

General Questions for Nonfiction

Use our general nonfiction questions to get book club discussions off to a good start. They're basic but smart.

1. If your book offers a **cultural portrait**—of life in another country or region of your own country, start with questions a, b, and c ...
 - a. What **observations** are made in the book? Does the author examine economics and politics, family traditions, the arts, religious beliefs, language or food?
 - b. Does the author **criticize or admire** the culture? Does he/she wish to preserve or change the way of life? Either way, what would be risked or gained?
 - c. What is **different** from your own culture? What do you find most surprising, intriguing or difficult to understand?

2. What is the **central idea** discussed in the book? What issues or ideas does the author explore? Are they personal, sociological, global, political, economic, spiritual, medical, or scientific?

3. Do the issues **affect your life**? How so—directly, on a daily basis, or more generally? Now or sometime in the future?

4. What **evidence** does the author use to support the book's ideas? Is the evidence convincing...definitive or...speculative? Does the author depend on personal opinion, observation, and assessment? Or is the evidence factual—based on science, statistics, historical documents, or quotations from (credible) experts?

5. What kind of **language** does the author use? Is it objective and dispassionate? Or passionate and earnest? Is it polemical, inflammatory, sarcastic? Does the language help or undercut the author's premise?

6. What are the **implications** for the future? Are there long- or short-term consequences to the issues raised in the book? Are they positive or negative...affirming or frightening?

7. What **solutions** does the author propose? Who would implement those solutions? How probable is success?

8. How **controversial** are the issues raised in the book? Who is aligned on which sides of the issues? Where do you fall in that line-up?

9. Talk about **specific passages** that struck you as significant—or interesting, profound, amusing, illuminating, disturbing, sad...? What was memorable?

10. What have you **learned** after reading this book? Has it broadened your perspective about a difficult issue—personal or societal? Has it introduced you to a culture in another country...or an ethnic or regional culture in your own country?

(Questions by LitLovers. Please feel free to use them, online or off, with attribution. Thanks.)