



Community Conversations for Families gives parents and their 8-to-12 year old children the opportunity to engage in meaningful dialogue about current events at their local library. Each *Community Conversation* is based on a short text that is read at the beginning of the discussion. A facilitator introduces thought-provoking questions and encourages participants to reflect on the issues raised by the reading and discuss how they impact our lives and communities.

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'The American Dream' (excerpt)

**A Speech by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
Lincoln University, Pennsylvania
June 6, 1961**

Through our scientific genius we have made of this world a neighborhood; now through our moral and spiritual development we must make of it a brotherhood. In a real sense, we must all learn to live together as brothers, or we will all perish together as fools. We must come to see that no individual can live alone; no nation can live alone. We must all live together; we must all be concerned about each other.

Some months ago, Mrs. King and I journeyed to that great country in the Far East known as India. I will never forget the experiences that came to us as we moved around that great country, or the opportunity of meeting and talking with the great leaders of India and with people all over in the cities and the villages throughout India. Certainly this was an experience that I will always remember, but there were depressing moments. How can one avoid being depressed when he sees with his own eyes millions of people going to bed hungry at night? How can one avoid being depressed when he sees with his own eyes millions of people sleeping on the sidewalk at night?

In Calcutta alone, more than a million people sleep on the sidewalks every night; in Bombay, more than six hundred thousand people sleep on the sidewalks every night. They have no beds to sleep in; they have no houses to go into. ...Most of these people have never seen a doctor or a dentist.

As I looked at these conditions, I found myself saying that we in America cannot stand idly by and not be concerned. Then something within me cried out, "Oh, no, because the destiny of the United States is tied up with the destiny of India—with the destiny of every other nation."

All this is simply to say that all life is interrelated... Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. As long as there is poverty in this world, no man can be totally rich even if he has a billion dollars. As long as diseases are rampant and millions of people cannot expect to live more than twenty or thirty years, no man can be totally healthy, even if he just got a clean bill of health from the finest clinic in America. Strangely enough, I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be. You can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be. This is the way the world is made. I didn't make it that way, but this is the interrelated structure of reality... [To] realize the American dream we must cultivate this world perspective.

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Discussion Questions for

'The American Dream' (excerpt)
A Speech by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
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- How has science, or technology, “made of this world a neighborhood?” What kind of technology do kids have today that their parents did not have when they were children? How have these new inventions changed how we think about people in other countries or in different parts of the United States?
- What is the difference between a neighbor and a brother? What is the difference between a “neighborhood” and a “brotherhood”?
- Dr. King talks about feeling depressed when he sees people who are homeless and hungry. How do you feel when you see people who do not have food or a place to sleep? What do you think is the best way to help?
- Dr. King says that the destiny of the United States is tied up with the destiny of every other nation. How do the actions of American people impact the lives of people in other countries? How do your (or your family’s) actions affect other people?
- “As long as there is poverty in this world, no man can be totally rich, even if he has a billion dollars.” Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not?
- The title of Dr. King’s speech is “The American Dream.” What is the American dream? What does it mean to you? How is the American dream connected to helping other people?
- Do you believe that “no individual can live alone?” Could you live alone? Who are the people you need? Are any of them strangers? Are there people who need you?
- Dr. King says that “You can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be.” What do you think he means by this?
- Dr. Martin Luther King Day has been designated the National Day of Service. Why do we honor Dr. King’s memory by doing service? What kinds of things can kids do to serve in their communities?

Tips for Hosting a Community Conversation for Families

Community Conversations are simple gatherings that encourage thoughtful, engaged dialogue using a short reading to foster discussion. The goal is a comfortable, lively discussion—we hope the following suggestions will help you create an inviting environment for you and your community.

For tips on gathering an audience, see our *Common Questions*.

Getting Started

- Arrange the room so that participants can easily see one another and be heard by all.
- Expect a healthy conversation to last between 60 and 90 minutes.
- Hand out name tags to encourage participation and build community.
- If possible, provide light snacks.
- Start by establishing some basic guidelines with the group: be respectful, make sure that everyone has a turn to speak, and focus comments on the reading.
- Introduce yourself at the beginning of the session and ask each participant to do the same.
- Begin by reading the text aloud together. You can ask for volunteers or try a round robin.
- Try an opening activity to help participants get comfortable: ask a discussion question and encourage participants to share their thoughts in pairs and report back to the group.

During Discussion

- Use the discussion questions provided by the Council to explore the reading in greater depth. (You do not have to address the questions in order; rather, use them as you feel is appropriate and be ready to jump in with follow-up questions to get conversation going.)
- If the conversation gets off topic, gently ease the group back by asking questions about the text.
- Make sure that both kids and parents are participating equally. If you notice mostly kids are talking, direct a question to the adults; if mostly adults are talking, ask a question for the kids.
- Encourage kids to engage with other parents and parents to engage with others kids, as well as their own family members.

Finishing Up

- Wrap up by asking participants for final thoughts and thanking them for their participation.
- Make information about local service opportunities for kids available after the discussion. You can pass out flier of information including phone numbers of organizations where families can volunteer together.
- Or do an activity to help others right there, such as making cards for patients at a local hospital or residents of a nursing home.

At least eight weeks before event

- Download materials from Council website:
<http://www.nyhumanities.org/conversations>
- Determine who will facilitate your event
- Set event date and time
- Select the location of your event
- Create a recruitment plan:
 - Identify partner or community organizations to help you promote your event
 - Finalize the program flyer and/or press release (these documents are available in Word format on the [Conversations Admin](#) page)
 - Plan to promote your event via social media outlets

Six weeks before event

- Distribute recruitment materials
- Begin recruiting participants at your organization
- Post flyers and make phone calls to partner organizations and potential participants
- Include event information on your website and newsletter

Three weeks before event

- Begin registering participants
- Continue to follow-up with partner organizations

One week before event

- Continue to recruit and register participants
- Follow-up with registered participants by phone or email
- Plan event implementation and timeline
- Buy refreshments, nametags, and other materials

Day of event

- Set up event space (a circle or semi-circle encourages conversation)
- Set up check-in table where participants can sign in and put on a name tag
- Set up refreshments
- Greet participants and assign someone to greet and direct late-comers

After the event

- Fill out the online host site evaluation
- The stipend will arrive no more than 4 weeks after you submit the host site evaluation