

Building Toward Justice Reflection Exercises

Building Toward Justice is a program of the Illinois Humanities Council that is used for all participants in Illinois AmeriCorps Programs. It is a reading and discussion series that gives AmeriCorps volunteers, staff, and alumni an opportunity to reflect on their chosen form of civic engagement. "*What is the meaning and content of their commitment to public service? What does it mean to choose to serve? What or whom are we serving, and why? What is social justice, and what is the character of its call?*" are some of the questions participants explore in the series. Effective practices for setting up a discussion series include:

- Orient each discussion around one or two brief readings that will elicit an engaging dialogue.
- Keep group size below twelve, if possible.
- All sessions should be facilitated by an instructor attentive not only to the readings, but to the questions raised by the participants.
- The set of themes and readings is dynamic. As members proceed through the series, they are encouraged to make reading suggestions, which the facilitator should attempt to incorporate.
- The discussion sessions are usually ninety-minutes

Possible themes and readings include the following:

What is injustice?

Second Samuel, 11-12:15 (OT of the Bible)

J.M. Whitfield, "America"

What is justice?

Plato's *Republic*, four excerpted definitions.

Martin Luther King, Jr. "Letter from Birmingham Jail"

What is compassion? What is duty?

Jean Jacques Rousseau's *Reveries of the Solitary Walker*.

Gwendolyn Brooks, "The Lovers of the Poor"

What is a right? What does it mean to claim a right?

Henry MacNeal Turner, "I Shall Not Beg for My Rights."

United States Constitution, Amendments 1-10.

United Nations Declaration of Universal Human Rights.

Why do we try to do (or be) good? How do we do good?

Benjamin Franklin, excerpts from the *Autobiography*.

Dave Eggers, "Where Were We"

What others, or what sorts of others, do we care for?

Toni Morrison, "Recitatif"

J.M. Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*.

George Orwell, "Reflections on Gandhi"

Why choose to serve?

Martin Luther King, Jr., "The Drum Major Instinct"

Mary E. Wilkins Freeman, "Luella Miller"

What should social leadership look like?

Charles Chesnutt, "The Wife of His Youth"