



SAMPLE FOR EDUCATIONAL REVIEW

# MAPPING THE FUTURE

by

Howard Zeiderman

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**TOUCHSTONES**  
DISCUSSION PROJECT

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522 Chesapeake Avenue

Annapolis, Maryland 21403

800-456-6542

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# Introduction

The Touchstones Discussion Project enables participants to become more self-aware, reflective, and responsible world citizens. Rapid advances in technology and the increased interdependence of nations and problems have placed current forms of organization—from national governments to local neighborhoods—under enormous strain. Both as individuals and as members of communities, we are faced with a choice: we can either let circumstances impose new structures upon us, or we can seize the initiative and help create new structures. To undertake the latter responsibly on either the personal or communal level, however, we need more than a new plan of action, strong leadership, or even the genuine desire to enact proactive change. Seizing the initiative for positive change requires in each individual self-knowledge and reflection on the deepest and most fundamental assumptions of our world. Before we can change, we must first know who we are. The Touchstones Discussion Project allows us to experience the transformation that occurs when individuals learn to learn together, explore their world together, and collectively map strategies and create the skills necessary to move ahead. You are about to undertake this journey. You will begin to map the future.

The assumptions we must examine critically—if we are to achieve self-awareness and sustain the possibilities of real changes in perspective—are those with which we are so familiar that we hardly notice, much less question, them. For example, we assume that experts are the primary source of knowledge and that their knowledge gives us the best resource to solve problems in the most efficient and effective way. We have been taught to defer to experts throughout our lives. However, without a reevaluation of such assumptions and other basic ways of thinking, even our innovative attempts to create

profound change will fail to achieve their goals. Precisely because they are so pervasive yet so unquestioned, our most fundamental beliefs can limit our attempts to implement new ideas. We will travel the same worn-out paths of action unless we exert ourselves to view the entire terrain of our possibilities. A strategy is therefore necessary to bring our assumptions sufficiently into the open so that they can be examined. Certainly this examination need not lead us to the conclusion that all our most basic attitudes and ways of interacting with the world should be abandoned or radically altered. Some may even be our allies in our attempt to chart and navigate the unfamiliar terrain ahead. To make such judgments, however, we must learn to see what is so familiar that we often overlook it.

The Touchstones Method is just such a strategy. As a Touchstones participant, you will explore strategically selected texts within a specially designed format of discussion. This experience enables participants to do the following:

- Explore the unseen paradigms of their lives
- Learn to work with others across boundaries
- Explore and modify their conceptual frameworks
- Assess current perspectives, habits, and practices with a critical eye
- Take on and encourage cooperative forms of leadership and action
- Learn how to learn

You will achieve these goals as you move through the four stages to becoming a full participant in a Touchstones Discussion.

## Moving through Stages

For success in Touchstones, all members of the group must eventually participate fully in the group discussions. Typically, full participation means that each member of the group feels free to express an opinion and does so. However, full participation in Touchstones is actually much more complex. It involves each member of the group leading the discussion as well as simply taking part. One of the goals of Touchstones is to give each participant an introduction to, and practice with, cooperative leadership through engaged participation in discussion. In such a situation, there is no single leader from whom all authority derives and with whom all responsibility ultimately rests. Rather, leadership in a discussion moves through the group as first one member and then another contributes the ideas and energy that give direction to an investigation. Participation in Touchstones will give individuals the opportunity to both experience and reflect on a shared form of leadership. This sharing ultimately emerges along with the ability of the group itself, with the active participation of all its members, to determine the shape of an inquiry. The units in this volume are divided into four sections, each of which represents a stage in reaching this goal.

## Stage 1: Authority and Expertise

Throughout our lives, most of us have been encouraged and trained to listen to the teacher, the expert, or the authority. Following this encouragement is useful because we often need to gain the knowledge these people have mastered. However, an unfortunate consequence is that we come to feel that we cannot legitimately speak about topics we have not studied in an official capacity either as part of formal education or professional life. When we speak as nonspecialists, in the back of our intellectual consciences we sense that we are treading on someone else's territory. We are constantly ready to apologize for overstepping and to defer to experts. However, many of the deepest issues facing us—relationships with others, diversity, and living in a global society—are precisely ones for which there are no experts. To explore and deal with these issues, we will have to learn to cooperate with other nonexperts.

Thus our first task in *Mapping the Future* will be to overcome this attitude of reliance on expertise without just speaking irresponsibly. What can we speak responsibly about? What do we really know? The one topic on which we are all authorities is ourselves. However, personal storytelling alone will not advance the goals of this group. We need to find a middle ground between demonstrating the expertise associated with a branch of knowledge and simply sharing our personal stories. This middle ground comes from the interrelation between the text and our experiences. The texts in Stage 1 all concern authority, expertise, and the power associated with those qualities; the experience we bring to these texts is our struggle in dealing with the very issues they discuss within the context of the discussion group. Thus a complex interrelation between text and process emerges, and you will see this throughout *Mapping the Future*. Discussion of the texts in Stage 1 will assist us in depersonalizing our experience and thereby making it available to others. Furthermore, the particular experiences being depersonalized will be those involving our struggles with authority and expertise. This first stage covers the first five units.

