



THE CULTURE OF ENCOUNTER



**A CONVERSATION TOOLBOX
FOR BOOK WEEK AND BEYOND**





THE CULTURE OF ENCOUNTER

STATEMENT OF INTENT

'Culture of Encounter' is a collaborative project to raise awareness of reading as a way of beginning conversations with others, with ourselves and between organisations. It promotes the library as a Site of Conversation that nurtures empathy and understanding.

It is part of **A Year of Conversation 2019**, designed to celebrate, to initiate and to explore conversation throughout the year. www.ayearofconversation.com #AYOC2019

This Conversation Toolbox was developed for A Day of Conversation, part of Voluntary Arts Scotland's Get Creative Festival (11-18 May) and the Scottish Mental Health Arts Festival (3-26 May). A version was modified, in consultation with the Scottish Storytelling Centre, for use during the Edinburgh Festival. This version has been substantially updated for use during Book Week and Beyond.

There are many ways in which you can create a Culture of Encounter; to make every day A Day of Conversation. Some of these involve a fair bit of planning; others can be more spontaneous. Both kinds of event will lead to a sense of creativity and connectedness.

IN THE TOOLBOX FOR CULTURE OF ENCOUNTER YOU WILL FIND:









- 1. A LIST OF IDEAS FOR EVENTS**
- 2. THREE LISTS OF CONVERSATION STARTERS**
 - one FOR ADULTS
 - one FOR CHILDREN/INTER-GENERATIONAL
 - and one ESPECIALLY FOR BOOK WEEK)



THE CULTURE OF ENCOUNTER EVENT IDEAS

CULTURE OF ENCOUNTER: MAKING EVERY DAY A DAY OF CONVERSATION – TRANSFERABLE AND ADAPTABLE IDEAS FOR EVENTS

-  1. Decide to go to see a film (play, concert, sporting occasion) with a friend or with a group of friends. Have a conversation about your expectations of the film (or...) before you go. Have a conversation afterwards about whether they were met.
-  2. Meet with friends to select a World Select writers team. Maybe 11 players, like a football team has. Write the name of each player on a piece of paper and line them up in a formation of your choosing. Now select and line up a team of underdogs capable of taking them on.
-  3. Invite friends for a meal. In their water/wine glass, or just at their places, leave a folded piece of paper with something different written on each piece that you think will get them talking. Leave them to it. [Suggestions follow as part of the Toolbox.]
-  4. Hold a 'List Event'. As in number 3, have pieces of paper with two or three words written on them that will be the start of a list e.g. Eighties pop groups, Sixties dance moves, school dinners, British garden birds, genre novels. The aim is to make each of the lists as long as the group can make it – and to make room for memory as you do so.
-  5. Arrange a meeting with friends for coffee, afternoon tea, supper, breakfast, a drink: each participant has to bring someone new to the group.
-  6. On your Day of Conversation, decide to start conversations with strangers – on the top deck of a bus, in the train carriage, at the bus stop, in the park, at the library. If you run a café or some other place where people gather, you could make a sign to let people know that certain tables are Conversation Tables and place some conversation starters there. Create a Culture of Encounter!



7. Take a seat or more outside. You are in southern Europe - greet people as they pass. Have a game of chess or snakes and ladders or a glass of wine. Invite them to sit with you.



8. In your group of friends or within your organisation, have THE conversation you always feel you aren't having, but need to have. Bring the elephant into the room.



9. Take advantage of your Day of Conversation to make a difficult phone call, to have a difficult conversation.



10. Invite people, telling them each to bring something that
a. tells a story about their connection to nature or
b. is or has been important in their lives. They each tell the story of the object.



11. On your Day of Conversation, think about the ways in which the digital world has changed the Culture of Encounter. Decide not to take it out in the company of other people. Depending on your context, encourage customers, visitors, friends or colleagues to turn off their machines. Have a conversation about how that felt.



12. Hold a conversation about kindness. Show kindness.

THE LIST IS ENDLESS. GO FOR IT!

“The twenty-first century needs a new ambition, to develop not talk but conversation, which does change people. Real conversation catches fire... It involves risk. It's an adventure in which we agree to cook the world together and make it taste less bitter.”

From Conversation – How Talk Can Change Our Lives by Theodore Zeldin.

CONVERSATION STARTERS

Cut up and fold and leave in a cup or a glass or let people pick from a bowl. Let the conversation happen.

FOR ADULTS (see idea number 3 above) One for each member of a small group. Fold them up, leave them in a glass or a cup or a let people choose from a bowl, so that there is an excitement in discovery. Let the conversation happen.

My hairstyles – a journey through the years.

What keeps me awake at night.

Describe your secret tattoo (make one up) and why you got it.

The most difficult thing I've ever done.

The biggest risk I've ever taken.

The best compliment I've ever had or ever given.

What does heaven look like?

If your house was on fire – what would you save first?

My favourite time of the year, when I was a child. And now.

If you were lost in a forest, which animal would you trust?

What qualities do you look for in a friend? Have these changed?

The most influential person in my life.

Describe something that makes you feel good – a smell, a sound, a view.

What advice would you give to yourself at fifteen?

The Times They Are A-Changing. For the better or for the worse?

I couldn't live without...

FOR CHILDREN [and for inter-generational groups]

What would you do if you had three hands?

When are you grown up?

What would you change about the world?

What is your biggest worry?

If you could have a superpower, what superpower would it be?

If you could have any animal in the world as a pet, what would it be?

How would you describe a perfect day for you?

Where do people go when they die?

If happiness was a colour, what colour would it be?

Was Goldilocks a robber?

What would happen if Little Red Riding Hood had a mobile phone?

What is love?

What's the difference between children and adults?

Is everything connected?

What if the sky was green and sheep lived there?

Can kindness change the world?

CONVERSATION STARTERS

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FOR BOOK WEEK – THE CULTURE OF ENCOUNTER

The first book you can remember reading on your own.

Share your guiltiest reading secret.

The book or the film?
Or the website?

"I've started the book, so I'll finish it."

"I read books so that I can talk about books."

The Imagination is a Library. Discuss.

Share a key incident from a story you've read.

My Best-selling Memoir: [subtitled...?]

Where is creativity in your life?

Library Anxiety: Its causes and its solutions.

What themes/genres interest you most/least?

Reasons to be cheerful.

If you had to sing for your supper, what song would you sing?

"It was World Book Day for grown-ups. I decided to dress up as..."

With the world as it is, are the arts a privileged irrelevance?

The library in 2050.

"...we know that literary fiction significantly improves empathic capacity, as measured by the ability to infer emotional states from people's facial expressions...Literary fiction exercises a reader's imagination in matters of character and emotional nuance. The parallels to conversation are clear. Conversation, like literary fiction, asks for imagination and engagement. And conversation, like literary fiction, demands quiet time."

from Reclaiming Conversation by Sherry Turkle

