Much to Offer! . .

By Louise Morgan, Leader Trainer

The topics I cover at our annual GBSF Leader/Reader Workshops are largely uncontroversial, but on one

point I have come to expect pushback. Every year someone will take issue with the Shared Inquiry rule that the leader's role is to ask questions, not to provide answers. By definition this means the leader should not insert any of his or her ideas or opinions into the discussion.

"Bummer!" thinks my challenger. "Here I've spent hours reading and digesting the text, coming up with questions and researching background information on the author and the era. I'm better prepared on this topic than anyone else in the group. Now you're saying that I must keep all that to myself and be content merely to sit, listen, and toss out the occasional query!?"

Well, yes.

Now, we all know that there are many ways to conduct book discussions, ranging from casual get-togethers over coffee ("Did you like the book? I did, too. Now, how are your grandkids?") to highly structured seminars ("On page 3 of the handout we'll focus on how the author linked the banking crisis to the impending collapse of the Weimar Republic.")

Any of these methods can work if . . . IF . . . it meets the needs of the group, and IF the entire group is happy with it.

But a Great Books group is a special case. The mission of Great Books is to explore works of literary merit in a manner that permits everyone who has read the text to offer their opinions and interpretations of that text in a respectful setting. To achieve that goal a Great Books group is defined as one that uses Shared Inquiry.

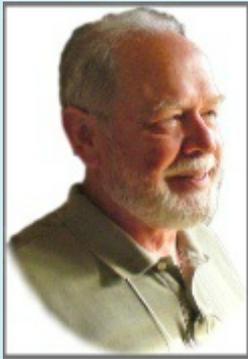
Shared Inquiry enables each participant to actively search for meaning, to express and to develop their own ideas, and to consider different plausible meanings. The discussion leader guides the discussion *by asking questions about the text and about the comments made by participants. Participants look to the leader for questions, not answers.*

Whenever a leader offers answers or opinions, or debates a point made by a participant, or brings in outside references, the tone of the discussion changes. Suddenly there's an expert in the room, someone who seemingly knows more than the rest. People become more cautious about offering interpretations, fearing that their answer might not be the "right" one. The playing field is no longer level. In the worst case scenario such a leader is so convinced of the merits of his or her argument that the leader jumps on a soapbox and holds forth while everyone silently sits back and listens.

A skilled leader knows that "just asking questions" can be more complex than it sounds. Leaders should always have some good opening questions prepared, but also several good follow-up questions to continue exploring any avenues that emerge. At any time during the discussion the leader can ask spontaneous questions, such as asking someone to clarify a comment, or to explain where in the text their opinion is supported. Leaders can test a proposed idea by asking

the participant to justify their argument in light of another, seemingly contradictory, portion of the text. And leaders are encouraged to draw quieter participants into the discussion by asking whether they agree or disagree, or if they have a different idea.

Yes, compromises can be made without sacrificing quality. Most Great Books groups have an informal policy that relevant outside references can be offered (by anyone) during the last 15-20 minutes of the discussion period. Many decades of experience have taught us that sticking to the rules of Shared Inquiry for the bulk of the discussion followed by a few minutes of extraneous relevant material lets everyone go home happy, feeling that they have enjoyed a stimulating, productive, and respectful examination of a meaningful text.



A Conversation with Jim Hall

Local Discussion Groups

September 25, 2022

Jim Hall has been a participant, founder or discussion leader of many Local Discussion Groups (“LDG”) over more than 40 years. Currently, he participates in groups in Santa Rosa and Noe Valley but is not leading a group.

Jim attended a Great Books of San Francisco Mini Retreat in 2009. The reading selection was George Orwell’s 1984. At that time there was only one LDG in San Francisco. He and Clifford Louie, whom he met at that meeting, thought, despite the opinion prevalent at the time within the San Francisco Great Books community, that it ought to be possible to establish more groups in San Francisco. Accordingly, they proceeded to establish a group at the Richmond Branch of the San Francisco Public Library (“SFPL”). Before that time Jim had previous experience starting two local discussion groups in and near Santa Rosa growing from his attendance at a Great Books session led by Barbara McConnell and Jim Carbone. In the year following starting the Richmond group Jim and Cliff started two more groups in SFPL branch libraries, eventually starting ten groups in all. The Richmond group continued until 2020 at which time it fell victim to the Covid-19 pandemic and ceased to meet. For a time, Jim and Cliff were each attending the monthly meetings of all ten groups.

