

Discussion Plan: “Trying to Name What Doesn’t Change” Naomi Shihab Nye

Welcome:

- Welcome participants and share: in the next hour the poem will give us an opportunity to look at leadership in challenging times.

Expectations and Ground Rules:

- Ask participants to do their best to let go of their preconceptions about poetry and any resistance or discomfort that poetry may bring for them.
- Share with the group: As facilitator, I hope to create a space in which we can share in a deep dialogue that allows each of us to expand our perception and views on leadership for community engagement in challenging times. I would like to propose the following guidelines to help us do this:
 - ▶ Invite, share and explore our different perspectives and be heard;
 - ▶ Share their comments with the full group and resist the urge to have a side conversation/comment;
 - ▶ Resist the urge to debate or get others to see things “my way”;
 - ▶ Allow the conversation to flow amongst you all and not through me (the facilitator);
 - ▶ Silence, passion, and intensity are okay; and
 - ▶ Ask questions of one another or ask for clarification.

Opening Exercise:

- Briefly introduce the Naomi Shihab Nye’s poem, “Trying to Name What Doesn’t Change”
- Ask participants to read the poem quietly to themselves and then take one minute of quiet to reflect on it.

Group Discussion:

- Reconvene and read the poem aloud with the full group (split one stanza between two people).
- Discuss the poem, using some or all of these questions:

Teasing Out Facts:

- ▶ What image or phrase stood out for you?
- ▶ What did you hear, what’s going on in the poem?

Teasing Out Reflections:

- ▶ What felt familiar to you?
- ▶ What felt unfamiliar?

Drilling Down (Analysis or Connection):

- ▶ What’s most important in the first stanza?
 - ▶ Is the train important (to the message of the poem)?
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- ▶ Are the train tracks important?
- ▶ Who do you identify with most and why?
- ▶ Who do you identify with least and why?

Change:

- ▶ How is change described? (e.g., explode, spidery, abandoned, not shiny, w/out a train, spices, buried, crack, split, were gone, curls up, shrinking)
- ▶ What does “spidery change” (or another example) look like in your environment?
- ▶ Which type of change do you experience most often?
- ▶ Which type of change do you prefer?
- ▶ Many have described this point in time as a time of great challenge. What can you name in community engagement that is changing? What can you name that isn’t changing in community engagement?

Leadership:

- ▶ Can community engagement thrive, survive, or do something in between in this difficult time?
- ▶ What is your vision for community engagement in this time of great challenge?
- ▶ What does this mean for your leadership?

Wrap-up:

- ▶ Return to the poem and ask: How did your view/interpretation of the poem shift as a result of this discussion?

Closing Exercise:

- For individual reflection, in thought or in writing: *What image or phrase from the poem or the discussion reflects the kind of leadership you would like to bring to these challenging times?*
- Go-Round (if time remains): Invite participants to share the image or phrase and say briefly why they chose it.

This plan was used for a Civic Reflection Regional Dialogue sponsored by California State University’s Center for Community Engagement in October 2010. The dialogue was facilitated by Project on Civic Reflection trainers Cathy Avila-Linn and Kathleen Rice.