



HOW TO START A SOCIAL JUSTICE READING GROUP IN FOUR EASY STEPS



There are [plenty of reasons](#) to start a reading group where students, educators, and families discuss issues related to social justice. The groups can help youth (and adults) process current events that may be causing anxiety or confusion. They develop important academic skills like literacy and critical thinking. They can deepen family engagement. But . . . how to begin?

Reading Together: A Guide for Families and Educators addresses this question by explaining how to start, run, and maintain multi-generational, social justice reading groups. The free guide, recently finalized after a feedback collection period, was created by [Teaching Tolerance](#), with help from the [National Education Policy Center](#). *Teaching Tolerance* magazine is a [Southern Poverty Law Center](#) publication about social justice education. In *Reading Together*, you'll find everything from evidence-based arguments for founding the groups, to suggested activities to descriptions of actual groups.

Here's how to get started!

1. Gather a planning committee. It doesn't have to be large but it should be inclusive, meaning it reflects the demographics of your school/community.
2. With the guidance of the planning committee, schedule and publicize the first meeting, considering how you might anticipate or remove barriers to participation by, for instance, providing translation or scheduling the meeting at a place and time convenient to families.
3. Create a manageable agenda that can be accomplished in the allotted meeting time, taking into account that you will need to devote air space to attendee input. You will almost certainly need more than one meeting to address six recommended planning goals:

- *Establish group standards and agreements:* Successful groups have embraced standards such as generating ideas with both adult and child input, ensuring meetings are held at a time and place convenient to as many people as possible, equitably distributing labor, and challenging members to learn and grow together.
 - *Select and assign group roles and responsibilities:* Suggested roles include assigning people to manage communications, texts, plans, schedules and school/library partnerships.
 - *Decide on a structure:* Will your group meet during class time? At homes? You may want to consider a variety of formats.
 - *Set content and literacy goals:* What do you want your participants to be able to learn and do? What topics will you address? Which genres will you include? Will you read aloud or silently? How will you support young readers?
 - *Select readings:* This is the fun part! Determine your needs, then gather and review prospective texts. Note that “texts” can also include audio, visual, and video material.
 - *Don't neglect logistics!* When and where will your group meet? Who will lead? Who will plan? What activities will be offered and how much time will each one take?
4. Jump in! Your first planning meeting is a big step toward an experience that children and adults alike have found to be enriching, engaging, and educational!

“The key decision for us,” explains Kevin Welner, co-founder of a social justice learning group serving families in Boulder, “was for the adults to merely facilitate. Once we stepped back and made more room for the children and youth to lead, the group became a wonderfully special place.”

Need more advice? The guide includes [detailed planning activities](#), and this [planning workbook](#).

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NEPC Resources on Equity and Social Justice

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