Some of those ten groups succeeded well and some didn’t. In Jim’s experience one of the most important factors contributing to the success of a new group is its meeting location. The best location is a neighborhood populated mostly by middle-aged people, *i.e.*, those 50 and older. Seemingly, younger people today either have less time for pleasure reading or choose to spend less of their time doing so. Jim and Cliff’s experience with the SFPL system was mixed. In the beginning they had difficulty helping library officials understand what Great Books is and why it fits with the library’s goals and policies. On the other hand, the SFPL’s monthly system-wide newsletter, listing the time and place of events in each of the branches, including the Great Books group meetings, was a great resource for attracting new participants.

The most enjoyable aspect of LDGs for Jim is the camaraderie which develops by meeting regularly with the same people, allowing for the opportunity to get to know one another and develop long term relationships. The most fun Jim has experienced in Great Books has been participating in a group in Santa Rosa that was started by Jim Carbone. That group met twice a month. Carbone, who led the group for at least 15 years, was a great discussion leader who had an outstanding ability to formulate great questions, focusing on details from a reading which other participants had not seen prior to Carbone’s questions.

After Carbone left Jim became the group’s leader. During this period, while meeting at a Barnes & Noble, the group discussed TS Eliot’s poem “*The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*” On this occasion they were meeting in the children’s section of the bookstore with only three regular participants attending. As they were preparing to begin the meeting, Barnes & Noble announced over the store’s public address system

that a group was about to discuss Eliot's poem in the children's section of the store. Five more people, not previous Great Book participants, but who happened to be in the store and who loved that poem, joined the meeting, resulting in one of the most enjoyable literary discussions in Jim's experience.

Jim thinks that new participants in LDG discussions result more often from word of mouth between friends and relatives than from any other advertising method.

Jim has enjoyed using several anthologies published by the Great Books Foundation including the "Great Conversations" series, "Imperfect Ideals, Utopian & Dystopian Visions" and "Counterpoint" in which opposing points of view are presented for comparison and discussion. The Foundation's more recent publications such as *Tube Talk*, *Big Ideas in Television* are not as good as some of the older, out-of-print titles such as *The Great Books Reading and Discussion Series*, One through Five. The Foundation publication list is missing current editions of many of the literary classics, including Greek classics.

Jim's favorite reading is the play, *Antigone*, by Sophocles. It presents issues of society, government, and power. But for new discussion groups Jim recommends *Introduction to Great Books*, First, Second and Third Series. They contain short readings and include guides of how to approach preparation for discussions. The readings have been selected from among the very best pieces of literature. Once a group has gained some experience with Shared Inquiry, passing the discussion leader role around among the participants helps to get them involved. In one group in which Jim participated the practice was for each participant to lead the discussion in two successive meetings, the reading in the second meeting being either of the same subject or the same author.

Following the rules of Shared Inquiry is the most important quality for a successful discussion leader. The discussion leader should not become part of the discussion. As a rule, the group shouldn't know the discussion leader's opinion. The opinion leader's job is to encourage engagement, perhaps by calling on those who remain quiet. The discussion leader should look for signs or hints that a participant has something to say. Importantly, the discussion leader must learn not to be afraid of silence. The group needs time to think about the question. The discussion leader shouldn't immediately rephrase the question or go on to another question. Talking too much is one of the most common mistake many discussion leaders make.

Their biggest challenge is formulating good questions. "Why" questions. Not "what" questions. And not "what" questions masquerading as "Why". These are generally the questions for which the discussion leader doesn't have answers or about which he/she is confused or which are susceptible to multiple answers. Jim typically formulates three to six questions in advance. But often the group formulates its own questions, in which case he by-passes his own questions in favor of those raised by the group or reformulates his questions based on the group's discussion. It is more difficult to lead an inexperienced group's discussion or a group that isn't skilled at discussion or one in which there are only 2 or 3 participants.

