

## STARTING A VOICE OF WITNESS BOOK CLUB

Voice of Witness books foster an empathy-based understanding of human rights crises through first-person oral history narratives. By choosing to start a book club, your group will be discussing and learning from many vital, and often unheard, stories from the United States and around the world.

### **Who would you like to invite?**

Ideally, choose people who represent a diverse set of experiences and perspectives from your various networks—school, work, friend circles, and neighborhood—who would commit to reading a book or would be interested in a “living room” conversation. If this is a new reading group, invite twice the number of people you’d like to host so that you get a good turnout. Having a group of twelve people or fewer for the discussion is ideal.

### **Which books will you read?**

Your Voice of Witness Book Club may have a focal theme to help you select the books you’re going to read and frame the guiding principles of the group. For example, your club may focus on domestic or global human rights, migration and displacement, systems of oppression, or resistance and activism. With over twenty titles in the Voice of Witness series and more on the way, there is sure to be something for everyone.

### **How should you handle book orders?**

Voice of Witness [books](#) are available to order online through [Haymarket Books](#) and [Verso Books](#). Bulk orders receive a discount. Many of our titles are also available as eBooks from these publishers. We recommend ordering your copies at least four weeks in advance of your discussion date so members have enough time to do their reading. Members can also borrow a book or request the title from their local library branch!

### **How often should the club meet?**

Meeting frequency depends on the needs and schedules of group members, but we recommend meeting monthly or bi-monthly. You can use [doodle.com](#), a free scheduling tool, to help the group find a date and time that works for most people. Keep in mind that your location will be dependent upon convenience, your desired atmosphere, and group size.

### **How should you continue the conversation after book club meetings?**

Share ideas amongst members about how to best continue the conversation in between club meetings: text threads, email chains, or online discussion forums are all great ways to share thoughts outside of meeting times. After the final book club meeting, some groups may decide to create a follow-up project such as a blog or creative writing reflection for group members. Consider sharing excerpts from your readings on social media to encourage more discussion and bring the narratives to a wider audience too!

## TIPS FOR BOOK CLUB FACILITATORS

### Norms and Expectations

As with any working group, it is helpful to set the tone by establishing a few discussion norms and expectations. Group members should collectively generate and agree upon discussion norms, but a few suggestions are:

- Step up, step back (or: make space, take space). Be mindful of your impact on discussion dynamics.
- Speak and listen from the heart. Approach differences of opinion with curiosity.
- Honor the group space and the time commitment from each other. Come to the discussion prepared, help with logistics and clean-up, etc.
- What's said here, stays here. Respect the privacy of your group members.

### Building Community

Your book club is an opportunity to foster meaningful relationships through powerful conversations. Invite your group to choose some community-building activities to build into your agenda. Perhaps you set up your meetings potluck-style and begin each session by sharing food. Perhaps you choose to start each session with a check-in or icebreaker question. You may also add a creative element to your meetings: collaborate on a playlist inspired by your reading or invite group members to bring their own art or writing into the space.

### Discussion Questions

Open-ended discussion questions give people an opportunity to share their thoughts and feelings and go deeper into how the book has made an impact on them. Below are some sample discussion questions that will hopefully inspire you to create questions of your own!

- Which story did you identify with the most, and why?
- Describe one moment from the book that stayed with you.
- What challenged you about a particular story or the book as a whole?
- What surprised you about a particular story or the book as a whole?
- Who do you most want to share this book with and why?
- What are three words to describe your experience with the book?
- What action(s) will you take as a result of reading this book? E.g., share the book with someone, find out more about an issue or organization mentioned, create a project, donate, or get involved in fighting injustice another way.

For more tailored discussion questions about specific books in the series, download free discussion questions for each title on our [book club webpage](https://www.voiceofwitness.org/bookclub).