



IAM READERS GUILD

Discussion Guide

Amusing Ourselves to Death

Neil Postman

1. Postman distinguishes Orwell's vision of the future, in which totalitarian governments seize individual rights, from Huxley's, where people are inundated with distractions, medicating themselves into bliss, thereby voluntarily releasing their rights. Postman sees television's entertainment value as leading to the latter-- rights exchanged for entertainment. Which (if either) do you foresee being the case?

2. At the very beginning of the book, Postman discusses American cities that at different times have "radiated the American spirit" ... Boston, New York, and Las Vegas in the 1980's. Which city, if any, is a symbol of the American state of things today?

3. Instead of saying the "medium is the message," Postman writes, "the medium is the metaphor." He argues that each medium is appropriate for a different kind of knowledge.

Books vs. Television/ Passive vs. Active involvement.

Example: The first fifteen U.S. presidents could probably have walked down the street without being recognized by the average citizen, yet all these men would be recognized by their written words. Today the reverse is true. The names of presidents or even famous preachers, lawyers, and scientists call up visual images, typically television images, but few, if any, of their words come to mind.

How have you experienced these differences as you process information?

4. Postman writes that "form excludes content" -- that is that certain ideas ought only be transmitted using certain media and vice versa. Recalling some of Postman's examples, discuss ways this major premise has been evidenced since the book was written? News? Religion? Politics?

5. Discuss how television news has become increasingly entertainment focused since the advent of the cable news network to societies benefit/harm. Specifically, how has it changed the campaigning process?

6. On the whole, do you agree with Postman? After reading the introduction by Andrew Postman, how would you amend the work?