



Discussion Group Kit

For Discussion Group Leaders

Five Easy Steps to a Successful Discussion

Step One: Choose a discussion group model

There are several discussion group models for the **Springfield Public Forum: Thinks** program. Which model will work best for you and your group?

Before & After

Before the Springfield Public Forum free lecture, read some or all of the speaker's book or read a short article (included in this kit) related to the speaker's topic. Get together as a group and discuss the topic and the resources (possible discussion topics in this kit).

Attend the Springfield Public Forum free lecture with your group. If you notify Executive Director Patricia Canavan in advance via email at canavan_patricia@yahoo.com, we can reserve seating for you.

After the lecture, reconvene your group and discuss your reactions to the speaker (possible discussion topics in this kit).

Before only

Before the Springfield Public Forum free lecture, read some or all of the speaker's book or read a short article (included in this kit) related to the speaker's topic. Get together as a group and discuss the topic and the readings (possible discussion topics in this kit).

Attend the Springfield Public Forum free lecture with your group.

After only

Attend the Springfield Public Forum free lecture with your group.

After the lecture, reconvene your group and discuss your reactions to the speaker (possible discussion topics in this kit).

Step Two: Choose a Springfield Public Forum lecture to attend

The Springfield Public Forum lectures are free and open to the public. They begin at 7:30 PM. Which of the speakers and topics is your group most interested in hearing? Which one fits best into your schedule?

Sustainable Cities with Henry Cisneros **Thursday, September 22 at 7:30pm**

Executive Chairman of CityView and former Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, Cisneros will discuss the importance of sustainable cities in our national landscape.

In The Plex: How Google Shapes Our Lives with Steven Levy **Tuesday, October 11 at 7:30pm**

Senior writer for *Wired* magazine, Levy spent over two years “embedded” at Google, and will share what he learned from their “creative disorganization.”

Rage and Rebellion across the Islamic World with Robin Wright **Wednesday, November 9 at 7:30pm**

Wright, a foreign affairs analyst, journalist and author, will speak on the political, social and economic transitions in the Middle East.

Cancer: Emperor of All Maladies with Dr. Siddhartha Mukherjee **Tuesday, November 15 at 7:30pm**

Pulitzer Prize winning author, Dr. Mukherjee, will discuss cancer’s medical and societal impact, and treatment options, past, present and future.

JFK and the Presidency: Past and Present with Chris Matthews **Thursday, December 1 at 7:30pm**

Matthews, host of MSNBC’s *Hardball*, will speak about his new book on John F. Kennedy and the way his presidency continues to affect our national and political landscape.

Step Three: Find a discussion group meeting location

Where will you meet? *Springfield Public Forum: Thinks* discussion groups can take place in a home, at the library, at a coffee shop, in a restaurant, in the workplace, or even outside at a park. Decide in advance where you plan to meet so that you can let attendees know in the next step.

Step Four: Invite participants

Whether you're part of an existing book group or hoping to gather friends or colleagues together to discuss ideas for the first time, it helps to give people as much notice as possible about the group. Let them know when and where to meet, what the time expectations are, and why you've chosen to host the group. Here's some sample text:

Dear Friend/Colleague/Neighbor,

I'm so excited to go and hear (name) speaking at the Springfield Public Forum on (date). Have you ever been to the Springfield Public Forum? It's a free lecture series that happens each fall in Symphony Hall. Some of these same speakers go on tour in Boston or New York and tickets cost at least \$50.00, but here in Springfield, it's free.

The Springfield Public Forum put together a kit for people to host discussion groups about each of the topics, and I've decided to host a discussion group about (topic). I'd like to learn more about this topic, and thought you might, too.

Would you like to join me on (date) at (location) from (time) to (time) to talk about the lecture? This is (before or after) the lecture, and I thought whoever is interested in participating could also go as a group to the lecture on (date) at 7:30 P.M.

I hope you'll have the time to participate; your opinions are valued and I think you'd really contribute to the discussion.

Sincerely,

(your name)

Step Five: Convene your group

The following pages offer some tips for hosting a successful discussion group, and there are speaker bios and possible reading lists for each topic. Take what you like and leave the rest. The most important component for a successful discussion group is that people are talking about the topic at hand. So get your group together and start talking.

Tips for leading a book or discussion group

Sit in a circle or around a large table to enable eye contact and set a conversational mood.

Start out by introducing yourself and having each participant do the same. You can ask people just to state their name or to give more information (where they live, where they work, why they're interested in the topic, etc.).

Try to avoid discussions of whether or not people liked the book or the lecture. A strong positive or negative response might intimidate someone who holds the opposite opinion.

