



Book Discussion: Your Voice is Your Superpower

A Beginner's Guide to Freedom of Speech (and the First Amendment)

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Teaching young children about their freedom of speech is crucial to develop their appreciation for diverse viewpoints and their ability to engage in open inquiry. Introducing children to these concepts early in their education and allowing them to practice sharing their opinions, as well as listening to the opinions of others, will prepare them for civil discourse inside and outside of the classroom and civic participation as adults.

Aim and Objectives

The aim of this book discussion is to introduce young children to the concepts of freedom of speech and viewpoint diversity.

- The guidelines are most suitable for ages 6 – 9, but the guide should be adjusted based on literacy level.
- The ideal desk arrangement for the book discussion is a U-shape or circle.
- You can complete the discussion in one day or across multiple days.

By completing this book discussion, students will be able to:

- Define and understand key words and terms relevant to the concepts of free speech and viewpoint diversity
- Discuss concepts related to free speech and viewpoint diversity.
- Relate the concepts of free speech and viewpoint diversity to their own experiences.

Discussion Guidelines

Read the book and search for key words and terms

1. Read the book "Your Voice is Your Superpower! A Beginner's Guide to Freedom of Speech (and the First Amendment)" to your class. Read it all the way through without stopping.
2. Read the book all the way through a second time. This time, as you read, stop and pull out key words and terms. Write the words and terms somewhere visible to all students.

Ask students to tell you words that stood out to them (words they either think are important to the story or words new to them), and write words and terms you think are important for students to understand, such as:

- a. Superpower
- b. Power
- c. Freedom
- d. Speech
- e. Free speech
- f. Voice
- g. Debate
- h. Protest

Come to terms with the author: Define words and terms

3. After you finish reading the book a second time through, as a whole class, ask students to tell you how they define the words and terms. Write the definitions they provide somewhere visible to all students.

4. Then, ask the students to tell you how the authors define each word and term (go back through the book to find the words and terms if you need to refresh their memory). Write the definitions somewhere visible to all students. Then, ask the students to verbally compare the definitions—this can be done in pairs or as a whole class.

5. To come to terms with the authors, the students and the authors need to have a shared understanding of what the words and terms mean. If the students have a different understanding of the word than the author, facilitate an understanding of what the authors mean when they use the words.

6. To check for understanding, have students draw a picture to illustrate the definition of the words. Provide students with a blank sheet of paper and colored pencils, crayons, or markers. Either assign one word to each student (each word will likely be assigned to more than one student) or assign a word to pairs or a small group of students. Give them 5 minutes to complete this task. After they finish, call out each word and have the students who drew that word share what they drew with the class. Then, ask the class: “Do you agree with the illustration?” “What would you add/remove?”

Socratic seminar: Discussion questions to foster understanding

7. Pose discussion questions to the whole class. The goal of the seminar (or book discussion) is to understand the arguments that the authors make.

Starter questions include:

- a. Why did the authors write this book?
- b. What do the authors want you to know?
- c. What do the authors think you should do?

Follow-up questions:

- d. How can your voice be a superpower?
- e. What does it mean to be free to speak?

The authors provide these examples to describe free speech. You can discuss what each statement means (some overlap):

- f. Free to be quiet/Free to blend in/Free to sit out
- g. Free to speak up/Free to be loud/Free to join the group
- h. Free to say what matters to you
- i. Free to listen or raise your hand (elaborate on this – one person speaking means others listen)
- j. Free to talk and debate
- k. Free to read and write your name on letters
- l. Free to protest
- m. Free to be yourself

8. Have students draw a picture of themselves using their voice as a superpower. They can use the opposite side of the piece of paper you provided for the definition activity or a new piece of paper. Give them 5 minutes to complete this task. Once they are finished, have the students share their picture with a partner or in a small group. Prompt: "Show your partner/small group your picture, then tell them how you are using your voice."

9. Reconvene the whole group. Write these quotes from the book somewhere visible to all students, then read them aloud one by one and ask students to tell you what they mean:

"Freedom belongs to all – even when what we hear sounds icky."

"It might be hard to listen, when we disagree."

"But that's what makes it possible for ALL speech to be free."

10. After discussing the quotes, pose this question:

- a. What if you disagree with what someone else says? What should you do?

Emphasize:

- Active listening.
- Asking questions to understand what the other person means.
- Asking questions to understand the other person's unique experiences and voice. (Author states: "Every voice is different. That makes us unique.")

Extension Activity

Follow-up activity: Adapt the classroom activity "[Have Students Interview Someone They Disagree With.](#)" This activity was designed for high school students but can be adapted for early elementary.

This activity will introduce students to how to constructively disagree, which, continually practiced, will prepare students to understand new perspectives and actively listen to the perspectives of people with opposing views.

To adapt the activity, instead of having students discuss a societal issue with weighty consequences, have them pair up with a classmate to discuss an issue related to the school or classroom. For example, pair two students with different views about whether schools should have more art, music, or language classes, whether school uniforms should be required, or whether classrooms should have class pets. Like with the activity for high schoolers, have students choose an issue with consequences for the school or classroom, not just themselves.

Instead of having students write out their response to the activity reflection and assessment questions, have them discuss their experience as a whole class.

Source: This book discussion was developed from the book, "[Your Voice is Your Superpower! A Beginner's Guide to Freedom of Speech \(and the First Amendment\)](#)," written by Jessica Bohrer and Sandy Bohrer.