



# Let's Talk About It Scholar-Facilitator Guidelines

**Thank you for your active support for public humanities in North Carolina!** Please see the following guidelines for Let's Talk About It program scholars.

## **The Program and Its Objectives**

The Let's Talk About it program is a library reading and discussion program where the scholar functions as a critical humanities link between the book and the reader.

The objectives of the program are for participants to have exposure to new ideas and perspectives, and have participants discuss thematically curated film and literature pieces to consider and share life experiences.

## **The role of a scholar is to:**

1. Provide a critical perspective on the materials.
2. Help participants to consider new perspectives and understand a particular theme, culture, history, or experience.
3. Facilitate discussion that creates opportunities for participants to hear a viewpoint other than their own and encourages participants to consider and share experiences from their own life.

## **Program Guidelines**

The instructions provided below are guidelines and expectations for scholars participating in the program. Scholars for this discussion series are selected based on their humanities background, knowledge of the selected reading or film, and experience working with adult audiences. **As this program may be different from others in which the scholars have participated, please review the following:**

- Let's Talk About It is an adult, public program and we encourage participation of a broad cross-section of North Carolina society.
  - Adult audiences bring their own life experiences to the discussion which can be broad and profound. However, participants will vary in their familiarity with literary analysis and could be shy in expressing their interpretations of the text. It is essential that the scholar recognize and encourage the participants' intellectual curiosity and unique contributions.
- Each of the Let's Talk About It series has a theme. Each scholar in the series should relate their assigned text to the overarching theme of the series.
  - The first scholar in the series might need to place more emphasis on the series theme to set the tone for participants as they begin to engage with the readings.
- The session discussion is framed by the scholar's introductory presentation on the text and their discussion questions.

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- The introductory presentation contextualizes the author and text, and addresses the ways in which the text connects to the series theme.
- The discussion points or questions should serve as a starting point for the discussion.
  - It is expected that scholars **send discussion questions or points of discussion to the librarian two to three weeks prior to a session** to help participants think critically about the text as they read it independently.
- The format of this program generally follows that of a reading seminar, with the scholar creating opportunities through discussion for participants to hear new perspectives. The discussion should also create opportunities for participants to consider and share their experiences. **Please note: This is not a lecture program.**
  - **Scholars function as facilitators during the discussion. It is the scholar's responsibility to make sure that all who wish to comment have the opportunity and, that these comments are heard by the entire group.**
- The Council schedules and confirms sessions with all scholars. Please note, that during the scheduling process, the Council will make efforts to minimize travel time for the scholar and cost to the library.
- In the Award Notification packet hosting libraries are instructed to reach out to each scholar to clarify expectations, program format, and logistics.
  - If the Council has confirmed you for a session and you do not hear from the library project director at least 4 weeks in advance of the session please **notify the Council immediately.**
  - The Council requires that libraries create MOUs (memorandum of understanding) with scholars to outline details and contingencies (i.e. inclement weather policy).

### **Facilitating Discussion**

- **Scholar Introduction of the Text**

The program is designed to “talk about” each book and to situate that work within the larger theme of the series.

- ❖ The time allotted for the scholar's introductory presentation is intended to facilitate discussion and critical analysis on the part of the participants, but should only last 30-45 minutes.
- ❖ During this time, the scholar can offer relevant social, political and economic context on the time period and the author, and should provide a general analysis of the book that emphasizes its relation to the series' theme.

As this is a program designed to encourage public participation, scholars should be prepared to address a range of participants. Eager participants may have read reviews and critical articles, while more inexperienced participants may have not completed the reading or lack the context necessary for analysis. If educators are present, they may have experience teaching the text to their students.

When facilitating, the following methods and literary elements can help frame the discussion:

- ❖ Method of narration and the overall structure of the work (plot development if appropriate).

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- ❖ Setting and character analysis may be strengthened by references to particular passages (perhaps read aloud) cited as specific evidence of particular themes or points of view.
- ❖ References to the author's use of irony or humor or any other literary device. Participants should be encouraged to discuss elements such as imagery, symbolism, and thematic development or to expand on other ideas introduced by the scholar in the opening presentation.