Six to twelve is an optimum size for a discussion group with an upper limit of 15, perhaps 20 for a weekend event. Two hours is too little time for each person in a group of 20 people to have the opportunity to participate. An assistant discussion leader can be helpful to ask additional questions, keep track of who has participated and point out someone who has a point they want to make.

The most important factors for the success of a local discussion group are the skill and experience of the discussion leader, the reading selection, and the time and place of the meeting.

The most frequent complaint Jim has received from participants concerns the difficulty of the reading. A difficult reading can make it hard to become interested in it. This is true for both regular attendees and others. On one occasion a participant who had been quiet during the meeting complained to Jim after the meeting for his having called on her to answer a question. She said, "some of us just come to listen".

GBSF's greatest challenge today is to recruit younger people. It may be that there is greater difficulty recruiting younger people because they have poorer reading skills, resulting from a poorer education than in years past. One possible solution is to aim for "middle age" people.

Jim emphasizes the importance of developing as a human being. John Erskine (1879-1951), an English professor at Amherst College and later Columbia University, musician, composer, founder of the Julliard School of Music, and early inspiration for the Great Books movement, was the author of the essay, "The Moral Obligation to be Intelligent" (1915), in which he argued that ignorance is sin, knowledge is virtue and that each of us has a moral obligation to pursue intelligence during our lives. Ignorance can lead to harm to others. We have been given a brain that is a learning machine. How dare we not develop

it? Great Books is one of the best ways to improve our minds. Mortimer Adler pointed out that a solitary reader is stuck with his/her own ideas. In the battle for the survival of the fittest, participation in a tolerant community provides an important advantage.

By: Brian Cunningham
October 19, 2022

GBSF Guidebook EXCERPTS FOR DISCUSSION LEADERS

As of October 20, 2022

These excerpts from the GBSF Guidebook have been selected for discussion leaders both of Local Discussion Groups (“Local Groups”) and weekend events sponsored by GBSF (“Events”). The excerpts are 9 pages from the 45-page Guidebook plus two sample documents. They do not include material which pertain only to members of the Executive Committee (“Directors”) or only to Events.



Brief description of the Sections included:

- §1. Introduction. Why a Guidebook? What is the “Council”? What are its goals and values for GBSF?*
- §2. Council. A few more details, including how it’s regulated, purposes, powers and meetings.*
- §3. Members. Who is a “Members”? What difference does it make?*
- §7. Local Discussion Groups. Where, when and how does a “typical” Local Group meet?*
- §8.2.3 Discussion Leaders. Job Description and expectations.*
- §9. Training. How do you learn to become a Discussion Leaders and where can you polish your skills?*
- §13. Resources. Our website. Reading Matters. Zoom. Tips to start a new Local Group.*
- §14.2 Sample Reading Schedule*
- §14.3. Sample Local Group Flyer*

Section numbers are those used in the Guidebook.

1. Introduction.

1. Purpose of Guidebook

This **Guidebook** is intended to inform the leadership and “Members” of the Great Books Council of San Francisco (“Council”) of the rules, traditions and expectations with which it conducts its affairs. It is intended as a living document that undergoes periodic review and revision as the Council’s policies and practices change.

2. Guidebook Organization

Throughout, this Guidebook provides sources of authority for its statements; viz. California Nonprofit Corporation Law (“CALaw”), United States tax law (“IRS”), our Articles of Incorporation (“Articles”), our Bylaws as amended and restated July 10, 2021 (“Bylaws”), resolutions approved by our governing group, the Executive Committee (“ExCom” as defined in Guidebook §4) that are still in effect (“Governing Resolutions”), and our traditions as described in this Guidebook (“Tradition”).

Entries in the Glossary are displayed in the text of the Guidebook with initial capitals. Their first use appears in quotation marks.