## Stage 2: Legitimate Speakers

The second stage begins with the recognition that we, although hardly experts on every topic, are nevertheless able to speak responsibly. A difficulty arises, however, because we all tend to segment the group into “legitimate” and “nonlegitimate” speakers. That is, we trust the words and efforts of some members of the group and believe that we can learn from them, whereas we treat with far less respect the words and efforts of others. This delineation is perfectly understandable. That is how we choose friends and colleagues. By the beginning of the second stage, each of us imagines that we and a few others have reached a point from which we can say—as one recent participant put it—“In Touchstones, I found my voice.” In Stage 2, we must work to acknowledge that others also have voices. The goals of the second stage will therefore be to eliminate factions and subgroups, view each participant as someone who has something worth

saying, and make each member of the group aware of his or her relationship to this process.

These goals will be achieved through continuing to analyze the discussions and considering the texts that explore ideas and issues that help us examine the reasons groups fragment into factions. In this second stage, we will begin to observe our own behavior and thinking and the ways in which our habits guide our actions for better or worse. We will see how our own entrenched desire for certainty and security leads us to evaluate the credibility of speakers. We will learn to recognize that all the members of the group are committed to self-examination, and therefore we will learn to respect them as legitimate speakers. We will then progress to the next stage, which is to learn to listen to what is said.

### **Stage 3: Listening and Understanding**

The third stage is in certain respects the most difficult. In Stages 1 and 2, we explored how first professional credentials and then personal compatibility work to fragment the group. We saw that we first pay attention to those whom we consider experts and then to those whom we like. Now the difficulty we must overcome comes from a source deeper within ourselves. In the third stage, we must face and start to overcome the difference between hearing and listening. Simply hearing the sounds and words that strike us is not listening. Listening is an activity requiring skill and self-awareness.

Our experience of the world is often described as a compound of what we contribute and what the world presents. Our contribution is sometimes seen as a paradigm or model that we impose on the world and which, through its familiarity, helps us make sense of things. Without some source of structure through which to order the massive amounts of information that confront us daily, we would no doubt be overwhelmed and unable to function in the world. Various sources for these organizing and filtering structures include philosophical beliefs, language, culture, education, life experiences, and the epoch or period in history in which we live. Not only do we apply concepts on the world, we also impose them on other people. We create expectations for what others say, think, and do. We impose ourselves on what we hear. It is this trait that makes it so difficult to listen to others. We all make the thoughts and words of others into corollaries of our own thoughts, opinions, and attitudes. In the third stage of *Mapping the Future*, we attempt to face and overcome this tendency.

Facing the ways in which we impose our presuppositions and assumptions on others involves facing ourselves. We will see that facing ourselves can only be done with the help of others. However, we will not attempt to strip ourselves entirely of our preconceptions. Our preconceptions are so deep and pervasive that we could not simply surrender them even should we desire to do so. Instead our task in Stage 3 is to become more aware of these assumptions and the ways in which they shape our experience of the world.

In this stage, you will also notice a shift in the relationship of the components of the discussion process. Those components—our experience, the dynamics of the process, and the texts—are always present. However, in the first two stages, the texts are generally not as central as the other two components. In the third stage, the texts rise to equal prominence. In the very effort we make to understand a text, we will learn to listen to and understand one another. Although our discussions will never focus solely on textual interpretation, the text will begin to act as a touchstone for us. Exploring an unfamiliar and somewhat alien text helps us to prepare to listen to others and also to ourselves. This skill of listening in turn prepares us to join with others to participate fully in a discussion group.

## **Stage 4: Leadership, Participation, and Commitment**

The examination of our own presuppositions in Stage 3 leads to the fourth and final stage. Stage 4 examines leadership based on our experience in discussion. In this stage, we will read texts that invite us to consider different aspects of the issues of leadership and participation, and we will intentionally practice and reflect on a new type of leadership.

This stage will be somewhat familiar. For instance, from the very start of the program, each group member will have participated in leadership tasks and issues to varying degrees. Throughout the units, everyone will have written questions to open discussions. And in every meeting, all members will have shared some responsibility with the leader for the success of the discussion. On a personal level, you also will have confronted leadership issues. You will have probably encountered times when you became frustrated with the direction of the conversation or by the dominance or hesitation of other group members. And you might have blamed the process or the leader or the text or the other participants for your frustration. But at some point, you will have probably asked what the group needs or how you could help the group get past a certain problem. Such a moment marks the point at which you will have moved from acting simply as a member of the group waiting for something to happen to acting in the context of the discussion process to determine the shape it will ultimately assume.

These experiences with leadership will crystallize in the fourth stage—the stage in which leadership will come to the forefront. With a small group, you will share responsibility not only for leading but also for designing a session. This stage will be the opportunity to use all the skills developed through the course of the program and to begin to recognize that in discussions, the needs of the individual and the responsibility toward the group need not conflict.