Disagreeing is fine. Different viewpoints often spark the most interesting discussions. The discussion leader should, however, not let disagreements become out of hand or personal. The leader might jump in and validate both opposing viewpoints, ask for a comment from someone else, or pose a new question.

Encourage participants to cite specific passages from the reading or lecture

It's okay if some people just want to listen. But if some people dominate the discussion, it's okay to say, "let's hear from some of the people who haven't had a chance to share their views yet."

General questions to spark a discussion:

Did the reading or lecture offer a **central idea or premise**? What are the problems or issues raised? Are they personal, spiritual, societal, global, political, economic, medical, scientific?

Do the issues **affect your life**? How so—directly, on a daily basis, or more generally? Now or sometime in the future?

What **evidence** did the author or speaker give to support his or her ideas? Does he/she use personal observations and assessments? Facts? Statistics? Opinions? Historical documents? Scientific research? Quotations from authorities?

Is the evidence **convincing**? Is it relevant or logical? Does it come from authoritative sources? (Is the author an authority?) Is the evidence speculative...how speculative?

Some speakers or writers make **assertions**, only to walk away from them—without offering explanations. It's maddening. Does the author use such unsupported claims?

What kind of **language** does the author or speaker use? Is it objective and dispassionate? Or passionate and earnest? Is it polemical, inflammatory, sarcastic? Does the language help or undercut the author's premise?

Does the author or speaker make a **call to action** to readers—individually or collectively? Is that call realistic? Idealistic? Achievable? Would readers be able to affect the desired outcome?

Can you point to **specific passages** that struck you personally—as interesting, profound, silly or shallow, incomprehensible, illuminating?

Did you **learn something new** reading the selection or hearing the lecture? Did it broaden your perspective about a difficult personal issue? Or a societal issue? About another culture in another country... or about an ethnic / regional culture in your own country?

Information on each speaker and topic

On the following pages, you will find the following information for each Springfield Public Forum free public lecture:

Speaker biography and photo

A list of resources (books, web sites, videos) related to the topic

Possible pre- and post- lecture discussion questions

Sustainable Cities with Henry Cisneros
Thursday, September 22 at 7:30pm



Housing Innovator and former Secretary of HUD Henry Cisneros is a living testament to American diversity and leadership. His inclusive vision of a strong, resilient society stretches beyond the boundaries of race and class.

Cisneros serves as Executive Chairman of CityView, which focuses on urban real estate, in-city housing and metropolitan infrastructure. Working with municipal leaders and local organizations he is building a broad range of development projects in urban cities across the country. His commitment to urban revitalization has led to the building of 40 communities in 12 states.

In 1981 Cisneros was elected Mayor of San Antonio, becoming the first Hispanic-American ever to run a major American city. For four terms he helped rebuild the city's economy, attracting high-tech industries, increasing tourism and creating tens of thousands of jobs. In 1993 President Clinton appointed him Secretary of HUD.

As president of Univision, he ran the fifth largest TV network in America. He was President of the National League of Cities and Chairman of the National Civic League. Cisneros remains active in non-profit and civic leadership. He is a member of the advisory boards of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the Broad Foundation. He has served as President of the National League of Cities and Deputy Chair of the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas. Cisneros holds Master's and Doctoral degrees from Harvard and George Washington Universities

In 2006, Cisneros was named one of the 50 most influential people in the real estate industry. In 2007, he was inducted into the National Association of Homebuilders "Builders Hall of Fame" and honored by the National Housing Conference as the "Housing Person of the Year."

Cisneros has written several books: *Interwoven Destinies: Cities and The Nation* and *Our Communities, Our Homes: Pathways to Housing and Homeownership in America's Cities and States*. His book with former HUD Secretary Jack Kemp, *Opportunity and Progress: A Bipartisan Platform for National Housing Policy*, was presented the Common Purpose Award for demonstrating the potential of bipartisan cooperation. His most recent book, *Latinos and the Nation's Future*, explores the demographic growth of the Hispanic population and its impact on American life.

He has appeared on such programs as *CNBC's Fast Money* and *Fox Business Network* and has been profiled in major publications, including *The New York Times*.

Resources related to Henry Cisneros' talk on Sustainable Cities:

Despair to Hope: Hope VI and the Transformation of America's Public Housing (a book by Henry Cisneros and Lora Engdahl, 2009: Brookings Institution Press)

"In *From Despair to Hope*, Henry Cisneros and Lora Engdahl collaborate with public and private sector leaders who were on the scene in the early 1990s when the intolerable conditions in the nation's worst public housing projects —and their devastating impact on inhabitants, neighborhoods, and cities —called for drastic action. These eyewitnesses from the policymaking, housing development, and architecture fields reveal how a program conceived to address one specific problem revolutionized the entire public housing system and solidified a set of principles that guide urban policy today."