3. Our Identity

- Our official name is the **Great Books Council of San Francisco** (“Council”). SOURCE: *Articles §ONE*
- Our principal office is in the City and County of San Francisco, California. The address is 30 Alviso St 94127. SOURCE: *Articles §FOUR*
- The Council’s California corporation registration number is 274743.
- The Council’s website is www.greatbooksncal.org.
- Our non-profit tax ID is 94-6102575.

4. Goals of Council

We strive to promote, support, and encourage a more thorough understanding of select literature using “Shared Inquiry” to promote a deeper level of discussion and insight.

SOURCE: *Tradition*

5. Shared Values

Our shared values include:

- Trust and honesty within the ExCom and with “Members” (as defined in Guidebook §3)
- Expecting and appreciation that each Member carries some responsibility for success of the Council
- Openness of Members and participants in activities sponsored by the Council (“Participants”)
- Visible access to “Officers”, the ExCom, “Subcommittees” (as defined in Guidebook §5), and the needs of Participants
- Responsiveness to suggestions and needs of the Participants
- Recognition of past practice and traditions
- Adherence to the Bylaws and Articles

2. Council

1. Structure

2.1.1 Non-profit

The Council is a 501[c][3] tax-exempt not-for-profit educational corporation incorporated under CALaw. Neither the Council nor the ExCom may do anything to change the Council’s character as a non-profit organization.

SOURCE: *Articles §THREE; Bylaws §§1.1, 2.2*

2.1.2 Regulation

The CA Attorney General regulates charitable organizations in CA for the protection of charitable assets for their intended use. The Registry, part of the State Attorney’s Office, administers a statutory registration program. The Secretary of State maintains and processes the filing of a biennial Statement of Information. The Franchise Tax Board and the Internal Revenue Service decide what qualifies as a tax deduction and who qualifies for exempt tax status under state and federal laws, respectively. SOURCE: CALaw §12581 et seq., §23701; IRS §501 c

2. Purposes

The specific and primary purposes of the Council are to administer the San Francisco Great Books Program, to maintain the discussion groups now meeting, to establish new groups, and to study the progress of the Program, with the view of constantly improving its quality.

The purposes of the Council may be expanded or otherwise altered only upon approval of the Council. Such purposes must be consistent with the promotion of the Great Books Foundation (“Foundation”) Program.

3. Members

3.1 Definition

Council Members (“Members”) are participants who, during the previous twelve months, have attended either (i) at least three (3) monthly meetings of a Great Books discussion group in Northern California (“Local Group”) or (ii) one or more Great Books Events sponsored by the Council (“Events”). The decision of the ExCom as to who are Members shall be final. SOURCE: *CA Law §5056 P (a), Articles §SEVEN, Bylaws §3.1*

3.2 Vote

Each Member has one vote on each matter duly presented to the Council, including election of Directors, at Annual Meetings or Special Meetings of the Council. SOURCE: *Bylaws §3.2*

7. LOCAL DISCUSSION GROUPS

Local Groups of perhaps 6 to 12 individuals meet monthly or at regular intervals, using Shared Inquiry to read and discuss short stories, essays, poems, novels and nonfiction of many different genres. Participation is generally free.

Local Groups of the Council began meeting in 1953, initially in San Francisco. Later groups were started in other regions of northern California, particularly in the San Francisco Bay Area.

As of September 2021, 31 Local Groups were meeting in the Central Valley (6), the East Bay (7), Marin (5), San Francisco (6) and the South Bay (7). This includes one college program leading to a Certificate of Achievement in Great Books. A list of the currently active Local Groups, together with contact information, appears in the [Find a Group](#) Page of the Website. The “Database Manager” conducts a census of groups annually.

7.1 Meetings

- Local Groups generally meet once a month for two hours at the same time and place.
- Discussions are led by one individual, designated the Discussion Leader, who conducts the discussion in accordance with the Shared Inquiry method.

- The role of Discussion Leader in many Local Groups is passed around from participant to participant monthly. Meetings are held in private homes, public libraries, churches and wherever a suitable room is available in which participants can sit comfortably to discuss the reading designated for that meeting. Many Local Groups also meet via Zoom. For more information regarding Zoom, see Guidebook §13.3.