The cooperative leadership that emerges within the discussion group and that we consider explicitly in Stage 4 becomes the model for an attitude of responsibility and openness that enables profound change to take place. In Touchstones, participants actually have the important opportunity to watch this type of cooperative leadership emerge within the group. By its nature, any real change is disorienting. Our usual maps and land-

marks no longer offer clear direction. The attempt to develop the cooperative thinking of shared leadership within the group might feel chaotic at first, such as when we find our usual ways of interacting challenged. We may be tempted to take refuge in the more familiar hierarchical ways of interacting. But in the same way that we watched form emerge in discussions that seemed to be without a rigid structure, we will eventually see direction emerge in our exploration and self-examination—a direction for which we will all feel some ownership and a success for which we will all take some responsibility.

## Paired Texts as Touchstones

In each unit of this volume, we will use a pair of texts as tools to explore our assumptions. Each pair of texts addresses a question or topic of recognizably great importance in our lives. Examples include the following: When, if ever, should one break a law? What are the uses and dangers of technology? What is power? Just as a jeweler's touchstone is used to determine the identity of metals, these texts are used to reveal our unexamined opinions about these concerns. We will contrast those opinions that we hold entirely acceptable or true with those that are alien or false for us.

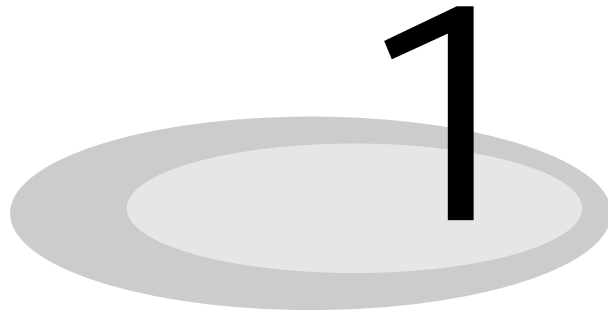
The first text of each pair is always a noncontemporary work, chosen because its general concern is recognizable but its approach and style are somewhat unfamiliar. It is distant in either time or culture, or in both. This distance of noncontemporary texts from us is what makes them valuable for discussion. The strangeness of the text invites the members of the group to submerge their personal differences and to cooperate in trying to understand what the text presents.

In the first unit, for example, the text from Saint Thomas Aquinas's *Treatise on Law* asks whether it is ever appropriate for an individual to break a law. Aquinas's treatment of the question, however, shows certain assumed opinions about law and nature that are no longer common. The group members have to restrain their differences about the question of the appropriateness of breaking a law to see how Aquinas's treatment of that question holds together. We discuss the issue by working together to understand it through Aquinas's eyes.

The second text of the unit is usually contemporary in the sense that it deals with an issue on the basis of opinions and conclusions we recognize. Most often, it is a text from our own time and culture. Of course, we might or might not share the opinions and conclusions evident in the text; however, because of our familiarity with these opinions and conclusions, they will evoke our active agreement or disagreement. This second text reintroduces the conditions for controversy that are present in our society and that were suspended within the first text. In our responses to the second text, our differences can be displayed, talked about, and thought about. Members of the group might not change their minds about the issue, but they will leave the discussion with a better appreciation for the basis of their opinions and of opinions with which they disagree.

The contemporary work in the first unit is a section of Martin Luther King Jr.'s "Letter from Birmingham Jail." In the letter, King sets forth the conditions for appropriate

civil disobedience. Although King refers to Aquinas's work, the argument in his letter differs in important ways from Aquinas's treatise. King does not base his argument on a notion of nature like Aquinas's but rather on the effects of law on the human personality. He argues that we have a duty to disobey unjust laws in a peaceful and respectful way. There are many people who disagree with this point of view, many who agree, and many who aren't sure. More important, the group members will disagree about how to judge whether a law is unjust and, if so, whether proper means of disobedience exist. The juxtaposition of this text with the first, combined with the Touchstones Discussion format, will make thoughtful discussion of such important concerns possible.



## Rules and Laws

Almost every one of our actions is directly or indirectly connected with rules and laws. There are the laws of our country, the rules of behavior in an organization like a university or a corporation, the rules of a game, the rules that we establish with one another in families or among friends, and many others. In a world in which we increasingly feel diversity must be encouraged and respected, we require ever more complex rules to allow the internal rules of various cultures to coexist.

Many of these rules, such as the “No Smoking” signs that we so often see in public areas, are explicit. Others are so ingrained that we rarely notice them because they have become a part of us. For example, we instinctively know that certain foods are eaten with or without certain utensils—we use our hands to eat a candy bar or chips, but a fork to eat a salad. These kinds of rules are usually only recognized when we are surprised to see someone break one of them. Some rules and laws are necessary, others are useful, and others seem superfluous. Some rules and laws appear arbitrary, others seem to be based on some thought and appear reasonable. Some laws seem just to us whereas other laws appear entirely unjust. All societies we know of have a code of behavior or a set of laws, and scientists have even tried to uncover the rules that govern societies of animals.

A class in a school or university also has rules. In lecture classes, attendees are expected to sit quietly facing the front of the room while the professor speaks. Attendees are also expected to ask questions at the appropriate time and in the appropriate way—perhaps by raising a hand and being acknowledged. In such a situation, all

the rules reinforce the purpose of that type of activity. The premise of a lecture class or a presentation at a place of work is that the expert who has mastered a subject will convey his or her excitement and knowledge about the material. The format that you will experience here is different. It will be a seminar or a discussion. The purposes of a discussion are different from those of a lecture, but there are still rules established to achieve those purposes.

