



BUILDING BRIDGES THROUGH BOOKS

a project of Human Rights Pen Pals

Guide to reading, discussions and answering questions

- We read with a sense of purpose. Building bridges is our goal.
- We promote critical thinking and oppose rote memorization.
- We encourage taking notes and writing down material not understood.
- Use a dictionary and don't skip over words you don't 100% understand.
- We encourage individuals to take the initiative to read related subject material to improve understanding.
- Ask questions: curiosity is the key to learning.
- Read questions and review the "words to know" prior to reading each chapter. "Words to know" are key terms and themes that are present in the chapters.
- Answer questions in a language that everyone can understand.
- Don't preach from the mountain top. We are guided by the educational principle "Each One, Teach One"
- Decide which questions you want to answer, and keep your responses succinct. You are not obligated to answer every single question.
- When writing out your response, please be sure to indicate which chapter and question number you are answering (i.e., chapter 1, #2). You do not need to re-write the question.

Discussion Questions

"A People's History of the United States" by Howard Zinn

Chapter 4. Tyranny Is Tyranny

Words to know.

Paternalism • Tyranny • Class / class privilege / class consciousness

1. How did Patrick Henry and Thomas Paine articulate a call for independence that appealed to the masses while smoothing over class divisions in the colonies? Do you see leaders employing this same strategy today, or in other times in US history?
2. How did the Declaration of Independence refer to Indians and slaves? Where these groups included in the polity demanding independence? Were women included?
3. How were rulers of the English colonies able to hold back potential rebellions and create a consensus of popular support for the rule of a new privileged class?
4. Do you believe the answer to the above question helps to cause division within the ranks of the have-nots?

5. What are your ideals about democracy?

Chapter 5. A Kind of Revolution

Words to know.

Revolution • Federalism • Class Conflicts • Private Property

1. How does this chapter support the phrase, “It was a rich man’s war and a poor man’s fight”? Do you agree or disagree with this belief? How and why? Do you believe that this phrase is applicable to today’s American army? How and why?
2. How did the events before, during, and immediately after the Revolutionary War affect the major Indian Nations? Why did most Indians fight for Great Britain during the Revolution?
3. What did the enslaved and free African Americans stand to gain—or lose—from the Revolution? Why did Washington refuse to allow enslaved African Americans to fight the British in exchange for their freedom?
4. According to Zinn, what was the purpose of the middle class in the post-Revolutionary U.S.?
5. How did Black Americans (both free and enslaved) make use of the Revolution to advocate for their advancement? Were their demands met?

Chapter 6. The Intimately Oppressed

Words to know.

Equality • Cult of Domesticity • Women’s Movement

1. Why was demanding the right to vote considered to be “radical”—even among women—in the mid-nineteenth century? Do you think it was still considered radical at the time the Nineteenth Amendment was adopted in 1920? Why, or why not?
2. Why was there a “practical need for women in a frontier society” that “produced some measure of equality”? (People’s History, p. 111) What were those measures? What were the special attributes of frontier life that would provide more equality for women than existed in urban life in preindustrial America?
3. What was the “cult of domesticity” (People’s History, p. 104)? Do you agree that it was “a way of pacifying her [women] with a doctrine of ‘separate but equal’”? Why, or why not?

4. Do you think most American women supported the women's movement in the pre-Civil War years? Why, or why not? What might have united them? What might have divided them?
5. What were the similarities and dissimilarities between the conditions of enslaved African Americans and white women?

Other questions:

Was there anything else you wanted to respond to from the reading chapters?

Were there any reflections from the discussion answers for chapters 1-3 that you wanted to share?