

# 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 *Soka Education*

“Daisaku Ikeda restores heart to education. Envisioning education as a value-creative, peace-promoting process strongly rooted in profound philosophical heritage, Ikeda's practical prescription places students' needs first, empowers teachers, and serves as a framework for global citizenship.”

—George David Miller,  
Professor, Lewis University  
Author of *Value, Peace, and Wisdom:  
The Educational Philosophy of Daisaku Ikeda*

“In this collection of his essays, Daisaku Ikeda once again demonstrates his commitment to the type of educational practice that honors innovation, discovery, and the creation of value. He demonstrates by example how the seeds of holistic and humanistic education can be nurtured, and how the flowers of peace, culture, and global citizenship can be cultivated.”

—Larry A. Hickman, Director,  
Center for Dewey Studies

## 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 to 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:

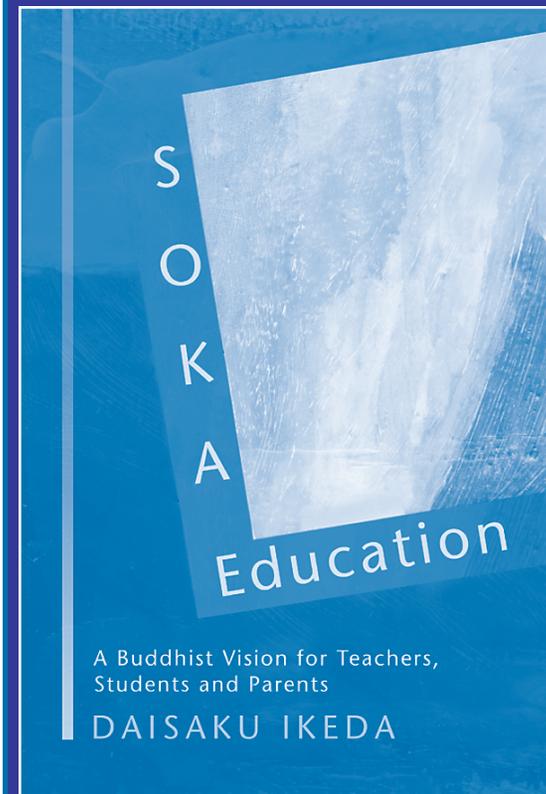
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## DISCUSSION GUIDE



## *Soka Education: A Buddhist Vision for Teachers, Students and Parents*

By Daisaku Ikeda



## About the Book

“What our world most requires now is the kind of education that fosters love for humankind, that develops character—that provides an intellectual basis for the realization of peace and empowers learners to contribute to and improve society,” writes Daisaku Ikeda, respected educator, prolific author and international Buddhist leader.

Soka education strives to do just that. Soka is a Japanese word that means “to create value,” or to develop within oneself the capacity to find meaning, to enhance one’s own existence and contribute to the well-being of others, under all circumstances.

In *Soka Education: A Buddhist Vision for Teachers, Students and Parents*, readers will learn about Mr. Ikeda’s thoughts on topics such as the role of education in creating a peaceful world, the meaning of a “creative life,” the crucial role of the teacher, and the responsibility of the student for creating values. Teachers, students, and parents will gain a fresh spiritual perspective from which to view the ultimate purpose of education itself.

**Middleway Press, 2001**  
**ISBN 0-9674697-4-0 (hardcover)**  
**\$25.95 USA/\$38.95 CAN, 224 pp.**

## About the Author

Daisaku Ikeda is president of the Soka Gakkai International (SGI), one of the most important international Buddhist communities in the world today. With 12 million members in 181 countries, the SGI reaches out to the broader community and promotes education, international cultural exchange and commitment to global peace.

Education has long been Mr. Ikeda’s focus. In 1968, he found the first of many nonsectarian schools—kindergartens, elementary, middle and high schools as well as



Soka University in Japan—based on the mission to nurture the lifelong happiness of the learner. In May 2001, Soka University of America, a four-year liberal arts college, opened its doors in Aliso Viejo, California.