What is a discussion? It is a format that assumes equality among participants. Each discussion will have a leader, but the leader will play a different role from the one a teacher or professor plays in a lecture class. The discussion leader will not be an expert there to entertain, amuse, or impart information. The leader's role instead is to engage the entire group in a cooperative exploration—of a topic or texts—in which each person's opinion is respected. The texts to be read will raise issues that do not have a single correct response. Instead, answers will generally be better or worse rather than correct or incorrect. There is diversity in every collection of people and, if our discussions are to achieve real richness and depth, each person's voice must be acknowledged. Such discussions require some ground rules. We propose five of them:

1. Read the text carefully.
2. Listen to what others say, and don't interrupt.
3. Speak clearly.
4. Speak to all the members of the group.
5. Give others your respect.

These are the rules we will use to get started. However, it will take time and effort to act according to these rules and even longer until they feel natural. You might think that, because of particular circumstances, your group requires other rules in addition to these; or you may feel that some of these rules need to be suspended for brief periods if our goals are to be achieved. The rules are present to assist us in achieving our goals and may need to be modified, expanded, or adjusted. After each session, you will evaluate the successes and problems in that meeting. The evaluations will enable us at appropriate times to reflect on our progress, on how well we are adhering to our framework of rules, and on whether we need to create new rules. The two texts in this unit will help us focus on the issue of rules and laws. Saint Thomas Aquinas and Martin Luther King Jr. both consider when it is appropriate to break an unjust law. In dealing with this issue, they also define what a just law is and its relation to a law that we are either allowed to change or encouraged to violate or, in even more extreme cases, that we may be obligated to break.

# Worksheet 1

The introduction to this session opens the topic of the role of rules and laws in all our lives. The texts consider the question of what might make a law unjust and what our reaction to such a law should be. The worksheet asks us to think about our own responses to the ground rules that will shape our discussions in Touchstones and to consider ways in which the rules of a discussion might be just or unjust.

1. Listed below are the ground rules we will follow in Touchstones Discussions. Which ground rule will you find the most difficult to follow? Why?

1. Read the text carefully.
2. Listen to what others say, and don't interrupt.
3. Speak clearly.
4. Speak to all the members of the group.
5. Give others your respect.

2. Write another possible ground rule. What would the new rule help achieve?

3. After reading the texts, write a question that you would like the group to discuss.

# Summa Theologica

*by Saint Thomas Aquinas*

Laws made by men are either just or unjust. If they are just, they rule our conscience because just laws are derived from the eternal law of God. As it says in Proverbs in the Bible, “By Me kings rule, and lawgivers decree just things.” Laws are considered just on account of the purpose they serve, the authority of the lawgiver, and their form. They are just when the purpose is the common good, when the lawgiver does not exceed his right to make certain kinds of laws, and when the form of the laws places burdens on the subjects proportionate to their position in society. This last condition is true because since each man is a part of the community, each, in all that he is and has, belongs to the community. On the other hand, laws may be unjust in two ways. First, a law may be contrary to human good, through being opposed to the things we have just mentioned. In respect to the goal or purpose, an authority might impose burdensome laws on his subjects, which are not for the common good but rather the rulers’ own selfish ends. Or a ruler might make a law that goes beyond the power committed to him. Or a law in its form may look toward the common good but not impose burdens that have a due proportion to the positions of the subjects within the community. All these are acts of violence rather than laws. Secondly, laws can be unjust through being opposed to the divine good. Such would be laws by tyrants forcing idolatry or anything else contrary to the divine law. Laws of this sort must never be followed. As is stated in the Acts of the Apostles, “We ought to obey God rather than men.”

There are a number of objections that could be made to what has just been said.

The first objection is that a human law never binds a man’s conscience because an inferior power cannot impose its law on the judgment of a higher power. But the power of man, which makes human law, is beneath divine power. Therefore human law cannot impose itself on the judgment of our consciences, which is based on divine law. To this I reply: The apostle Paul says in Romans that all human power is from God. “Therefore he who resists the power in matters that are within its scope resists the commands of God.” So, such a person becomes guilty in his conscience.

The second objection is the following: The judgment made by our conscience depends primarily on the commandments of God. But sometimes the commandments of God are made void by human laws. Therefore, human law does not bind our consciences. I reply that this argument is true of laws that are contrary to God’s commandments, for these commandments are beyond the scope of human power. In such matters, human law should not be obeyed.

There is also a third objection. Human laws often bring to men both injury and a loss of character. For according to Isaiah, “Shame on you who make unjust laws and burdensome decrees. You deprive the poor of justice and rob the weakest of my people of their rights.” Since it is lawful for all to avoid oppression and violence, therefore

human laws do not bind our conscience. I reply that this argument is true of any law that imposes an unjust burden on its subjects. The power that man holds from God does not extend to this. So, in such matters, a man is not bound to obey the law provided he can avoid causing scandal or inflicting an even worse injury by his disobedience.

