

The Mothers  
ARRT Book Club Study  
Leadership Discussion Notes  
Wednesday November 8, 2017  
3:15-4pm  
Morton Grove Public Library  
15 participants

The Leadership Topic was how to discuss difficult topics in book discussion books since this novel had abortion as its central conflict. Led by Greta.

- Greta began by sharing a story about her book club talking about a nonfiction book about race and a member of her group said an outright racist thing, "You can't expect the same from black kids that you expect from white." She was shocked and didn't do anything
  - I would like to think now with experience I would challenge her and also encourage others to chime in.
  - Another person said bring it back to the book-- is that what author thinks.
  - Play a little dumb, "Can you clarify that?" Again gives others a chance to chime in.
  - Did you really mean what you said?
  - Give people a chance to check themselves
- Book club is a safe space and sometimes people say things they wouldn't say anywhere else.
- As the facilitator you have to step in and challenge but also keep things respectful.
- Megan shared her Between the World and Me discussion and how the 2 non-white people were "talked to" by the others. Megan had to step in and say, ask me the questions not them.
  - Erin did this book with her group of upper middle class white and Asian women. They stayed surface. They refused to talk about the hard stuff.
  - People in both groups said "He's wrong." It's not that bad.
  - Those of us here today said we read it and thought, "I know nothing." People don't like to admit it.
- Book Discussion issues-- Do you stay away from these books?
  - Megan said that choosing the Coates book was good. It was a hard discussion. Many of the white people didn't think it was for them. But she spent the time convincing them it was. It was hard, but people appreciated it. It required Megan put in work to really facilitate. You can't just sit back and watch a discussion of more difficult topics.
  - Someone else shared-- I lead a nonfiction book club and race is in all of them even if it isn't about race, it's there.
- List of difficult subjects
  - Racism is more nuanced and people don't know they are racist, but no one wants to be racist. Everyone has some racism in them.

- Rape
- Child abuse
- Abortion
- Immigration-- This makes a lot of racism bubble up.
- Anything political. People don't want to discuss politics at book club.
- Gun control-- school shooting books?
- Jennifer did Americanah with her book club and the discussion was good, but when she tried to bring the discussion back to racism in America-- the hard stuff-- they resisted.
- Is it our job to select these books to challenge our groups to grow and learn?
  - I give them choices to vote, but yes.
  - I want to pick books that challenge people
  - Years ago I did a Mitford book that someone wanted and it was the worst discussion-- 15 variations of it was nice. That was awful.
  - More challenging books make for better discussions
- IT might help if we remind people that they are under no obligation to like the book. You can criticize it but let's be respectful to each other.
- Would you do The Mothers with your group?
  - Most said yes, but are glad we had this discussion too.
  - Wouldn't warn it is coming though
- Overall advice:
  - Try to keep challenging our patrons to read books with difficult issues
    - Don't let it stop you
  - When something is said that is questionable challenge the person. YOU have to, it is your job as the leader-- Is that how you really feel?
    - Make sure you empower other members of the group to respond
  - Don't give up! Book group is for the books people wouldn't pick up on their own.
  - Bring it back to the author. Intent?
  - Set ground rules-- "I know this book has blank issue; let's remember it is a book and it is one opinion; we are discussing our opinions. But we need to be respectful of everyone's opinions here, even if they are different from ours. THAT's why we are all here."
  - Allow anyone to call a "time out" if they are feeling uncomfortable or things are getting out of hand. Not just you the leader. Anyone.
  - Inappropriate things can come up at anytime, about anything. Bring it back to the book or encourage others respond
- You don't know what is going to set people off. Don't try to figure it out a head of time. Just be ready to deal with it.-- always.
- Practice taking control. Do it for smaller things.

#### Final Thoughts on other topics:

- Good ending for book discussion-- What is your takeaway? Allison said she starts with a rating and ends with a takeaway.