

Ideas for Personal Practice, Teaching, Dialogue and Civic Action

A Greater Democracy Day by Day is a book of quotations that integrates spiritual and practical themes and points toward a greater democracy toward which our world is moving. The quotations are organized by themes, focusing on one theme each month. Taken as a whole, the collection invites a deepening exploration into what democracy means and reasserts that every person can contribute to the good of all.

This Guide contains three sections:

- ❖ **Personal Practice** - ideas for individual engagement
- ❖ **Teaching** - ideas to engage with students - middle school to adult.
- ❖ **Dialogue and Civic Action** - ideas for civic, faith, family and professional groups that enliven meetings and enrich gatherings.

Engage!

Torn by political turmoil, buried in confusion, shrouded in sentimentality, undermined by power and greed, is democracy losing its way? What will help people understand its deeper meaning and potential? What kinds of engagement will help people face its challenges and appreciate its multi-faceted qualities? How will we experience its exquisitely personal nature? As citizens of our own countries and as global citizens, we need the capacity to counter cynicism, confusion, and the painful discrepancies between the noble principles of democracy we want to believe in and the news we hear every day.

The quest for 'democracy at its best' aims to equip citizens with more than an ability to regurgitate idealized freedoms or rules about how laws are made. The quest seeks to tap people's ability to understand and live the qualities of democracy as well as acquire the skills of citizenship. Attuning to the 'how' of democracy, as well as the 'what,' may be essential for our planetary survival.

At its core, democracy challenges people to act with courage and goodness. People can help each other engage the qualities of democracy and reach out to meet needs in society. As we do, the good things we want to do will be easier to accomplish and we will find meaning for our lives.

Section One: Ideas for Personal Practice

1. Place the book by your bedside. Read a quote a day. Sit quietly and allow the meaning to sink in and connect with your experience. If you wish, jot down your thoughts.
2. Pick a favorite quote each month and send it to people dear to you. Explain briefly why you like this quote.
3. Find a space in your home to create a poster. Let each month's themes guide you. Look for different images, words, symbols. Place favorite quotes from each month in this space and add images, photos, symbols to enhance your poster. Take a few minutes each day to appreciate this space and reflect on what it means to you.
4. Commit to living into the values expressed in quotes. As you read a quote, ask how this quote relates to your life. In what ways do you live out the value expressed? Do these words inspire new behavior? Keep track of old behaviors you are ready to leave behind and the new behaviors you are ready to begin.
5. Use the theme and quotes for each month to be a lens through which you perceive the daily news. As you take in the news, look for people or stories that exemplify these values - or not. Consider if there is anything you can do to encourage the behaviors you want to see in society?
6. When a quotation really touches you, look up more information about its author. Learn more about this person and discover other work he or she has created. If this person is still living consider sending this person a note of gratitude.
7. Ask yourself if a quote brings up an experience in your life. How does a quote connect to your own story? Recollect the story. What was happening? Who was involved? What was your role? You might want to share this story with family or friends.

Section 2: Ideas for Teaching

1. When challenging issues arise in a classroom, find a quotation that you think provides positive impact or that might inspire deeper reflection about the issue. Write the quote on the board and find time to discuss its meaning with students and how it might apply to the issue at hand.
2. If teaching history, civics, values, emotional intelligence, or comparative religion, etc. look for quotes that express important ideas about the issues you are engaging. Students can reflect and discuss in what ways a quote is significant to a topic or the questions being discussed.
3. Choose 5-6 people who are quoted in the book more than once. Prepare worksheets with their name and some of their quotations. Ask students to choose one person they admire based on these quotes. Students can research this person [who, what, where, when, significance, etc.] and share research findings with class. Students should include why they chose this person.
4. Ask students to choose two or three favorite quotes from one author. Ask students to research about the author, memorize the quotes, and pretend they are that person. They might find appropriate clothes or costume, etc. Stage a program where students personify the authors and recite quotes. Students might perform for another class.
5. Post a monthly theme and a new quote each day (or each week) in the classroom. Encourage students to add additional quotes, images or stories that are in the news that also exemplify this theme and these ideas.
6. Use the poems in this book to enhance a unit on teaching poetry.
7. Use quotes from religious and spiritual leaders to enhance a unit on comparative religions. Inquire how quotes from indigenous, religious and spiritual leaders speak to values students think are important. If students are not aware of a leader or a tradition, ask students to research this person or tradition and share reports with class.
8. Create a “web” on a classroom wall. Yarn might be used to create a web like structure. In the center place the word “democracy”. Each day, ask two or three students to choose one quote from the book that speaks to them about an important aspect of democracy. Students write or print this quote on specially cut paper and connect these quotes to the “web.” As students place

- their quote on the wall, ask them to explain to the class what it has to do with democracy. When all students have contributed a quote, ask students to reflect on the entire “democracy web” and ask what big ideas or themes emerge from viewing all of these quotes connected to the word “democracy.”
9. Find the “action stories” in the book. Ask students to analyze these stories. What impressed you in this story? What happened? What actions made a difference? What attitudes or values were present? What can we learn from each story? Would the class consider taking an action to support specific values?

