



Discussion Guide

for *The Revolution Where You Live*



DISCUSSION GUIDE

*The Revolution Where You Live:
Stories from a 12,000 Mile Journey Through a New America*
by Sarah van Gelder

How to Use This Discussion Guide

Welcome to this discussion guide on the Revolution Where You Live. The guide is designed to spur conversation about the stories in the book as they relate to your experience and your community. It includes eight sections. You can choose to discuss any or all of them depending on which seem most relevant to you in the place you call home.

Although it's not the norm for book groups, consider starting with "Your Story." This will help you get to know each other better and ground the conversation in your own experiences of change.

Then decide which of the following sections you want to discuss more deeply. There is optional homework that goes with some sections.

Note: Author Sarah van Gelder is interested in hearing from you. See note at the end.

Sections of the guide

- 1) Your story
- 2) Your community
- 3) Being an ally
- 4) Your environment
- 5) Fighting isolation
- 6) The economy
- 7) Racism
- 8) Next steps

Your story

The Revolution Where You Live tells stories of people making a difference in their communities, but it starts with the author telling her own story of how she became interested in being a change-maker (page 1-15).

Take a few minutes in silence to think about one or two pivotal events or moments when you realized that you had a passion for making change. Take notes if that is helpful.

- Then form into pairs (preferably with someone you don't already know well) and share your story with your partner. Take about five minutes to tell your story. At the end of five minutes, the facilitator can ring a bell or sound a timer, and then switch to the other person to hear their story. Make sure each person's story is heard.
- Gather together with the larger group. If you are moved, share a story about yourself or (with their permission) your partner.
- What did you notice about the sources of your own interest in your community? What did you learn about what it means to you to be a change-maker? Did anything you heard change your ideas about how you want to be involved in your community?

Your community

In the book (page 10), a tribal elder, Ted George, talks about the importance of lifting up those who are making the community stronger, rather than dwelling only on a community's problems or deficiencies. And the book contains many such stories.

Give an example or two from your community of a project or group that has been making things better.

- What difference have they made? What have they accomplished?
- Name two or three things about how they've worked that you especially appreciate. What have you noticed that you admire? Without dwelling on it, are there things you wish had been done differently?
- Has the work of your local change makers been celebrated by the larger community and have the leaders been thanked? In what way?
- Name two or three things that people in the book did that surprised you, or that you especially appreciated.

Being an ally

Several stories from the book include people working together across divides. The ranchers and the Native people in southeast Montana, for example (see page 27). The unions and the faith

community in Cincinnati (see page 99). Latino immigrants and people of European descent in Moab, Utah (see page 174).

- What difference does it make when people connect across barriers of this sort? Draw examples from your own experience or from stories in the book.
- Do you see these sorts of alliances happening in your community?
- What divides exist in your community?
- What gets in the way of people reaching out, and what would it take to overcome those barriers?
- Under what circumstances, if any, could they cross those barriers?

Your environment

The Revolution Where You Live focuses on people learning about their local ecosystem and making a commitment to protect it, and it explores the political clout and insights that come from those deep relationships.

- What particular features of your local environment help define your local culture and way of life? Rivers or bays? Mountain ranges? Farming? Growing season? Wildlife?
- What difference do these features make to your life?
- Who speaks up for the protection of the natural world where you live?
- Is it thriving?
- What is needed to protect it?

There were several examples in the book of people taking action to protect their local environment that also benefited the global climate — for example, the Turtle Mountain Chippewa Tribe’s ban on fracking (page 53) or the energy-efficiency cooperative in Cincinnati (page 94).

- Are there efforts to protect the environment in your community that also contribute to climate stability? Or in other ways protect the regional or global environment?

Isolation

Social isolation is as toxic as cigarette smoking to our health; it’s a big contributor to depression and disempowerment.

- Who in your community is isolated?
- What sorts of spaces are available for people to gather informally in your community?
- What are some simple ways to reduce isolation that might work where you live? (See 101 Ways on page 190 for some ideas).

The economy

The Revolution Where You Live contains stories of people working to create cooperatives and in other ways to offer an ownership stake to people left out of the current economy. On page 196, and in numbers 62 through 82 in *101 Ways to Reclaim Local Power*, you can find ideas about how to build a local economy.

- What assets does your community have to build on? Name at least 10. Consider natural resources, cultural and historic resources, social capital (for example, relationships of trust among people), business, government, and nonprofit leadership, and populations who have time and willingness to contribute. Consider especially young people, retired people, unemployed folks, and others whose potential is often overlooked.
- *101 Ways to Reclaim Local Power* (page 196) includes ways to build a local economy via informal exchanges and sharing, as well as ideas for building formal structures, like cooperatives.
 - Which, if any, are you drawn to?
 - Which could improve the quality of life in your community in the short term? In the long term?

In an increasingly unequal society, renters, businesses, and home buyers can get priced out of their neighborhoods, especially as the community is revitalizing and as arts, local food, and gathering places begin to proliferate.

- Do you see that happening in your community?
- What contributes to displacement, and what alleviates it where you live?

Racism

Each community has its history of trauma and exclusion related to race, religion, ethnic background and/or nationality. Do some research if necessary to find out about your local history.

- What is your community's history regarding the original people of the land? Who lived there first, and, if they are no longer there, what happened to them?
- What if any relationship did your community have with the institution of slavery, as owners, traders, or in other ways supporting slavery? Who profited? What happened during the post-Civil War reconstruction? The Jim Crow era? How did slavery and its aftermath shape local culture?
- How do issues of race, immigration status, religion, and ethnicity play out where you live? Who is "invisible"? Who is not represented in government or business leadership? Are some groups more likely to be impoverished than others? What history made that so?

- Consider taking the implicit bias test. If you are comfortable doing so, consider sharing the results during a discussion session.
<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html>
- On page 190, *101 Ways to Reclaim Local Power* begins with 23 ways to “Build Bridges.” Would any of those ways be appropriate for your community?

Next steps

Each person, choose one or two items from the chapter, *101 Ways to Reclaim Local Power*, that could be a positive next step for your community.

- Discuss how each of your choices might play out in your community.
- Is there one or more that generates excitement? Or is there a variation on an item in the list, or something even better than the items included?
- Are you ready to move ahead with one or more?

We’d love to hear about your experiences with this guide! Contact us at info@RevolutionWhereYouLive.org to share what comes out of your discussions. If you would like Sarah to meet with your group via phone or Skype, you can reach her via this email or on her website <https://revolutionwhereyoulive.org/about-sarahvangelder/contact-sarah/>

Find more resources on local power at *YES! Magazine*, www.yesmagazine.org, where you can also follow Sarah’s column.

Sarah van Gelder, author of *The Revolution Where You Live*, is co-founder and columnist for *YES! Magazine*, a frequent guest on the media, and a public speaker on topics of community empowerment, the new economy, solutions to the climate crisis, overcoming racism, and other themes. She is currently launching an online training project for teaching the skills of successful community change – learn more here: <https://revolutionwhereyoulive.org/local-power-trainings/>

Discussion Guide courtesy of RevolutionWhereYouLive.org and *YES! Magazine*.