When considering these matters another question arises. Should a human law be changed whenever a better law comes along? I answer that human law is rightly changed when such a change helps attain the common good. But, to a certain extent, the change of any law, even an unjust law, harms the common good. This is because custom helps a great deal in getting us to observe all laws. We can see this by noticing that anything that is done contrary to our usual customs, even in small matters, is looked at as a serious offense. So when any law is changed, the power of law itself is diminished in so far as a custom is abolished. Therefore, human law should never be changed, unless, in some way or other, the common good is compensated according to the extent of the harm done by breaking our habit of obeying laws. As the great legal thinker Gratian says, "In making a new law, one must have evidence of the benefits which will be derived before changing a law which has, for a long time, been considered just."

# Letter from Birmingham Jail

*by Martin Luther King Jr.*

You express a great deal of anxiety over our willingness to break laws. This is certainly a legitimate concern. Since we so diligently urge people to obey the Supreme Court's decision of 1954 outlawing segregation in the public schools, at first glance it may seem rather paradoxical for us consciously to break laws. One may well ask: "How can you advocate breaking some laws and obeying others?" The answer lies in the fact that there are two types of laws: just and unjust. I would be the first to advocate obeying just laws. One has not only a legal but also a moral responsibility to obey laws. Conversely, one has a moral responsibility to disobey unjust laws. I would agree with Saint Augustine that "an unjust law is not law at all."

Now, what is the difference between the two? How does one determine whether a law is just or unjust? A just law is a man-made code that squares with the moral law or the law of God. An unjust law is a code that is out of harmony with the moral law. To put it in the terms of Saint Thomas Aquinas: An unjust law is a human law that is not rooted in eternal law and natural law. Any law that uplifts human personality is just. Any law that degrades human personality is unjust. All segregation statutes are unjust because segregation distorts the soul and damages the personality. It gives the segregator a false sense of superiority and the segregated a false sense of inferiority. Hence segregation is not only politically, economically, and sociologically unsound, it is morally wrong and sinful. Thus it is that I can urge men to obey the 1954 decision of the Supreme Court, for it is morally right, and I can urge them to disobey segregation ordinances, for they are morally wrong.

Let us consider a more concrete example of just and unjust laws. An unjust law is a code that a numerical or power majority group compels a minority group to obey but does not make binding on itself. This is difference made legal. By the same token, a just law is a code that a majority compels a minority to follow and that it is willing to follow itself. This is sameness made legal.

Let me give another explanation. A law is unjust if it is inflicted on a minority that, as a result of being denied the right to vote, had no part in enacting or devising the law. Who can say that the legislature of Alabama that set up that state's segregation laws was democratically elected? Throughout Alabama, all sorts of devious methods are used to prevent Negroes from becoming registered voters, and there are some counties in which, even though Negroes constitute a majority of the population, not a single Negro is registered. Can any law enacted under such circumstances be considered democratically structured?

Sometimes a law is just on its face and unjust in its application. For instance, I have been arrested on a charge of parading without a permit. Now, there is nothing wrong in having an ordinance that requires a permit for a parade. But such an ordinance becomes unjust when it is used to maintain segregation and to deny citizens the First

Amendment privilege of peaceful assembly and protest.

I hope you are able to see the distinction I am trying to point out. In no sense do I advocate evading or defying the law, as would the rabid segregationist. That would lead to anarchy. One who breaks an unjust law must do so openly, lovingly, and with a willingness to accept the penalty.

Of course, there is nothing new about this kind of civil disobedience. It was practiced superbly by the early Christians, who were willing to face hungry lions and the excruciating pain of chopping blocks rather than submit to certain unjust laws of the Roman Empire. To a degree, academic freedom is a reality today because Socrates practiced civil disobedience. In our own nation, the Boston Tea Party represented a massive act of civil disobedience.

We should never forget that everything Adolf Hitler did in Germany was “legal” and everything the Hungarian freedom fighters did in Hungary was “illegal.” It was “illegal” to aid and comfort a Jew in Hitler’s Germany. Even so, I am sure that, had I lived in Germany at the time, I would have aided and comforted my Jewish brothers. If today I lived in a Communist country where certain principles dear to the Christian faith are suppressed, I would openly advocate disobeying that country’s antireligious laws.

## Discussion Evaluation Form

The items below are discussion dynamics that may or may not be present in your group. Decide to what extent you think that each dynamic was present in the discussion. Then decide whether you think the group needs to work to improve in this area.

	None	Some	Great deal	Need to Improve?
Dominance by some individuals	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10			Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
Cooperation	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10			Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
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Building on one other's contributions	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10			Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
Many people talking at once	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10			Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

Pick one of the dynamics that you think the group should work to improve, and explain why.

How would you rate this discussion on a scale of 1–10? \_\_\_\_\_



## The Difference between Our Public and Private Selves

Almost all of us have grown up in a culture that is dominated by Western ideas, by science and technology, and by the corporations and institutions within which we work and learn. Each of us therefore shares a certain range of concepts and presuppositions—what is often called a paradigm—within which we make our choices and live our lives. We certainly could not function without the frameworks that our presuppositions and assumptions provide. Yet our inability to recognize these characteristic patterns of thought and to notice how such patterns shape our lives often keeps us from understanding other perspectives and from exploring all the possibilities within a given situation. Our tendency to regard the lens through which we habitually view our world as the only possible or legitimate perspective is often the strongest impediment to implementing real change in our lives on either a personal or an institutional level.

