



# HOW TO HAVE A DISCUSSION GROUP

*Not that long ago, the local café was the gathering place for artists and thinkers, who spent hours hashing out the ideas of the day, solving the world's problems, inspiring great art, and, in some cases, changing the course of history.*

*Today most of us can't spend hours in the local café, but we can still spend a little time with others who are interested in wrestling with the deep questions of life together. A weekly discussion group is an excellent forum for doing so. Keep in mind that the guidelines below are just that: guidelines. Feel free to adapt them for your own community!*

## **Materials Needed**

1. A space to meet in with adequate room and food available. Urbanites may find this easiest in a local café; other people may wish to meet in their own homes.
2. Food and drink appropriate to the time of day.
3. Printed discussion materials, perhaps with notebooks.

## **When do we meet?**

IAM's New York discussion group has met on Wednesdays at 8:00am in an accessible Manhattan café for the past several years, which works well for those who have to be at work in the morning as well as those with more flexible schedules. You may find that the ideal meeting time for your group is before work, at lunch, after work, over coffee, or on Saturday nights, weekly, bi-weekly, or even monthly.

The only guideline is to pick a time and meet consistently. Generally, discussing the topic for an hour and then allowing for informal conversation afterward works well.

## **What should we do?**

Generally, discussion groups work best when participants come prepared to engage in conversation. That may mean reading an article or book excerpt ahead of time. When you meet, dive right into the discussion. Stay concentrated on the topic at hand, but don't be afraid of "bunny trails" – some of the most fruitful conversations are unplanned. Keep in mind that the purpose of a discussion group is not to come up with a solution, but to wrestle with the topic at hand. Cultivate an attitude of respect and safety for participants to express opposing viewpoints.

## **What should we discuss?**

The possibilities are nearly endless: a book, a topic, a film, a local art happening, an idea or concept that is in the "zeitgeist" of your community. One successful format has been picking and discussing articles from magazines and newspapers that deal with some important idea: the art world, the identity of an artist, art vs. craft, storytelling, etc. Start with a few prepared questions and see where the conversation leads.

In order to help you jump-start your discussion group, IAM has produced several short discussion group curriculums on various topics. Visit the IAM website to download materials.