

5 Easy Steps for Leading Book Discussions

Excerpted from Reading Group Choices
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1 Acknowledge your role as “facilitator”—not expert.

If it's your turn to lead the discussion, know that you are not expected to be an authority or expert on the chosen book. Your primary tasks are to open the discussion, keep it going, maintain a lively dialogue, and end the discussion on time. A great book discussion is the result of the thoughts and perceptions of a variety of different people.

2 Note your own response as you read.

Make notes as you read the book, highlighting or marking passages. What are your reactions, questions or insights? Add the personal touch to your discussion. Share your thoughts during your discussion and invite others to comment.

3 Lay some ground rules.

After you've introduced yourself to the group, remind members of the ways they can contribute to the discussion:

- Avoid “crosstalk” or talking over others.
- Be respectful. Keep an open mind.
- Try not to repeat what others have said. Speak up with something new or add to the previous comment.
- Acknowledge that there is no right or wrong, just differences of opinion.
- Be open to learn from others.
- If you are outgoing, be careful to allow space for others to share their thoughts.

4 Call the question.

If you feel the group has begun to repeat itself, acknowledge your observation, ask for agreement if necessary, and pose a new topic.

5 Balance the discussion.

Invite quiet members to share their thoughts. Watch for introverts who have something to say but are having a hard time getting in a word.

Praise for *Planetary Citizenship*

“This extraordinary dialogue moves seamlessly between the personal and the profound, constantly weaving in years of practice, experience and insight. I not only learned a great deal in the presence of these two great wisdom teachers; I also grew clear about what it means to lead a life of dedication and devotion.”

—Margaret J. Wheatley, author of
Leadership and the New Science and
Turning to One Another, Utah

“These conversations are the language of life — a language of hope, a language that illumines the possibility of human existence compatible with the needs of our descendants. Reading this dialogue is like being guided along a path through greed and misconceptions to a decent and sustainable world.”

—Robert A. G. Monks, author of
The New Global Investors, Maine

Host a Reading Group

Reading group discussions—in your home, at a bookstore or in a library—are great opportunities to learn something new, see things in a new way, examine deeply held beliefs or simply enjoy the company of other book lovers. Middleway Press is happy to provide this discussion guide, which gives you everything you need to host a successful meeting: a descriptive summary, topics to consider, endorsements and hosting tips.

For more copies of this guide, or guides for other great Middleway Press books, contact us at:

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DISCUSSION GUIDE

Planetary Citizenship



Your Values, Beliefs, and Actions
Can Shape a Sustainable World

HAZEL HENDERSON
AND DAISAKU IKEDA

Planetary Citizenship
Your Values, Beliefs and Actions
Can Shape a Sustainable World

By Hazel Henderson
and Daisaku Ikeda



About the Book

Reading or watching the news can be terribly disheartening, even downright depressing. Conflict and violence have escalated at the dawn of a new millennium, a time many thought would bring about a brighter era. The earth's resources continue to be depleted at an alarming rate; many no longer feel that we've sufficiently conquered the threat of nuclear destruction. If you've felt the need for some hope and encouragement — for some guidance on how to make a difference in a world that seems to be out of control — *Planetary Citizenship* fits the bill.

Hazel Henderson and Daisaku Ikeda combine head and heart to expose the foundation of some of the world's greatest dilemmas and provide a path away from endless consumption, violence and disregard for the earth to ways we can shape a sustainable world. The good news is that history has shown revolutionary change not only to be an outcome of the efforts of those in power but also to have risen from ordinary people who question, explore and press for change — one step at a time.

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About the Authors

HAZEL HENDERSON began her career as an activist while she lived with her husband and small daughter in New York City. After spending time at the playground, Henderson would have to scrub soot from her daughter, then rallied other mothers to voice concerns about the city's pollution. Through decades of reading, research, discussions with great thinkers and questioning the status quo, Henderson has devoted herself to lifelong learning and civic action. She is an active advisor to governmental and institutional organizations in more than thirty nations on environmental, economic and quality of life matters; her articles are published in more than four hundred newspapers worldwide. Her latest television project is *Ethical Marketplace*, a financial program covering those who support sustainable economies.