7.2. Management of Local Groups

- Local Groups operate autonomously.
- They choose what they read as well as when and where they meet.
- Some use Foundation publications; some do not.
- All Local Groups are encouraged to use the Shared Inquiry method.
- The ExCom does not monitor what they read, how well they practice the Shared Inquiry method or the performance of the Discussion Leaders.
- Local Groups do not regularly report to the ExCom and do not have designated representation on it. However, most of the Directors participate in Local Groups; many are Discussion Leaders.
- The ExCom tries to respond to the needs for programs, events or other forms of support expressed by Local Groups either in response to the Data Manager's annual survey or by other means.
- Local Group Discussion Leaders are encouraged attend a Leader/Reader workshop.
- Local Groups need no permission to form or operate, either from the Council or the Foundation.
- The ExCom's only explicit connection to Local Groups is the listing of groups on the Website as described above.
- Local groups are eligible to request meetings to be conducted using the Great Books Zoom Meeting Room, as outlined in Guidebook §13.3.

7.3. Participation

7.3.1 Recruitment Initiatives

From time to time the ExCom has undertaken initiatives intended to assist Local Groups to attract new participants. Some Local Groups have expressed a desire for greater assistance from the ExCom in advertising and recruiting.

7.3.2 Zoom

The advent of Zoom has made it easier for most people to attend meetings, although some are challenged by computers and the Internet. It is generally agreed that a measure of social interaction is lost when groups meet by Zoom, and that social interaction is an important part of the Great Books experience.

7.3.3 Members of the Council

Participants in Local Groups are Members of the Council. See Guidebook§3.

7.3.4. New Groups

New groups form from time to time. See Guidebook§13.7.

SOURCE: *Tradition*

8.2.3 Discussion Leaders

8.2.3.1 Job Description

A Discussion Leader leads a Shared Inquiry discussion of a book or film at an Event or Local Group meeting.

8.2.3.2. Additional Expectations

A Discussion Leader is expected to be familiar with the reading and to have formulated Shared Inquiry questions in advance of the discussion. For Events, a Discussion Leader is expected to share and coordinate those questions with other Discussion Leaders during the Pre-discussion.

9. Training

9.1 Leader/Reader Training

The Leader Trainer ensures that all Events [and Local Discussion Groups (Ed.)] have an adequate number of Discussion Leaders who are prepared to encourage and facilitate productive discussions using the Shared Inquiry method.

Annual Workshop: At least once a year the Leader Trainer will offer a Leader/Reader Workshop designed to cover:

- Expectations with regard to a Local Group or Event discussion and its Discussion Leader;
- People skills for Discussion Leaders;
- Details of Shared Inquiry and tips for “deep” reading;
- How to lead different genres: fiction, non-fiction, poetry, drama;
- Tactics for dealing with difficult participants and situations;
- In-person vs on-line leading;

- Practice sessions.

Luncheon Seminar: The Leader Trainer may host a periodic luncheon/seminar for active Discussion Leaders for the purpose of sharing experiences and recognizing special efforts.

13. Resources

13.1 Website

1. Web Address (URL) The Council's website, www.greatbooksncal.org, is available to the general public.
2. The Website Manager is responsible for maintaining the health and content of the Website.

13.1.4 Site Content

Overview: The Website includes a brief description of the Council, as well as a description of the Shared Inquiry method for discussing books.

Discussion Group Info: The site provides contact info for each Local Group, including information about where and when each group meets and what it's currently reading.

Publications: The site links to the Foundation's website, which provides a list of anthologies published by the Foundation and tools for ordering them online.

Event Announcements: The site provides detailed information about each Event sponsored by the Council, including information on how to register.

Newsletters: The site posts the current issue of *Reading Matters*, as well as each issue since 1996. Site visitors can sign up to join the mailing list and receive upcoming publications of *Reading Matters* and the Council's e-newsletters.

Links to Related Sites: The site provides links to related sites, including other regional Councils and their Events, the Foundation, private organizations such as Classical Pursuits, and educational institutions.

