



Discussion Project Fundamentals

One of the many extraordinary things about discussions is how various they are – all sorts of people gathering in all sorts of ways to discuss all sorts of things. But there are three things that every Discussion Project has in common with every other:

Discussion: Genuinely reciprocal communication enables participants to share their curiosity, insight and experience with others through listening and being listened to. Discussion, understood in this way, can happen on a variety of time-scales: in-the-moment, as on zoom or in phone conversations, but also with a time-lag, as in exchanges of writing via email or the postal service; etc.

Texts: A text can be something folks read or watch or listen to, whether they encounter the text ahead of time or during the meeting. Texts give participants a shared experience to discuss; relieve any obligation to share personal experience directly; and introduce participants to voices that are new to them and/or reflect their own concerns and insights in new and unexpected ways.

Convenience and ease: It's important to MHC that the logistics of joining and participating in a discussion be as simple as possible. Every program should be arranged with attention to the participants' actual needs – including timing, preparation, getting there, and the format of the discussions itself.

Over time, as people have told us what it was like for them to participate in one of our discussion series, three things have emerged as especially vital and transformative. These are three of the things we hope arise for Discussion Project participants – at least for some, at least sometimes:

Agency: Feeling able to do things of your own choosing, of your own volition, according to your own best lights and understanding of the situation at hand.

Connection: The felt sense of sharing something important with others – listening closely and being listened to as people something fundamental, like the urge to find words for how it feels to be alive, to share the effort of understanding.

Engagement: Putting one's own ideas and actions into play in ways that are valuable to the people around you – joining in to do what needs doing.