- **Developing Series Connections**

The first speaker in a series is responsible for giving the thematic overview of the series.

If, for instance, a group has chosen the series "Not for Children Only," the first scholar should provide a brief summary of children's literature during as it relates to the selected books.

- ❖ The scholar may also make recommendations for additional print or electronic resources.
- ❖ More than any speaker in the series, the first scholar must balance general background information with specific information about the particular book.

Subsequent scholars should highlight the connections between the text for their session and series theme. This provides continuity for the series and allows both participants present for every session, as well as those who may have been absent, to understand the connections between the selected books and series theme.

- **Session Format**

Following the scholar's introductory presentation, there are two basic discussion formats for this program:

- ❖ *Small Group Breakouts* – One design of the program includes small group break-out discussions for about thirty minutes to ensure that all voices can be heard. The small groups then reconvene and share their comments analysis with the whole group. If the group is large (30+), some participants might not offer comments or ask questions. By breaking into smaller groups for part of the discussion participants will have more opportunity (and often greater comfort) to express their opinions on the text.
- ❖ *Whole Group Discussion* - Many libraries, particularly those with a smaller group, prefer to remain together for the discussion. These larger discussions group can sometimes be dominated by one participant with a strong personality. The scholar should be aware of the group's dynamics and intervene to redirect the conversation when needed so that all participants have an opportunity to share and the discussion stays on topic.

Participants may disagree with one another and even with the scholar. These disagreements often stimulate further discussion and can lead to a deeper understandings of the text. If a participant disagrees with the scholar or a particular academic interpretation, the scholar should share the reasons for that particular understanding and the methods of critical analysis.

Disagreement can often be an opportunity for participants to build capacity by using critical thinking skills and put literary analysis into practice. However, if disagreements in the discussion between

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group members become heated or personal the scholar should redirect the group to the text being discussed or engage the assistance of the librarian/project director when appropriate.

- **Potential Program Structures**

- Small Group Breakout Format*

- 7:00 PM Introductory Presentation by scholar

- 7:45 PM Break & Refreshments

- 8:00 PM Discussion Group(s)

- 8:40 PM Wrap-up (different groups report, final questions and responses between scholar and audience)

- 9:00 PM Departure

- Whole Group Discussion Format*

- 6:00 PM Introductory Presentation by scholar

- 6:30 PM Break and Refreshments

- 6:45 PM Group Discussion

- 7:45 PM Departure

### **Program Evaluations**

- **Evaluations**

The North Carolina Humanities Council collects feedback of each session from participants and the local librarian/project director, which assess both the speaker and the evening's program. The council also collects scholar self-evaluations.

All feedback is important to the Council and is utilized both for state and federal reporting as well as when designing new programs. Please note the following for evaluations:

- ❖ Scholars are required to **complete the North Carolina Humanities Council's evaluation form**, which is available online. If you would like the link to your session emailed to you to complete before the series has concluded, please notify the Programs Coordinator.
- ❖ If the scholar has suggestions, comments or concerns regarding the Let's Talk About It program please direct those to the Program Coordinator or provide them on your evaluation form.
- ❖ The North Carolina Humanities Council ***must be informed immediately*** if there are any serious complications, incidents or issues that occur during the series.

### **Additional Resources**

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- ❖ One of the best resources for scholars preparing for a Let's Talk About It session is to connect with the local librarian or site director. This exchange of expectations and information on the group's interests will be critical as scholars prepare for sessions and develop relevant discussion topics. This collaboration also ensures that the themes of a selected series and books are presented to participants in meaningful ways.
- ❖ For new scholars starting out with the program the North Carolina Humanities Council's Program Coordinator can connect veteran Let's Talk About It scholars to new scholars to answer questions and share successful strategies and experiences. It would be advantageous for a scholar to attend a Let's Talk About It program prior to facilitating one to gain a solid foundation before facilitating programs.