13.3 Zoom Meeting Room

13.3.2 Uses

13.3.2.2 Local Groups

These are usually set up as a recurring meeting by the Zoom Room Manager who sends out the Zoom invitation to the key contact. The key contact will then manage the actual meeting. As of January 2022, all Local Groups requesting Zoom Meeting Room access have been scheduled to July 2022.

13.3.3 Setting Up Meetings / Managing Meetings

13.3.3.3 Zoom Room Manager Support

The Zoom Room Manager, Caroline Van Howe, can set up meetings, provide Zoom invites, and provide Zoom meeting support on request. Her email address is zoom.greatbooksncal@gmail.com

13.3.3.4 No Overlapping Meetings

There can be at most one meeting in the Zoom Meeting Room at any given time.

13.3.3.5 Zoom Host

Each meeting must have a Zoom Host. If the original Host needs to leave early, they can transfer the Host role to another participant using the Manage Participants option.

Participants may use *Leave Meeting* to leave a meeting at any time, but only the Host may *End the Meeting for All*.

13.3.4 How to Join a Meeting in the Zoom Meeting Room

- Open the email containing the Zoom invitation
- Note the password or copy it
- Click on the invitation or copy it into a browser
- Join with Computer Audio
- Zoom Meeting Room options: from the screen that appears after you've joined the meeting, you can use the icons at the bottom to (reading left to right):
 - Control your Microphone - mute/unmute
 - Control your Video camera - Start Video / Stop Video
 - Invite other people to join the Zoom Meeting
 - Manage Participants - to see who else is in the room
 - Share a screen, document, website or other resource
 - Chat - to Everyone or to a specific participant
 - Record a meeting for future playback

13.3.5 Technical Support for Zoom

For general information and technical support on Zoom, please visit <https://www.zoom.us> for the most up-to-

date information. Zoom has excellent online tutorials and videos to assist new users. For specific questions about a Zoom invitation or Council meeting or Event, please contact the Zoom Room Manager.

13.5 Reading Matters

Reading Matters, the principal public face of the Council, is in its 27th year of publication as of October 2021. In that role it presents the Council's policies, programs and mission. Articles are written by the leaders of activities and programs of the Council and by the *Reading Matters* Editor. Issues of *Reading Matters* are timed for maximum impact on participation in the Council's major Events, three annually at this writing—McCConnell Spring Conference, Long Novel Weekend, and Poetry Weekend. Thus, *Reading Matters* is published thrice yearly. Attention is also given within this framework to support the mini-retreats, leader training Events, Annual Meeting, and other Events that may arise.

13.7. How to Start a New Great Books Discussion Group

13.7.1 First, Just Do It: It's Not Magic

- It mainly requires energy and determination. Simply follow the steps below.
- If you're doing it for the first time, consider finding someone who has done it before and can help you for the first year or so.
- Ask an experienced Great Books participant for help. They are a caring and generous group, very willing to help.

13.7.2 Find a Discussion Leader

- The person, whether you or someone else, should be an experienced Discussion Leader, meaning they (i) have participated in a Local Group for at least a couple of years, (ii) have participated in one or more Leader/Reader Workshops and (iii) have prior experience as a Discussion Leader.
- One person can do it but two people working together can divide the work and cover for one another. In that case, it is preferable that both are experienced Discussion Leaders.
- Alternatively, one might be experienced and act as a mentor for the other. The less experienced Discussion Leader can concentrate on developing the skill of asking questions and guiding the discussion. The experienced Discussion Leader can be the "cop" who doesn't let the discussion get off-track from interruptions, arguments, outside references and personal anecdotes.

13.7.3. Find a Good Location

- You'll need a well-lit, quiet room with chairs that will accommodate six to twelve people, is easily accessible by car or public transportation, has toilet facilities, and is in a safe neighborhood.
- Public libraries often have a room which they may make available for free. Discuss with the librarian a day and time to hold the meeting each month. Ask what they can do to help publicize the group. People who go to libraries like to read. Libraries attract a variety of readers and may provide free publicity by (i) posting the reading schedule on their bulletin boards or (ii) providing a stack of reading schedules in their free pamphlet displays so that people can take them. San Francisco public libraries are very accommodating in this regard although libraries elsewhere may be less so.
- Churches and private homes are frequently chosen locations. You might also investigate associations of homeowners, senior living centers or anywhere with a suitable space that will be reliably available each month.
- Consider using Zoom as an alternative to meeting in person. Meeting online makes it easier for some to get to the meeting. But it has the disadvantage of reducing social interaction, an important part of the Great Books experience. Some experienced leaders also find that Zoom discussions are not as free-flowing as in-person discussions.