Comeback Cities: A Blueprint for Urban Renewal (a book by Paul Grogan, 2001: Basics Books)

"The authors highlight four trends that explain the urban upswing affecting not just the South Bronx, but American cities in general: the growth of neighborhood nonprofit groups; the creation of new markets, including the willingness of retailers to move into old areas; falling crime rates; and "the unshackling of inner-city life from the giant bureaucracies that once dictated everything that happened there--in particular, the welfare system, public housing authorities, and public schools."

Urban Land Institute Report on Springfield's Urban Renewal:

http://www.springfield-ma.gov/planning/urban_land.0.html

The Federal Reserve Bank's information on Springfield:

<http://www.bos.frb.org/commdev/springfield>

PBS urban renewal content:

<http://www.pbs.org/kqed/fillmore/classroom/renewal.html>

<http://video.pbs.org/video/1954582692#>

<http://video.pbs.org/video/1367286357>

YouTube videos on Urban Renewal

Insights into a Lively Downtown (Ann Arbor):

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VsrgBHEOT0>

Jane Jacobs overview: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZXeEMD6U0NY>



Discussion questions on Sustainable Cities

Before the lecture:

- How do you define “sustainable” when talking about a city?
- Have you ever been to a sustainable city?
- What aspects of Springfield are strongly “sustainable”?

After the lecture

- What does “sustainable” mean when referring to a city?
- Did your idea of what a sustainable city is change after hearing the lecture?
- Did anything in Cisneros’ lecture surprise you?

Did you leave feeling hopeful or depressed about Springfield’s future?

- Did anything you heard in the talk make you want to take action to improve Springfield?

In The Plex: How Google Shapes Our Lives with Steven Levy

Tuesday, October 11 at 7:30pm



Steven Levy is a senior writer for *Wired* magazine. Previously, he was chief technology writer and a senior editor for *Newsweek*. Considered one of the pioneers of technology journalism, Levy has had articles published in *Harper's*, *Macworld*, *The New York Times Magazine*, *The New Yorker*, *Premiere*, and *Rolling Stone*. He is also the author of several books, including *In The Plex: How Google Thinks, Works, and Shapes Our Lives* (2011), *The Perfect Thing: How the iPod Shuffles Commerce, Culture, and Coolness* (2006) and *Insanely Great: The Life and Times of Macintosh, the Computer That Changed Everything* (1994).

Levy has won several journalism awards, including the "Computer Press Association Award" for a report he co-wrote in 1998 on the Year 2000 problem.

Levy received his bachelor's degree from Temple University and earned a Master's degree in literature from Pennsylvania State University. He lives in New York City with his wife, Pulitzer Prize winner Teresa Carpenter, and son.

Resources related to Stephen Levy's talk on Google:

In the Plex: How Google thinks, works and shapes our lives (a book by Stephen Levy, 2011, Simon & Schuster)

"Levy is America's premier technology journalist. . . . He has produced the most interesting book ever written about Google. He makes the biggest intellectual challenges of computer science seem endlessly fun and fascinating. . . . We can expect many more books about Google. But few will deliver the lively, idea-based journalism of *In the Plex*."

—Siva Vaidhyanathan, *The Washington Post*

The Google Way: How one company is revolutionizing management as we know it (a book by Bernard Girard, 2009, No Starch Press)

YouTube Videos

Stephen Levy interviewed on BookTV (about this book):

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nm0Cqv4cI3s>

How Google Works (as a search tool):

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RLyKLo6StLg>

Discussion questions on Google

Before the lecture

- How do you feel about Google capturing your personal information when you search the web?
- How do you define privacy? Is it different on the Internet?
- What do you think has made Google so successful?

After the lecture

- Did anything about the Google model surprise you?
- Could you see ways to apply the Google management model to your workplace?
- Will you do anything differently when using the internet after hearing this talk?

Rage and Rebellion across the Islamic World with Robin Wright
Wednesday, November 9 at 7:30pm



Robin Wright is a foreign affairs analyst, journalist and author who has worked in more than 140 countries on six continents during her career. Her reporting has been featured in *The Washington Post*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *The Sunday Times of London*, *CBS News* and *The Christian Science Monitor*. Wright has also written for *The New Yorker*, *The Atlantic Monthly*, *Foreign Affairs*, *Foreign Policy*, *The New York Times*, *The International Herald Tribune* and others.