 10. Invite students and fellow teachers to share ideas about how to create “a greater democracy” in your present circumstance. How might students participate in issues that are alive in the school or the community by putting into practice specific democratic values they are learning about?

Section 3: Dialogue and Civic Actions

1. Appreciative Conversations

Engage small or large groups in conversations. Ask each person to find one other person and form a pair. Each person is given 15 - 30 minutes per person (time can vary) to interview the other. The interviewer reads each question to the interviewee. Listens to the response and then reads the next questions, etc. The interviewer listens for the highlights and jots down notes. A facilitator keeps time and reminds pairs when it is time to switch roles. Pairs can use two or three interview questions. No advance preparation is necessary. People speak from personal experience and people listen with appreciative interest. It is a heart to heart conversation. When conversations are finished, group may reassemble and speak about what moved them in these conversations. Or, people might gather back together in circles of 6 or 8 and introduce their partner to their small group describing highlights from their conversation.

Question 1 In simple terms, democracy can be defined as a political system that gives people freedom to participate in making decisions that affect their lives. In theory, democracy provides a set of principles and values for people and a society to live by. Most of us experience both high points and low points in actually living the values

and practices of democracy. Reflect on the high points of democracy in your life. Please tell me about a time when you were inspired by or participated in an experience of democracy. What happened? Please tell me the story.

Question 2 Movement in society toward a 'greater democracy' is made by heroic efforts of famous people and also by a multitude of tiny pushes from people we may never hear about. Please tell me about a person who you hold in high esteem for their contribution to a greater democracy. This can be a well-known person or some one known only to you. What did this person contribute? Why do you admire him or her?

Question 3 Imagine that it is 20 years from today. A 'greater democracy' has been born in this land. Values that were once only aspired to are now actually being practiced and enjoyed by greater numbers of people than ever before. Imagine what is happening? What has changed? Imagine what part did you play in this transformation?

2. Dinner Date with Favorite Leader of Democracy

To energize a meeting or civic gathering, ask people to break from the work of the meeting. Introduce topic, favorite leaders of democracy. Enliven the spirit by reading quotes from one of your favorite leaders in the book. Ask participants to reflect on a leader of democracy (past or present) they would choose to invite to their dinner party. Go around and invite each person to name one leader of democracy and why they chose this person to be their dinner date.

3. Art - Create a Field of Dreams

Many people may feel that this is a time when democracy is far from what we want. Rather than focus on the problems, ask people to dream and to draw together. Set tables for 4-5 people. Have big sheets of paper and colored markers on each table. Instead of focusing on the problems, create a *Field of Dreams*. Draw your dream leaders. Draw ideal citizens. Draw the organizations that are doing the most to make a positive difference. Draw your dream neighborhood, city, nation or world. Draw how the Earth is being helped and healed and the transformations that are happening.

4. Dialogue - Birthday Shares

To energize a meeting, ask people look in “A Greater Democracy Day by Day” to find their birthday. Go around and ask each person to read his/her quote. Ask if it resonates in any way or has a special meaning for them.

5. Presentation - Bringing Quotes to Life

Bring “quotes to life” to spice up a meeting! Choose a monthly theme from the book that corresponds to the issue or topic of the meeting. Ask a few people to prepare by choosing a favorite quotation from the book to recite. Stage the presentation. As “curtain opens” 4-5 people with quotes to recite (or read) are mingling at the back of the “stage” as if in conversation. One by one they step up to the microphone and recite their quotation and give the name of author. “Bringing quotes to life” can happen at the beginning or as a surprising interlude to spice up a meeting..

6. Thank You Notes

Ask participants to think of one person currently in a leadership position in government to whom they would like to express gratitude. Ask each person to share name of the person they chose and why they are grateful for him/her. Hand out thank you note cards. Use internet to locate addresses. Invite participants to send a thank you note to these people. Participants may want to include a quote from the book that this person might enjoy.

7. Opening and Closing Meetings

To begin or close a meeting, read the introductory theme that corresponds to the current month. Give each participant a copy of the book (or a copy of a few pages). Ask participants to look over the selection of quotations for that month and choose one quotation that has meaning for them. Invite people to read quotes to the whole group or turn to one other person and share their quote and why they like it.

To open or close a meeting, call for a few minutes of silence. A bell might be rung to begin the silence. People can be instructed simply to center themselves. After a short time (1-5 minutes) mark the end of the silence by reading one quotation that enriches the topic of the gathering. Or, vice-versa, start the silent time by reading a quote and end with the sound of a bell.