

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website

Books

Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Stony Brook, NY, April 2014
Rev. Margie Allen and Rev. Dr. Linda Anderson

Small Group Ministry Program Sunday Demo

“Spiritual growth through personal connection”

This session is meant to take about 1 hour

(Possible time frames are included in each part of session)

“Book, when I close you, I open life”

“Libro, cuando te cierro / abro la vida.” ~ Pablo Neruda, “Ode to the Book (I)”

10 min Welcome and Introduction to Sharing Circles

(give out brochures)

small groups of 6-10 people who make a commitment to meet monthly
(Sept-June)

make a covenant with one another regarding how they will be together
purpose to get to know others in the fellowship and to know oneself better
we hope people will share but if someone does not want to, that's ok for
this demo

there is a topic each month that the groups focus on (ex. Travel, regret,
gifts and skills, repair, dreaming a year, . . .)

what we will do today is a shorter version of a sharing circle
save questions for the end, after the group has experienced it

3min Covenant

(Avoid a discussion of the no cross-talk, no interruption practice and just ask
people to give it a try. Briefly explain the purpose of it and what it gives to the groups.)

4 min Opening Words and Chalice Lighting

from Henry David Thoreau's *Walden*, Chapter 3 “Reading”

“No wonder that Alexander carried the *Iliad* with him on his expeditions in a precious casket. A written word is the choicest of relics. It is something at once more intimate with us and more universal than any other work of art. It is the work of art nearest to life itself. It may be translated into every language, and not only be read but actually breathed from all human lips;--not be represented on canvas or in marble only, but be carved out of the breath of life itself. The symbol of an ancient man's thought becomes a modern man's speech. Two thousand summers have imparted to the monuments of Grecian literature, as to her marbles, only a maturer golden and autumnal tint, for they have carried their own serene and celestial atmosphere into all lands to protect them against the corrosion of time. Books are the treasured wealth of the world and the fit inheritance of generations and nations.”

5 min Check-in: Introduce yourself, how long you've been connected with this congregation and, if you are willing, the title of a book you are reading right now.

5 min Introduction to the Topic

Books can be friendly, revolutionary, inspirational, healing; can offer escape, challenge, rebuke, affirmation; can make and unmake us. Anna Quindlen, novelist and *New York Times* columnist published a slim volume in 1998 entitled *How Reading Changed My Life*. Two excerpts introduce the topic for our small group today:

In books I have traveled, not only to other worlds, but into my own. I learned who I was and who I wanted to be, what I might aspire to, and what I might dare to dream about my world and myself. More powerfully and persuasively than from the “shalt nots” of the Ten Commandments, I learned the difference between good and evil, right and wrong. (6)

“All of reading is really only finding ways to name ourselves, and, perhaps, to name the others around us so that they will no longer seem like strangers. Crusoe and Friday. Ishmael and Ahab. Daisy and Gatsby. Pip and Estella. Me. Me. Me. I am not alone. I am surrounded by words that tell me who I am, why I feel what I feel. Or maybe they just help me while away the hours as the rain pounds down on the porch roof, taking me away from the gloom and on to somewhere sunny, somewhere else.” (21)

5 min Quotations (cut up and have everyone pick one or two to read aloud)

25 min Questions (maybe give everyone 4 min to share about the question of their choice?)

- ◆ What was your family’s attitude toward reading and books when you were growing up?
- ◆ Do you have fond memories of a certain book or story from your childhood? Can you make a connection between that book or story (titles, themes, hero/ine(s), etc.) and who you wanted to be or who you are today?
- ◆ Was there a book you read as a teenager or young adult that changed your life? Have there been other points in your life when a book catalyzed an important internal (or external) reaction?
- ◆ Are there certain books you turn to when you are in need of comfort, advice, hope, or encouragement?
- ◆ From the Latin *scribere* “to write” comes our word **scripture**. What has this word come to mean to you? Would you consider any books you know and love to be “scripture” by your own definition?

5min Check-out -- how was your experience

2 min Closing Words & Chalice Extinguishing

Pablo Neruda, *Ode to the Book (II)*—a compacted excerpt

Book, beautiful book, miniscule forest, leaf after leaf, your paper smells of the elements, you are of morning and nocturnal, vegetal, oceanic, in your ancient pages bear hunters, bonfires near the Mississippi, canoes in the islands, later roads and roads, revelations, insurgent races, Rimbaud like a wounded fish bleeding thumping in the mud,

and the beauty of fellowship, stone by stone the human castle rises, sorrows intertwined with strength, actions of solidarity, clandestine book from pocket to pocket, hidden lamp, red star.

QUOTES

1. How many a man has dated a new era in his life from the reading of a book.
~Henry David Thoreau, *Walden: Reading, 1854*
2. Outside of a dog, a book is man's best friend. Inside of a dog it's too dark to read.
~Groucho Marx (1890 - 1977)
3. A book reads the better which is our own, and has been so long known to us, that we know the topography of its blots, and dog's ears, and can trace the dirt in it to having read it at tea with buttered muffins. ~Charles Lamb, *Last Essays of Elia*, 1833
4. I suggest that the only books that influence us are those for which we are ready, and which have gone a little farther down our particular path than we have yet got ourselves. ~E.M. Forster, *Two Cheers for Democracy*, 1951
5. Books are the compasses and telescopes and sextants and charts which other men have prepared to help us navigate the dangerous seas of human life. ~Jesse Lee Bennett
6. There are books so alive that you're always afraid that while you weren't reading, the book has gone and changed, has shifted like a river; while you went on living, it went on living too, and like a river moved on and moved away. No one has stepped twice into the same river. But did anyone ever step twice into the same book? ~Marina Tsvetaeva
7. Medicine for the soul. ~Inscription over the door of the Library at Thebes
8. "Tell me what you read and I'll tell you who you are" is true enough, but I'd know you better if you told me what you reread. ~François Mauriac
9. If you have never said "Excuse me" to a parking meter or bashed your shins on a fireplug, you are probably wasting too much valuable reading time. ~Sherri Chasin Calvo
10. A house without books is like a room without windows. ~Heinrich Mann
11. A book is a garden, an orchard, a storehouse, a party, a company by the way, a counselor, a multitude of counselors. ~Henry Ward Beecher
12. Having your book turned into a movie is like seeing your oxen turned into bouillon cubes. ~John LeCarre
13. I knew a gentleman who was so good a manager of his time that he would not even lose that small portion of it which the calls of nature obliged him to pass in the necessary-house; but gradually went through all the Latin poets in those moments.
~Lord Chesterfield

14. I find television to be very educating. Every time somebody turns on the set, I go in the other room and read a book. ~Groucho Marx
15. Reading is to the mind what exercise is to the body. It is wholesome and bracing for the mind to have its faculties kept on the stretch. ~Augustus Hare