DAISAKU IKEDA has traveled to more than fifty countries meeting and holding dialogues with people, sharing what he has learned with the United Nations, and working to make a difference through Soka Gakkai International, one of the most dynamic international Buddhist movements in the world today. Mr. Ikeda is the founder of numerous cultural and educational institutes throughout the world. He has written scores of books that have been translated into several languages and has worked tirelessly for international cultural exchange and the establishment of world peace.

TOPICS TO CONSIDER

- 1 The book is written in dialogue format. How would your experience of reading the book be different if the concepts were instead presented in typical narrative manner?
- 2 How do Henderson and Ikeda model the process of dialogue? How does their dialogue differ from what we usually hear and see on radio and television programs?
- 3 Discuss the childhood experiences of Henderson and Ikeda (chapter 1). How was their concern for the world inspired by others? Who in your life has encouraged you to look beyond your own needs?
- 4 Ikeda remembers, "Mr. Gorbachev insists that we of the war-children generation must expose the folly, inhumanity and irrationality of war" (p. 11). What is your view of the escalating acts of hostility and violence the world now faces? Are they steps backward or opportunities for enlightenment? Discuss the range of possible outcomes from times of intense conflict.
- 5 Henderson exclaims, "find difficulties exciting" (p. 41). Have you shared this experience at any point in your life? Is it necessary to experience success over adversity on a personal level before being able to see it as a possibility for the world? Are there any current global difficulties you consider to be "exciting"?
- 6 Discuss how the use of professionals, so-called experts and even not-for-profit institutes by politicians and the media has changed over the years. What qualified, neutral and credible sources of research and advice have you discovered to be trustworthy in today's world?
- 7 What advice would you give a young person on what kind of education is worth pursuing for achieving a good living and a good life?
- 8 Henderson suggests perpetuating René DuBos's slogan, "Think globally, act locally." She states, "With an awareness of yourself as a world citizen and of the responsibility this entails, you do the best you can in your local area to stimulate action to cope with those problems" (p. 68). What are the top three issues in your community right now? What is needed to make real progress with each? Are there people actively working in these areas or is this an opportunity that needs a local "Planetary Citizen"?
- 9 Discuss your reaction to Henderson's assertion that Gross National Product (GNP) is an inadequate measure and should be replaced with Quality of Life Indicators (pp. 83–84).
- 10 If a worldwide poll was taken of ordinary people, how many do you believe would agree with Henderson that "the real 'axis of evil' we must overcome consists of poverty, ignorance, disease and violence" (p. 84)? Can you envision a tipping point that would help us make progress?
- 11 Ikeda suggests that the problem of depleting the world's resources cannot be solved unless "we overcome the modern social tendency to waste resources and waste our lives" (p. 86). Have you recently seen any encouraging signs from individuals and corporations?
- 12 Both Ikeda and Henderson support efforts to strengthen the United Nations. Henderson suggests that, "Because development of technologies for profit is out of control, we need more laws on an international UN level, like the convention on human rights. And we need them now" (p. 112). Can international laws change societies? How?
- 13 The Earth Charter states, "Fundamental changes are needed in our values, institutions, and ways of living. We must realize that when basic needs have been met, human development is primarily about *being* more, not *having* more" (p. 122). What evidence is there to support the idea that this shift is taking place?
- 14 Do you agree with Mr. Ikeda and Count Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi that "When women account for half the membership of every council and every government on earth, we will have laid the strong foundation stone for global peace" (p. 141)? What are the obstacles to giving women basic human rights in some areas of the world? What might be the most effective path for influencing this change?
- 15 What were the points you found most valuable to you personally in the book? How would you describe what it means to be a "Planetary Citizen" to someone who has not yet read the book?