Robin Wright's foreign tours include the Middle East, Europe, Africa, and several years as a roving foreign correspondent. She has covered a dozen wars and several revolutions. She most recently covered U.S. foreign policy for *The Washington Post*.

Among several awards, Wright received the U.N. Correspondents Gold Medal, the National Magazine Award for reportage from Iran in *The New Yorker*, and the Overseas Press Club Award for "best reporting in any medium requiring exceptional courage and initiative" for coverage of African wars. Robin Wright was named journalist of the year by the American Academy of Diplomacy, and won the National Press Club Award and the Weintal Prize for diplomatic reporting. Wright has also been the recipient of a John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation grant.

Wright has been a fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, the Brookings Institution, Yale University, Duke University, Stanford University, and the University of California at Santa Barbara. She lectures extensively around the United States and has appeared on ABC, NBC, CBS, CNN and PBS programs, including "Meet the Press," "Face the Nation," "This Week," "Nightline," the "Newshour," "Frontline," and "Larry King Live."

Among her books, *The Last Great Revolution: Turmoil and Transformation in Iran* was selected as one of the 25 most memorable books of the year 2000. Robin Wright is also the author of *Sacred Rage: The Wrath of Militant Islam*, *Flashpoints: Promise and Peril in a New World*, and *In the Name of God: The Khomeini Decade*. Her most recent book is *Rock the Casbah: Rage and Rebellion Across the Islamic World*.

Resources related to Robin Wright's talk on Rage and Rebellion across the Islamic World:

Rock the Casbah: Rage and Rebellion Across the Islamic World (a book by Robin Wright, 2011, Simon & Schuster)

"[Wright] provides invaluable context for what she rightly terms 'the epic convulsion across the Islamic world' by listening to voices we don't usually hear....Anyone seeking deeper understanding of the Arab Spring needs to read Wright's formidably well-informed bookWright's richly textured portrait of ancient cultures in the throes of wrenching but liberating transformation makes it quite clear that Muslims themselves will decide their future." — *Los Angeles Times*

Blog by Robin Wright on foreign affairs, with links to websites and articles:
<http://robinwrightblog.blogspot.com/>

Guardian newspaper's **timeline on the Arab Spring**
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/interactive/2011/mar/22/middle-east-protest-interactive-timeline>

Audio interview with Peter Bergen, CNN's National Security analyst, by Terri Gross on Fresh Air about **How Bin Laden's Death Has Affected al Qaida** (August 2011):

<http://www.npr.org/player/v2/mediaPlayer.html?action=1&t=1&islist=false&id=138783681&m=138920277>

BBC World News Video

On protests in Egypt:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/search/news/?q=egyptian%20protests%20video>

On events in Syria:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/search/news/?q=syria%20videos>

Discussion questions on the Islamic World

Before the lecture

- How do you define “the Middle East” – what countries are part of it, and what are the people like, what languages do they speak, what religions do they practice?
- What do you think were the main factors that contributed to the protests and uprisings in Egypt, Syria, Bahrain, Jordan, Libya, and Tunisia (and others)?
- Do you think the so-called “Arab Spring of 2011” is done or will there be more protests?

After the lecture

- Were you surprised to learn the percentage of Arabs that make up the Muslim world?
- What do you think will happen next (politically) in the countries that Robin Wright touched on in her talk?
- Do you think that Shariah Law can work as the ruling system of a large country?

Cancer: Emperor of All Maladies with Dr. Siddhartha Mukherjee
Tuesday, November 15 at 7:30pm



Siddhartha Mukherjee is an Indian-born American doctor and non-fiction writer. He is the author of the 2010 book, *The Emperor of All Maladies: A Biography of Cancer* which won the Pulitzer Prize for General Nonfiction. Currently he is an Assistant Professor of Medicine at Columbia University in New York City. Dr. Mukherjee also serves as a staff oncologist at Columbia University Medical Center.

Dr. Mukherjee is a graduate of Stanford University and Oxford University, where he received a Ph.D. in immunology while a Rhodes Scholar. After graduation, he attended Harvard Medical School to train as an internist. He subsequently won an oncology fellowship at Massachusetts General Hospital.

The Emperor of All Maladies: A Biography of Cancer details the evolution of diagnosis and treatment of human cancers from ancient Egypt to the latest developments in chemotherapy and targeted therapy. In addition to the Pulitzer, the book has received numerous awards, including recognition by *Oprah Magazine*, *the New York Times* and *Time Magazine* as one of the "Top 10 Books of 2010". It was also nominated as a National Book Critics Circle Award finalist.

