

yes! magazine

Published by
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Building a Just and Sustainable World

DISCUSSION GUIDE | ISSUE 44 | LIBERATE YOUR SPACE

YES! Discussion Guides are designed to help you explore your own experiences, opinions, and commitments as they relate to material found in YES! magazine. Use them in group discussions, classrooms, or study circles. We believe that when people discuss with mutual respect and caring the critical issues of our time, they create a powerful avenue for constructive social change.

You can find the articles mentioned below on our website at www.yesmagazine.org. You are welcome to download and photocopy them free of charge. If you'd like to purchase multiple copies of YES! or subscriptions for your class or group, please phone 800/937-4451 and ask for the Discussion Group Discount.



Margit Christenson and Brooke Jarvis

Let's face it—for many of us, the world we live in isn't exactly the one we'd pick. And the world we need and want does not coincide with what those in power have in mind.

This issue of YES! introduces us to people who are done waiting for a leader to come along; who are recognizing their own power to liberate the spaces where they live, work, learn, and create. Their stories challenge us all to stop waiting—to take our world into our own hands.

This discussion guide focuses on the following articles:

- Live Free: Do It Yourself by Sarah van Gelder and Doug Pibel
- Reclaiming Our Freedom to Learn by Gustavo Esteva
- People Power by Aimee Allison and David Solnit

It also includes “Take Action” ideas for each article and a contract you can make with yourself.

Live Free: Do It Yourself

“You must be the change you want to see in the world.” Gandhi's famous words urge us to take action in our world, rather than waiting for governments to make change for us. Sarah van Gelder and Doug Pibel look at what happens when we step out of a system that leaves us dissatisfied, hopeless and tired. They propose an unusual tool for facing the dire challenges of this world: Turn your back on them. And as you look the other way, as you slip out of the path mapped out for us by advertisers, employers, teachers, you can discover and create spaces that build and support a more livable world.

- What are some societal norms that keep you from living free? What hurdles or perceptions keep you from breaking free of them? What would it cost to try? What is at stake?

- Can you think of people you know who have made change in this spirit? Why did they act without waiting or asking for the assistance or permission of government or other authorities? Were they successful? What were the reactions of observers or others involved?

Take action

Dip your toe in and practice your freedom every day, at least once. Here are some ideas to start with:

The age of automation is making interactions with strangers a rarity. Liberate your voice by using it with the people around you in the world. Strike up conversations on public transit, in the elevator, while waiting in line. Skip the computerized option and talk to a person. Go to the bookstore rather than shopping online. Walk past the ATM and actually go inside the bank. Resist printing out directions before you leave for a trip; instead, ask a local for directions once you've gotten good and lost.

Tap into the potential offered by a true community. There are countless ways to break down the barriers between you and your neighbors. Make your yard more liveable, and spend more time outside. Organize a potluck, then see if neighbors want to hold community events more often. Build or revitalize a public space in the area—a park or a public garden, for example. See what resources can be shared—start a carpool, a tool share, plant swap, or a babysitting co-op. Research co-housing practices that can be incorporated into your neighborhood.

Reclaiming Our Freedom to Learn

Does education provide us with the skills and knowledge we need to thrive in our communities, or is it an increasingly impersonal institution losing its practical foundation? Universidad de la Tierra (Unitierra) in Oaxaca, Mexico broke free of constraining definitions to experiment with a new form of education. Based on the model of apprenticeships, Unitierra represents an educational ethic that nurtures passion for learning while protecting the needs of the community.

- Gustavo Esteva writes that “The people in the villages

knew very well that school prevents their children from learning what they need to know to continue living in their communities, contributing to the common well-being and that of their soils, their places.” What is your reaction to this claim? What is the effect on communities when children learn skills and definitions of success that take them away from home?

- What messages do current educational systems in your community teach to students? What do they learn about success? Individualism? Values?

- Esteva describes Unitierra’s practice of playfully giving out diplomas. In which ways do diplomas and grading systems value some forms of knowledge but not others? What can you do to honor the people you know who share their skills and wisdom?

Take action

Make a list of the skills you have that children in your community might want to learn. Are there venues, such as workshops or mentorships, where you could share your skills with your own “apprentices”?

People Power

Aimee Allison and David Solnit examine what it takes to go to war. Recruiting, corporate support, and media beating the war drums are pillars without which the occupation of Iraq and potential future invasions would become impossible. Rather than trying to convince the current government that war is wrong, their strategy focuses on the enablers of war.

- Describe the strengths and weaknesses of some of the pillars of war: recruitment, media, corporate involvement in the war, and other factors that make a war possible.

- What are the leverage points where you or your organization could have an impact? Where do you see potential allies?

Take action

How much time do you have individually and as a group this month to help stop the war? List some concrete things you can do right now that would weaken or take away a pillar of the war. Decide which one you deem



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most effective and go. (In “The Art of Raising a Ruckus,” Jen Angel describes ways to make this people power more visible. You can draw on her experiences when planning your actions.)

Feel Free

As we were working on this issue, we asked our readers when they felt most free. The answers varied: in the wilderness, in meaningful conversation, bicycling home with food from the farmers market, working the soil—but they had one thing in common: their own actions, not someone else’s, made people feel free.

That is great news, because it means that freedom is accessible to all of us. But it also means that you need to do it yourself.

Try this trick: Take the Walk-Out Challenge and commit to a certain change for one month. Involve a friend who will act as a support to you in your walk-out. Pay attention to your feelings about this shift in your routine at the beginning of the month versus at the end. You can always go back to your old ways, or maybe the challenge will spur you to make this change permanent.

Our *Handy How-To Guide* can help you get started. Begin with something small, then move on to new and bigger changes. Watch these actions blossom until you’ve created the world you want.

Walk Out Contract

I commit to walking out from

_____ (insert thing you want to break free from)

for the month of _____.

I will check in with my walk-out support once a week and at the end of the month.

Name and Date _____

Walk-out Support Name and Date _____

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