Although each of us comes equipped with certain presuppositions as part of our common cultural heritage, each of us differs in the emphases he or she places on these shared attitudes. It is similar to the way in which we all share a common language yet display different styles of speaking and writing. Through taking a closer look at these differences, we should be able to see more clearly both the ways in which each of us is unique and the ways in which common beliefs and habits of mind shape us all.

One of the most basic distinctions we make in our lives is the one between our public or professional and our private lives. We all have certain attitudes that determine how we behave in activities that occur in the public realm and other, frequently quite different, attitudes that influence our behavior among those closest to us—family and

friends. This division, however, is not universal. There at least seem to be societies in which people's lives occur almost entirely in what we would consider the public realm. This public living appears to be the case in many Native American societies and was also the case in the ancient Greek city of Sparta. In China, although there is a distinction between the society at large and the family, the family seems to be subordinated virtually completely to social responsibilities. In our society, however, people entirely absorbed in the public realm are often considered workaholics and told to get a life. Of course there is no society in which people are entirely absorbed in the private realm; that would be a sort of contradiction. The closest description we have of that situation is Homer's picture in the *Odyssey* of the Cyclopes who live in caves alone or with their families with each, as Homer says, being a law unto himself. How to adjust our public and private selves is one of the great tasks we all face. How our professional lives and personal lives can fit harmoniously together is one of the great issues facing our society as new forms of family and institutional life emerge.

Another distinction that underlies our thinking is the contrast we make between objective facts and subjective feelings. Most people believe that objectivity is an important quality in determining what is correct, fair, or true about the world. We worry about how our judgments are colored by our attitudes and biases. When we are told that we are not being objective, we generally feel the need to defend ourselves. And although none of us achieves complete objectivity, we think it is an ideal. The tremendous success of science in the last 300 years has made objectivity a model for other forms of activity.

Yet although we all believe to a large extent in the virtues of objectivity, we also probably think that this attitude can be pushed too far. We tend to be shocked when we hear of objectivity becoming an overriding consideration in our private or family lives. For instance, we resist the idea that friends are simply people who can be useful to us in certain quantifiable ways. People from Western nations are also frequently troubled when they hear about arranged marriages in other parts of the world. An arranged marriage appears to violate deep beliefs about human feeling and emotion and about choice and freedom. However, arranged marriages have worked for thousands of years, and entire societies that have achieved great historical prominence have been based on them. Even in our society, objective concerns do play some part in selecting a marriage partner. When we hear about couples in which each partner is very different in education, background, and aspirations, we wonder whether the union will last even while we hope that love will conquer all. Similar issues arise in business and corporate environments. Objectivity is, on the one hand, admired, but on the other hand, often viewed as a dehumanizing attitude that looks only to the bottom line. We tend to criticize the heartless technocrat along with the arranger of marriages. What is the proper relationship between these various attitudes, between subjectivity and objectivity, between our public and private lives?

The two texts bear precisely on this issue. They describe the same sort of event but from two very different perspectives. Thucydides and Albert Camus both write about the plague—Thucydides writes of the outbreak in Athens in the second year of the

Peloponnesian War between Athens and Sparta; Camus writes of a fictional outbreak in northern Africa. One account is a dispassionate objective narration, the other is a description of a doctor who is struggling to recognize and imagine the reality of the disease. Through these two texts that focus on the same type of event as well as the worksheet, we can examine the objective and subjective and the public and personal.

## Worksheet 6

The unit’s introduction highlighted the ways in which we separate our lives into the public and private realms and the differences in our behavior and assumptions within these divisions. The worksheet asks us to consider these differences for a number of specific cases. In the texts by Thucydides and Camus, we have examples of extreme situations in which the divisions and structures we use to order our lives are broken down and also examples of the drive we have to find normalcy by reclaiming our roles and the “proper” division between the public and private realms.

- For each contrasting pair of beliefs or attitudes below, think about how great a role each should play in the public and private dimensions of our lives. Then, express your view by dividing 10 points between the items of each pair. For example, suppose we view the pair of objectivity and subjectivity in relation to our public lives. One might think that objectivity should heavily outweigh subjectivity but both should be present. On that basis, one might allocate 9 to objectivity and 1 to subjectivity. Or, one might agree that both should be present but believe that they should be more balanced and allocate the points as 6 and 4, respectively. For our private or personal lives, you would then also decide how to allocate 10 points. Here, for example, one might think subjectivity is most important, but also assign objectivity 3 points because subjective approaches should still rely somewhat on facts.