Dr. Mukherjee lives in New York with his wife, artist Sarah Sze, and their two daughters.

Resources related to Dr. Siddhartha Mukherjee's talk on Cancer

The Emperor of all Maladies: A biography of cancer (a book by Dr. Siddhartha Mukherjee, 2010, Scribner)

"In 2010, about six hundred thousand Americans, and more than 7 million humans around the world, will die of cancer." With this sobering statistic, physician and researcher Siddhartha Mukherjee begins his comprehensive and eloquent "biography" of one of the most virulent diseases of our time. An exhaustive account of cancer's origins, *The Emperor of All Maladies* illustrates how modern treatments—multi-pronged chemotherapy, radiation, and surgery, as well as preventative care—came into existence thanks to a century's worth of research, trials, and small, essential breakthroughs around the globe.. --*Lynette Mong*

American Cancer Society's web site: <http://www.cancer.org/>

Livestrong Foundation support for people affected by cancer:
<http://www.livestrong.org/>

YouTube Videos

What is Cancer? By BioDigital (animation):
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LEpTTolebqo>

Khan Academy lecture with Mimio slides about cancer and DNA:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RZhL7LDPk8w>

Discussion questions about cancer

Before the lecture

- What is cancer anyway?
- Do you believe there are natural or alternative ways to cure or treat cancer?
- Do you consciously make lifestyle choices out of a fear of contracting cancer?

After the lecture

- Did anything surprise you about this talk?
- Will you make any different choices about exercise, diet, or environmental factors after hearing Dr. Mukherjee talk?

JFK and the Presidency: Past and Present with Chris Matthews

Thursday, December 1 at 7:30pm



A television news anchor with significant depth of experience, Matthews has distinguished himself as a broadcast journalist, newspaper bureau chief, presidential speechwriter, and bestselling author. Matthews covered the fall of the Berlin Wall, the first all-races election in South Africa, the Good Friday Peace Accord in Northern Ireland, and the funeral of Pope John Paul II. He has covered every American presidential election campaign since the 1980s.

Prior to his broadcasting career, Matthews worked for fifteen years as a newspaper journalist, thirteen of them as a Washington bureau chief for the *San Francisco Examiner* and two as a national columnist for the *San Francisco Chronicle*. Before that, he had a fifteen year career in public service, in various positions in the U.S. Congress and the White House. Matthews is also the author of six books, including *American: Beyond Our Grandest Notions* (2002), *Life's a Campaign* (2007) and the soon to be published book on John F. Kennedy.

Matthews has received the David Brinkley Award for Excellence in Broadcast Journalism and the Gold Medal Award from the Pennsylvania Society. He was a visiting fellow at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy Institute of Politics and holds twenty-four honorary degrees.

A graduate of Holy Cross, Mr. Matthews did graduate work in economics at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Matthews served for two years with the U.S. Peace Corps as a trade development advisor in Swaziland, Africa.

Resources related to Chris Matthews' talk on JFK and the Presidency

Jack Kennedy, Elusive Hero (a book by Chris Matthews, 2011)

On-line biography of John F. Kennedy <http://www.biography.com/articles/John-Fitzgerald-Kennedy-9362930>

Documentary on the Kennedy family:
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/kennedys/>

2012 Presidential Candidates and Election articles and links:
<http://2012.presidential-candidates.org/>
<http://www.politico.com/2012-election/>
<http://www.usnews.com/topics/subjects/2012-presidential-election>

PBS Teacher and Parent Resources

<http://www.pbs.org/teachers/connect/resources/7047/preview/> (Kennedy family's life and times, articles, primary sources and activities)
<http://www.pbs.org/teachers/connect/resources/7047/preview/> (the Kennedys and civics, a consideration of JFK's call to action)
<http://www.pbs.org/teachers/connect/resources/6928/preview/> (Activities regarding the presidency)
<http://www.pbs.org/teachers/connect/resources/1628/preview/> (President for a Day activities)
<http://www.pbs.org/teachers/connect/resources/6844/preview/> (Presidential Campaigns)

Discussion questions on JFK and the Presidency

Before the lecture

- Is JFK still relevant?
- Why is there so much interest in JFK nearly 50 years after his presidency?
- Do presidential candidates have to choose a past president as a model for their candidacy/presidency?

After the lecture

- Did you learn anything new about JFK in this talk?
- Have you already decided on whom you will vote for in the 2012 election?
- Do you think one person's presidential vote matters?