13.7.4 Pick a Day and Time

- Many groups meet during weekday evenings, but some prefer weekend times.
- Start with what works for you, then what works for the location where you will meet and, finally, the preferences of the group. Some people don't like to meet at night due to safety concerns or because they don't like to travel at night.

13.7.5 Choose What to Read

- The kind of readings you use (short stories, essays, novels, non-fiction, science fiction, etc.) will affect the participants you attract.
- Whatever the genre, it is very important that the group enjoys the readings.
- A proven good way to start is with the *Introduction to Great Books* series of anthologies, available at the Great Books Foundation online bookstore at <https://store.greatbooks.org/colleges-book-groups.html>. The series consists of multiple volumes of interesting short stories and essays by well-known writers.
- Many Local Groups read a short story or essay of from four to forty pages rather than an entire book each month.
- Prepare and distribute a reading schedule for the entire year showing the title of the pieces you will be

reading, name of the anthology or book containing the reading (if applicable), and the date for the reading.

13.7.6 Publicize, Publicize, Publicize

- Good publicity is the best way to attract prospective members to the group and to insure its longevity.
- Prepare a flyer to distribute in neighborhood businesses like bookstores, restaurants, coffee shops and laundromats. See the sample flyer at the end of this.
- Advertise on social media such as MeetUp, LinkedIn, Next Door Neighborhood.
- Encourage your participants to invite guests to “try out” a meeting.
- If you meet in a library, take advantage of whatever publicity outlets the library makes available.

13.7.7 Tips, Things to Consider

- Serve as Discussion Leader until you can develop new Discussion Leaders within the group. Act as a mentor and advisor to the group for as long as needed - generally at least two to three years.
- A week or more before your meeting send an email to participants and prospective participants reminding them of the time and place of the meeting or the Zoom address and stating what reading you will be discussing. Personalize the email by adding words encouraging participation. Be sure to address the email using “bcc” so addresses don’t show. Sensitivity to privacy issues is very important.
- If the reading is short, consider providing a scanned copy or the address of a website where it can be found. This allows people not to feel compelled to buy the book.
- When your group becomes established, encourage participants to become Discussion Leaders by attending a Leader/Reader Workshop.
- Build group camaraderie and friendships by inviting participants to coffee or dinner after the discussion.
- Have occasional special events to spice things up. For example, read Shakespeare on his birthday or Edgar Allen Poe on Halloween.
- Don’t fail to follow up on inquiries you receive.
- Select readings carefully. Avoid readings that are uninteresting, irrelevant, badly written or unsatisfying to read.
- **Don’t fail to show up for a meeting without notifying everyone in advance of the cancellation** Dependability is important.

14. Links to Other Documents

14.12 Sample Reading Schedule

READING SCHEDULE

DATE	READING	AUTHOR
Aug 17, 2019	(A) Thief in a Pastry Shop (8p)	Italo Calvino
	Short story about the Deadly Sin of GLUTTONY	
Sept 21	(B) Why War? (11p)	Sigmund Freud
	Freud’s theory on why we have war	
Oct 19	(A) Fat People (15p)	Alison Lurie
	Short story about the Deadly Sin of GLUTTONY	
Nov 16	(B) The Melian Dialogue (9p)	Thucydides
	Excerpt on how ancient Greek states got along	
Dec 21	(A) Nuns at a Luncheon (18p)	Aldous Huxley
	Short story about the Deadly Sin of LUST	
	[...Etc.]	
July 18, 2020	(C) Recitatif (19p)	Toni Morrison
	Short story about race relations	

NOTE: We read from three books published by the Great Books Foundation:

(A) *Even Deadlier 7 Deadly Sins*; (B) *Introduction to Great Books - First Series*; and (C) *Her Own Accord - American Women on Identity, Culture, and Community*.

