



Vocation: “Tuesdays with Morrie” Reading and Discussion

The Bonner Community Engagement Curriculum

BWBR Description: *Bonner Curriculum workshop integrates the book “Tuesdays with Morrie” with discussion prompts to have participants consider harder questions about life. This builds introspection and dialogue.*

Overview: “Tuesdays with Morrie” is a phenomenal book about youth and wisdom, life and death, having and giving, holding on and letting go. By reading and discussing this text, each participant will have an opportunity to examine his/her life through introspective analysis. In addition, during the discussion, a sense of community develops with participants as they share their thoughts and experiences.

Category: Personal Development, Spiritual Growth, Community Development

Level: This activity is most effective with individuals in the example and expertise stage, as they will have a clearer sense of conflicting expectations and values and the struggles of time and life management.



Recommended

Bonner Sequence:

"Tuesdays with Morrie" is an excellent book and discussion to incorporate into a junior renewal retreat. As they are wrestling with how to balance the multiple demands of life, this book offers life perspective. If used in the senior year, it is recommended that it be utilized in a senior retreat in the spring semester. As "real life" is more imminent, the issues raised in the book become more real to the student. This is a good follow-up activity for the "Bridge Builder" and/or "Board of Directors" exercises.

Learning Outcomes:

- Expose participants to the story of a powerful relationship between a professor and student, a mentor and his mentee.
- Challenge participants to seek the deeper life meaning in the story.
- Encourage participants to apply those principles and life lessons to their lives.

Materials:

- "Tuesdays with Morrie" book
- Discussion Questions (a very comprehensive list of questions can be found at <http://www.randomhouse.com/features/morrie/guide.html>. Questions should be displayed via a projector, or printed out on handouts for each participant.

How to Prepare:

In preparation of this activity, the facilitator and participants will need to read the book in advance of the discussion.

Brief Outline:

The book can either be discussed in its entirety during one session or over a series of weeks by chapter or topical issues.

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| 1) Introduction | suggested time 5 minutes |
| 2) Guided Book Discussion | suggested time 40 minutes |
| 3) Report Back | suggested time 10 |
| 4) Wrap Up | suggested time 5 minutes |

Part 1) Introduction

Suggested time: 5 minutes

Read aloud:

"Maybe it was a grandparent, or a teacher, or a colleague. Someone older, patient and wise, who understood you when you were young and searching, helped you see the world as a more profound place, gave you sound advice to help you make your way through it.

For Mitch Albom, that person was Morrie Schwartz, his college professor from nearly twenty years ago.

Maybe, like Mitch, you lost track of this mentor as you made your way, and the insights faded, and the world seemed colder. Wouldn't you like to see that person again, ask the bigger questions that still haunt you, receive wisdom for your busy life today the way you once did when you were younger?

Mitch Albom had that second chance. He rediscovered Morrie in the last months of the older man's life. Knowing he was dying, Morrie visited with Mitch in his study every Tuesday, just as they used to back in college. Their rekindled relationship turned into one final "class": lessons in how to live." (from Tuesdays with Morrie web site)

As we read this story, let's imagine ourselves as Mitch and see what we learn about ourselves.

Share the expectations/guidelines established for your group.

Part 2) Guided Book Discussion

Suggested time: 40 minutes

These questions are from the "Tuesdays with Morrie" web site. You may add to, re-order, or delete as appropriate for you group. You will not be able to cover all these questions in 40 minutes, so pick 5-7 that you really like and focus on those. Have students break into small groups, and have the questions you want them to work through displayed (either on a projector, flip-board, or with handouts.)

Topical Discussion 1: Let's talk about Mitch and Morrie

1. Did your opinion about Mitch change as the book went on? In what way?
2. Who do you think got more out of their Tuesday meetings, Mitch or Morrie? In what ways? How do you think each would answer this question?
3. Do you think Mitch would have come back to Morrie's house the second time if he hadn't been semi-idled by the newspaper strike?
4. Discuss Morrie's criticisms of Mitch throughout the book. Do you think Morrie should have been tougher on him? Easier?
5. Do you think Mitch would have listened if Morrie hadn't been dying? Does impending death automatically make one's voice able to penetrate where it couldn't before?

Topical Discussion 2: Let's talk about death

6. Does this book make Morrie's death a public event? If so, how is it similar to other public deaths we've experienced as a society? How is it different?
7. Morrie referred to himself as a bridge, a person who is in between life and death, which makes him useful to others as a tool to understand both. Talk about other literary, historical, political or religious figures who have also served this purpose.
8. Most of us have read of people discussing the way they'd like to die, or, perhaps, have talked about it ourselves. One common thought is that it would be best to live a long, healthy life and then die suddenly in one's sleep. After reading this book, what do you think about that? Given a choice, would Morrie have taken that route instead of the path he traveled?
9. On "Nightline," Morrie spoke to Ted Koppel of the pain he still felt seventy years after his mother's death. Is your experience with loss similar or different? Does what you've read in this book help ease any of the pain?
10. Morrie was seventy-six years old when diagnosed with ALS. How might he have reacted if he'd contracted the disease when he was Mitch's age? Would Morrie have come to the same conclusions? Felt the same peace and acceptance? Or was his experience also a function of his age?

Topical Discussion 3: Let's talk about meaning

11. Try the "effect of silence" exercise that Mitch described. What do you learn from it?
12. Talk about the role of meaningful coincidence, synchronicity, in the book and in Mitch and Morrie's friendship.
13. Morrie told Mitch about the "tension of opposites." Talk about this as a metaphor for the book and for society.
14. Mitch made a list of topics about which he wanted Morrie's insight and clarity. In what ways would your list be the same or different?
15. Discuss the book in terms of structure, voice, and tone, paying attention to Mitch's use of flashbacks and other literary devices. How do his choices add to the meaning?
16. Are college students today missing out because they don't have the meaningful experiences that students faced in the 1960s had? Do you think Morrie thought they were?
17. Morrie said: "If you've found meaning in your life, you don't want to go back. You want to go forward." Is this true in your experience?

Topical Discussion 4: Let's talk about religion, culture, and ritual

18. Morrie believed, "You have to be strong enough to say if the culture doesn't work, don't buy it. Create your own." How can people do this? How can this book help?
19. As his visits with Morrie continued, Mitch explored some other cultures and religions and how each views death. Discuss these and others that you've studied.
20. To the very end, Mitch arrived at Morrie's house with food. Discuss the importance of this ritual.

Topical Discussion 5: Let's talk about relationships

21. Was Morrie judging people who choose not to have kids with his statement: "If you want the experience of having complete responsibility for another human

being, and to learn how to love and bond in the deepest way, then you should have children." Whether or not he was, do you agree?

22. Mitch wrote, "Perhaps this is one reason I was drawn to Morrie. He let me be where my brother would not." Discuss Mitch's relationship with Peter.

23. Discuss the practical side of Morrie's advice: "Only an open heart will allow you to float equally between everyone." How could this advice be useful the next time you're in a social or other situation where you feel out of place or uncomfortable?

24. Morrie said that in marriage, "Your values must be alike." In what ways do you agree or disagree?

25. Would Morrie's lessons have carried less weight if Mitch and Peter hadn't resumed contact by the book's end?

Part 3) Report Back

Suggested time: 10 minutes

Have a single student representative from each small group report back to the entire group regarding what was discussed, focusing on main points and take-aways.

Part 4) Wrap Up

Suggested time: 5 minutes

Spend a moment summarizing some of the main points students made while encouraging them to continue to think and reflect on the questions raised.