	Public Realm	Private Realm
a) Objectivity	_____	_____
Subjectivity	_____	_____
	10	10
b) Efficiency	_____	_____
Spontaneity	_____	_____
	10	10
c) Skeptical attitude toward others	_____	_____
Trusting attitude toward others	_____	_____
	10	10

	Public Realm	Private Realm
d) Problems have a definite, unambiguous solution	_____	_____
Problems solved by compromise between the parties	_____	_____
	10	10
e) Risk taking	_____	_____
Risk minimizing	_____	_____
	10	10

2. After reading the texts, write an opening question for the discussion.

# The Peloponnesian War

by Thucydides

Soon after the Spartans invaded the area around Athens, the plague first appeared among the Athenians. No one could remember an epidemic of such magnitude and seriousness, and the doctors themselves were not, at first, of any use. They didn't know how to treat it, and as they spent the most time with the ill, the doctors were the first to die. And no other human art did any better. Prayers in the temples, sacrifices, and divinations were equally useless, and were finally given up when the disaster reached overwhelming proportions. I leave all theories about its origin and its cause, if causes can be found to account for such vast disturbances, to other writers. For myself, I will describe its nature and the symptoms by which one can recognize it, if it ever breaks out again. This I can do, since I had the disease myself and also watched its course in Athens.

In general, there seemed no particular cause for coming down with the plague. Even people in good health were suddenly seized by violent fevers. The eyes became inflamed and reddened, the throat and tongue became bloody. Sneezing and hoarseness soon followed, and the disease passed to the chest producing a hard cough. Then it settled in the stomach, producing great pain and spasms. The skin was not very hot to the touch though reddish in appearance and breaking out into sores. But internally, the patients burned and couldn't stand to have any clothing at all touch them. They wanted to throw themselves into cold water and had an unquenchable thirst. In addition, the miserable feeling of never being able to rest or sleep tormented them. Strangely enough, while patients were sickest, their bodies did not waste away. It was extraordinary how the body could hold out against the attack of the disease. But on the seventh or eighth day, they died from internal inflammation even though there was still strength in them.

During the plague, Athens was not much troubled by ordinary diseases, but when someone became ill from some other cause, he eventually contracted the plague. Some died from neglect, others died in spite of intense care. No remedy or drug was ever found. What helped in one case did harm in others.

The worst feature was the dejection that occurred when anyone realized he was becoming ill. This despair immediately took away all power of resistance. Another horrible aspect was the sight of men dying like sheep, having caught the disease while nursing one another. This was particularly the case with those who had any claim to goodness. Their own honor made them nurse their friends from whom they then caught the disease and died. The sick and the dying received the most help and compassion from those few who had recovered from the plague. These knew how painful the sickness was, and they had no fear themselves, since the same person was never attacked twice. However, such people, in their excitement and elation, half-believed that they were now safe from every form of illness and misfortune.

The sacred places and temples, where many of the sick went, became full of corpses, and these remained there just as they were. As the disaster went beyond all

bounds, men no longer had any idea what was to become of them. Therefore, they became completely careless about everything, whether sacred or merely human. All the burial ceremonies were abandoned, and people buried friends and relatives as best they could. And this wasn't the only form of lawless action that owed its origin to the plague. Men now did calmly and in public what previously they would only do in secret. Great changes were also brought about by constantly seeing wealthy people dying suddenly, and the poor becoming rich. All resolved to spend quickly and enjoy themselves, since they began to look at their lives and their wealth as things that wouldn't last. Honor no longer existed, and planning for the future vanished, since it was so uncertain that anyone would survive to reach a goal. Instead, immediate pleasure and everything assisting it came to be considered both honorable and useful.

The fear of the gods or of the laws of men could no longer restrain anyone. As for the gods, all Athenians judged that it was the same whether they worshiped them or not, since they saw that religious and pious people died as frequently as those who were irreligious and impious. And as for the laws of men, no one took those seriously, since no one expected to live long enough to be brought to trial for his crimes. Instead all Athenians felt that a far heavier sentence had already been passed on them and hung over their heads. And they all believed that before this sentence fell, it was only reasonable to enjoy life a little.

# The Plague

by Albert Camus

The word “plague” had just been said to him for the first time. With very small differences, Dr. Rieux’s reaction was the same as that of most of the people in town. Everyone knows that epidemics have a way of repeating themselves in the world, yet we find it hard to believe that they will happen to us. There have been as many epidemics in history as there have been wars, yet epidemics and wars always take people by surprise.

In fact, Dr. Rieux was caught off his guard, and we should understand that his uncertainty was due to this. He was torn between his fears and a feeling of confidence. When a war is declared, people say, “This can’t last long, it’s too stupid.” But although a war may be stupid, that doesn’t keep it from lasting. Stupidity is very insistent. We would see this if we weren’t so wrapped up in ourselves.

In this respect, our townsfolk were like everybody else, wrapped up in themselves. They did not believe in epidemics. Since an epidemic is beyond our imaginations, we tell ourselves that it is a bad dream that will go away by itself. But it doesn’t pass away, it is men who pass away, and first of all those who haven’t taken precautions because they don’t believe in epidemics.