14.13 Sample Local Group Flyer

Like to read? Like to talk about ideas? Want to finally read great writings by famous authors?

Come to the ...

GREAT BOOKS DISCUSSION GROUP

Third Saturday of each month

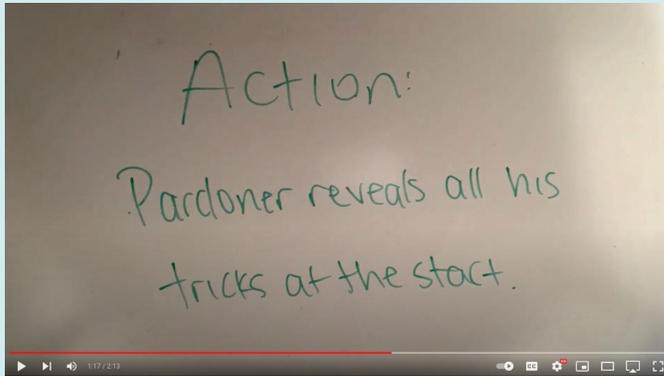
1:00 - 3:00 p.m.

Anza Branch Library
550 - 37th Ave. (at Geary Blvd.)
(415) 355-5717

JOIN THE FUN as we discuss short readings by famous authors. In a friendly group setting, we talk about the human condition, learn how to appreciate great writing, and learn how to become better critical thinkers. See the reading schedule on the other side of this page.

To obtain a free copy of the reading before a meeting, please contact: Clifford at (415) 750-1786 or clifford.louie@sbcglobal.net

read. think. DISCUSS. Grow



Do you have questions about Asking Questions?

One of the concerns that is often voiced by discussion leaders is how to formulate the best questions to stimulate discussion. For some groups, the role of discussion leader is shared amongst the group, while with other groups one or two members may lead. It is usually the role of the discussion leader to kick off the

discussion with an opening question and then to broaden the discussion with interpretative questions.

Louise Morgan, a member of the Great Books San Francisco Executive Committee who heads up the Great Books Leader/Reader Workshop team, has been working on creating resources to help with the tricky topic of “asking questions”. Louise, along with her granddaughter Lydia (also an Executive Committee member) have developed a series of short videos on this topic which are available for viewing on our new [YouTube Channel](#).

Please check out these informative videos for help in getting some of your questions answered.

[Fact questions vs. interpretive questions](#)
[Opening questions](#)
[People Skills](#)

If you have any feedback or would like to suggest other topics for other videos, please contact Louise at: louise-morgan@sbcglobal.net

Caroline Van Howe
Publicity Chair
February 6, 2022

Discussion Leaders may reserve the Great Books Zoom Room – at no fee

Are you interested in hosting a Great Books discussion by Zoom but not sure where to start? We can help! Great Books has a Zoom room that can host meetings for up to 100 participants and Discussion Leaders may reserve the Zoom room at

no fee.

GB Publicity Coordinator, Caroline Van Howe, manages the Great Books Zoom and can help with setting up meetings, invites, and basic support. Discussion leaders are able to manage the Zoom room themselves. You can request one meeting or a recurring series, say every Tuesday at 7 pm.

Interested? Contact Caroline at: zoom.greatbooksnca@gmail.com



GREAT BOOKS COUNCIL OF SAN FRANCISCO EVENTS CALENDAR

Useful Quick Links

[San Francisco Mini-Retreat February 11, 2022](#)

[Barbara McConnell Asilomar Great Books Weekend April 28-30, 2023](#)

[Gold Country Mini-Retreat Spring 2023](#)

[Annual Meeting and Book Discussion Summer 2023](#)

[Leader-Reader Workshop Summer 2023](#)

[Banned Books Mini-Retreat Summer/Fall 2023](#)

[Long Novel Weekend October 2023](#)

[Poetry Weekend November 2023](#)

Our Website <https://www.greatbooksnca.org>

Reading Matters, published and edited by Rick White, is our premier publication. To read the

Summer 2023 edition just [CLICK HERE](#).
