



Book Discussion Guide & Classroom Activities

How to Read a Book: The Classic Guide to Intelligent Reading

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The primary goal of *How to Read a Book* is to instruct readers on how to read for information and understanding. The authors assert that learning is the process of understanding more (not remembering more); we read to understand more and to be enlightened. When reading, we engage in discovery, which is learning something by research, investigation, or reflection, without direct instruction. A teacher can supply direct answers to direct questions, but if you ask a book a question, you must answer it by your own effort.

The authors believe that unlimited educational opportunity is the most valuable service that a democratic society can provide, and that we must be not merely a society of functional literates but one of truly competent readers. This means understanding a written work's arguments, the terms on which they are made, and whether they are true in whole or part. These principles also apply when engaging in dialogue with another person or group of people—you cannot come to a mutual understanding in dialogue without these principles.

This guide includes discussion questions, which focus on how to read a book, and two sets of activities—one for *How to Read a Book* and one for engaging in dialogue based on the principles of *How to Read a Book*—to practice applying these principles when reading and when dialoguing.

How to Read a Book was initially published in 1940 and updated in 1972, but the book is not dated. The principles still apply in the age of the internet and are perhaps more imperative now that children and adults receive information from an even wider variety of print and digital sources.

Aim and Objectives

The aim of this reading guide and the corresponding activities for reading is the same as the aim of *How to Read a Book*—to enhance students' ability to read for understanding. The dialogue activities further this aim by translating the principles set forth by Adler and Van Doren to discussion and deliberation.

The discussion guide and activities are written for high school juniors and seniors but can be modified for middle school, lower-level high school, and college students.

The learning outcomes for the book discussion, book activities, and dialogue activities are the same. To meet these objectives, every student should have their own copy of the book. Students should be able to:

1. Describe key words and terms the author/speaker uses and their definitions.
2. Identify the problems the author/speaker aims to solve.
3. Identify the key arguments the author/speaker is making.
4. Make critical judgements about the arguments of the author/speaker to agree or disagree with them.