Dr. Rieux tried to remember what he had read about the plague. Numbers floated through his memory. He remembered the thirty or so great epidemics in history that had caused a hundred million deaths. But what are a hundred million deaths? Since a dead man is not real unless you have actually seen him, a hundred million bodies spread throughout history are like a puff of smoke in the imagination. He remembered the plague at Constantinople in which ten thousand people died in one day. Ten thousand people are about five times the audience in a big theater. Yes, this is how it should be thought of. You should collect the bodies at the exits of the movie theaters. You should lead them to the city square and make them die in bunches if you wanted a clear idea of what it means. Then you should also have some familiar faces among the dead. But naturally this couldn’t be put into practice. Besides, who knows ten thousand people anyway? In any case, everyone knows that these old stories about epidemics are not reliable.

The doctor made an effort to stop thinking about this. He was letting his imagination play tricks on him, and he couldn’t afford it. He must fix his mind on the observed facts. All the patients who had recently died had the following symptoms: extreme weakness, delirium, swollen glands, constant thirst, dark spots on the body, and in conclusion ... the doctor remembered the sentence in his medical handbook, “pulse becomes weak, and uneven, and death results when the patient makes the slightest movement.” Yes, three out of four of his patients (he remembered the exact numbers) were so impatient that they made that slight movement.

Dr. Rieux was looking out of the window at a beautiful and peaceful, cool spring day. Inside his room, the word “plague” was still echoing. The word brought up in the doctor’s mind not only what science had put into it, but a whole series of wild

possibilities that seemed foreign to the hustle and bustle of the happy city beyond his window. The peacefulness of the town made the old descriptions of the plague seem unreal: Athens a stinking graveyard deserted even by the birds; Chinese towns filled with victims silent in their agony; the convicts at Marseilles piling corpses into pits; the damp, rotting beds stuck to the mud floor of the hospital in Constantinople, where patients were hauled from their beds with hooks; men and women making love in the cemeteries of Milan; carloads of bodies rumbling through the darkness of night in London; nights and days always and everywhere filled with the cry of human pain. No, all these horrors were not near enough to upset the peace of a spring afternoon. The comforting sounds of a streetcar came through the window. Only the sea, which he could hear beyond the town, told of the unrest and danger present in the world. The sea reminded Dr. Rieux of the fires that the Athenians lit on the seashore. The dead were brought there after dark, and since there was not enough room for everyone, the living fought one another for a space to lay the bodies of their friends and relatives. They would rather fight than let those bodies be cast into the sea. As this last image rose before his mind, he knew that it had happened, and that it could happen again.

But these wild thoughts died down as he began to think more reasonably. True, the word plague had been said, and there had been one or two victims. Still the epidemic could be stopped. It was only a question of clearly recognizing what needed to be done, and doing it. Then the plague would come to an end, because it was unthinkable that it wouldn't. If it came to an end by itself everything would be fine; if not, one would know it for what it is. Then steps could be taken for coping with and finally overcoming it.

The doctor opened the window, and at once the noises of the town grew louder. He pulled himself together. He recognized that reality lay in those everyday sounds, and not in his imaginings. All these fears about the plague were unimportant. The important thing was to do your job as it should be done.

## Discussion Evaluation Form

The items below are discussion dynamics that may or may not be present in your group. Decide to what extent you think that each dynamic was present in the discussion. Then decide whether you think the group needs to work to improve in this area.

	None	Some	Great deal	Need to Improve?
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Balanced participation	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10			Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
Active listening	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10			Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
Lack of interest	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10			Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
Asking one other questions	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10			Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
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Pick one of the dynamics that you think the group should work to improve, and explain why.

How would you rate this discussion on a scale of 1–10? \_\_\_\_\_

# Educational Support Services

*“The Touchstones Workshop on discussions that I attended at the San Joaquin County Office of Education was one of the most helpful workshops I have attended in my 31 years as an educator. Touchstones provides dynamic strategies that can be used by teachers regardless of the subject they teach and the level of student they are addressing. I have been using Socratic questioning techniques throughout my career, and this is the most effective program for that approach that I have experienced.*

–Alan Hawkins, Staff Development & Head of IB, Tracy High School in San Joaquin Valley

**Workshops:** Touchstones workshops provide teachers with a hands-on introduction to running seminar format discussions with students. In a workshop, teachers:

- Learn how and why the Touchstones method works, through first-hand modeling and participation in discussion sessions;
- Explore their role as discussion leader, the concept of shared leadership, and techniques for effective classroom management;
- Develop sample lesson plans to see how Touchstones easily integrates into existing curricular activities;
- Understand how discussion evaluations reinforce and strengthen the Touchstones experience;
- Investigate how student evaluators support the group’s progress and the teacher’s role;
- Work together and with Touchstones staff to develop and refine leadership skills and examine the challenges and rewards of group inquiry; and
- Engage in a lively question and answer period.

Workshops are tailored to the groups’ needs and are offered as beginning, intermediate, or advanced levels, depending on the group’s experience with Touchstones. Touchstones also offers workshop options that specifically address IB and AVID communities.

**Fee for one-day workshop (limited to 30 participants): \$1250**

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**On-Site Classroom Support:** With on-site support, one of our staff comes into the classroom to help you directly with implementing Touchstones with your class. Through modeling, discussion evaluation, and targeted feedback, you learn how to improve your approach and outcomes. You set the number of on-site support visits according to your budget, time, and needs.

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