

Justice Talking

for
Illinois AmeriCorps Programs 2005-2006
A Program of the *Illinois Humanities Council*

What is *Justice Talking*?

Justice Talking is a unique discussion series which gives AmeriCorps volunteers, staff, and alumni an opportunity to reflect on their chosen form of civic engagement. *What is the meaning and content of their commitment to public service? What does it mean to choose to serve? What or whom are we serving, and why? What is social justice, and what is the character of its call?*

I think this was one of the best parts of Public Allies, a chance to sit and think without being 'trained.'

- Public Allies Volunteer, 2002-3

How does *Justice Talking* work?

Justice Talking generates challenging, open discussions about service, justice, and civic engagement. Each session is oriented around one or two brief but provocative readings. Group size stays below fifteen, when possible, and all sessions are facilitated by an instructor attentive to the questions raised by the participants as well as the readings. Whether we look at Jean-Jacques Rousseau's consideration of our obligation to others, Mary E. Wilkins' Freeman's portrait of service gone awry, or Langston Hughes' treatment of the consequences of difference, the goal of the *JT* series is clear: to think, speak, and listen carefully, with the hope that we can enhance our understanding of why we do what we do-- and thereby improve what we do.

The discussions prompted me to evaluate service/justice/etc for the first time really. I was able to find a vocabulary to describe my ideas and feelings...

- PCC Westside AmeriCorps Volunteer, 2003-4

Whom does *Justice Talking* serve?

Now entering its fifth year, *Justice Talking* has served volunteers, staff, and alumni at Public Allies, Project YES, Hope worldwide, PCC Westside AmeriCorps, City Year Chicago, Center for Urban School Improvement AmeriCorps, and Notre Dame AmeriCorps. It is also intended to function as a pilot program for other state and national AmeriCorps organizations, and to cultivate a corps of facilitators from within the partner organizations themselves.

More than anything, know that the JT program is making an impact on my life as I venture into this life after formal education. These discussions are very much welcome and I am grateful.

- Hope Worldwide AmeriCorps Volunteer, 2003-4

Where and how often does *JT* meet?

In the Chicago area, the *JT* series tends to meet for seven ninety-minute sessions over a span of a few months. For AmeriCorps organizations whose members are geographically scattered, *JT* would be most effective as part of quarterly retreats. *JT* is flexible enough – in terms of logistics and content – to meet the specific needs posed by a diverse range of organizations.

What themes and readings does the *JT* series consider?

Possible themes and readings include the following:

What is injustice?

Second Samuel, 11-12:15.

J.M. Whitfield, “America”

What is justice?

Plato’s *Republic*, four excerpted definitions.

Martin Luther King, Jr. “Letter from Birmingham Jail”

What is compassion? What is duty?

Jean Jacques Rousseau’s *Reveries of the Solitary Walker*.

Gwendolyn Brooks, “The Lovers of the Poor”

William Carlos Williams, “The Use of Force”

What is a right? What does it mean to claim a right?

Henry MacNeal Turner, “I Shall Not Beg for My Rights.”

United States Constitution, Amendments 1-10.

United Nations Declaration of Universal Human Rights.

Why do we try to do (or be) good? How do we do good?

Benjamin Franklin, excerpts from the *Autobiography*.

Dave Eggers, “Where Were We”

What others, or what sorts of others, do we care for?

Toni Morrison, “Recitatif”

J.M. Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*.

George Orwell, “Reflections on Gandhi”

Langston Hughes, “Theme for English B”

Why choose to serve?

Martin Luther King, Jr., “The Drum Major Instinct”

Mary E. Wilkins Freeman, “Luella Miller”

What should social leadership look like?

Charles Chesnutt, “The Wife of His Youth”

Note: The set of themes and readings is dynamic. As groups proceed through the series, they are encouraged to make suggestions which the *JT* series endeavors to incorporate.

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