A peace activist, Mr. Ikeda has traveled to more than 50 countries meeting and holding dialogues with people, including political and intellectual leaders, applying his

strong belief that international understanding and the realization of peace begins with people-to-people contacts. Among the hundreds of honors and commendations given him around the world, he received the United Nations Peace Award in 1983.

## TOPICS TO CONSIDER

- 1 Tsunesaburo Makiguchi asserted that the “student’s realization of happiness” (p. xi) is the fundamental purpose of education. Discuss the meaning of happiness in the Soka education sense. What seems to be the fundamental purpose of Western education?
- 2 At the beginning of the 20th century, Makiguchi sought to promote a three-layered scheme of identity or citizenship: a sense of belonging and commitment to the community, to the nation, and to the world. What are the indicators of community? Discuss how an individual’s well-being in a community affects nations and ultimately, the world.
- 3 In the essay “Reviving Education” Ikeda posits that “children are the microcosm of the times...they mirror the future of society” (p. 36). What are our children telling us through their behavior? How do adult attitudes of cynicism and indifference influence the escalation of bullying and violence in our communities?
- 4 Ikeda presents his ideas of “soft power” and inner-directed processes (p. 43). How does this differ from the Western idea of power? Is it possible to influence Western culture with a more Buddhist approach? Who would champion this approach? Who would likely fight against it?
- 5 Ikeda believes that great works of literature are the “quintessential representation of the inner self” (p. 43). Discuss how a work of literature sharpened your sense of empathetic connection. Did a teacher play a role in your understanding of the book?
- 6 In his discussion of virtual reality, Ikeda takes the position that electronic games and computer devices tend to atrophy inner-motivated spirituality (p. 53). Have you seen any indication of this? Is there a way to know how computer devices affect brain function and spirituality?
- 7 Paradigm shifts from agrarian to industrialized society and now to the information age have caused upheavals in spiritual, educational, and vocational arenas. On p. 72, Ikeda asks, “If all that the new invention of IT brings to human society is a tendency toward materialism, then what use is this revolution?” What does the advent of information technology bring to us? How do we help our children counteract the barrage of information (and advertising accompanying it) and develop a humanitarian and nature-centered view of life?
- 8 Ikeda believes that the empowerment of teachers must be a component of change in education, stating that “Teachers need mutual inspiration and motivation, encouragement and solidarity” (p. 83). Are teachers isolated from one another? How are they to reconcile the pressure to “teach for the test” with a creative urge to develop their students on every level?
- 9 Soka education stresses an organic and interdisciplinary approach to education. How does this approach foster an understanding of the interrelatedness of everything in life? Does the Western compartmentalization of subjects necessarily prevent this understanding?
- 10 There are three essential elements of global citizenship (p. 100): Wisdom to perceive the interconnectedness of all life, the courage not to fear or deny cultural differences, and compassion to maintain imaginative empathy. Is it possible to build this foundation for students in a society that operates on “an eye for an eye” approach to global events?
- 11 The United States is a mobile society. How do we nurture the local community as a “place where global citizens are fostered” (p. 104) when families move so often? What do children really observe about us in our community relationships?
- 12 Makiguchi lost his life for his unwavering convictions focusing on “righteous anger” and “active tolerance.” He focused on individual rights over government sovereignty, as did Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. How does one balance patriotism against striving for the greater good of peace?
- 13 Ikeda discusses the danger of politics taking the lead in educational reforms (p. 124). Since the federal government funds education, how do local school districts best serve their unique populations? Ikeda also advocates the establishment of education as the fourth arm of government (p. 125). How do you envision that fourth branch? How could it operate independent of politics?
- 14 “To be human in the full sense of the word is to lead a creative life” (p. 174). How can we foster teachers’ inner growth and help them to sustain their careers? Would that in turn contribute to students’ happiness? What other influences complicate this scenario?