

HIGHER EDUCATION IN PRISON READING PROJECT

Angela Davis's
Freedom Is a Constant Struggle

July — August 2020



Summary

Here are some big-picture questions you and your organization might use to discuss Angela Davis's *Freedom is a Constant Struggle*. As your conversations evolve, and other questions and talking points arise, why not take some time to share them with the broader community? Other participants in the project will be interested in the topics your group discussed, the questions that proved most generative to your conversations, and/or hearing about anything else that came up in your discussion. Email us at alliance@higheredinprison.org if you want to engage via email (just remember to put "HEP Reading Project" in your subject line). And if you're on Twitter, you'll want to join us (@AllianceforHEP) on Tuesdays at 9 am PT/12 pm ET. Please use the hashtag #HEPReadingProject when you do!

Possible Icebreaker Questions to Start the Conversation

There are many good ways to start a conversation about books, but we believe strongly that everyone in the room has expertise to share. We recommend these questions for groups having their first book discussions, or organizations looking for a team building or "get to know you" exercise.

TIP: Consider giving participants a few minutes to write or think before you ask them to respond.

- ▶ What books would you say have been essential to the expertise you have in life?
- ▶ Is there a book that you would credit with changing your life? How did it do so?
- ▶ What books would you say made you the person you are today?¹

¹ The Mellon Foundation (the largest humanities philanthropy in the United States) recently announced that it was adjusting its mission to better support programs with a social justice mission. Part of that project will involve nearly \$5.3 million dollars in donations of book collections to prison libraries around the country. These are the questions (or inspired by the questions) that project leads Reginald Dwayne Betts and Elizabeth Hinton will be using when they ask experts to make suggestions for the series, and we liked them for their icebreaker possibilities for this project, too. For more information, see Julia Jacobs, "With Books and New Focus, Mellon Foundation to Foster Social Equity," *New York Times*, June 30, 2020. Last Accessed July 2, 2020: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/30/arts/mellon-foundation-elizabeth-alexander.html>.

Angela Davis, *Freedom is a Constant Struggle*

Here are a few open-ended questions we recommend for kickstarting your conversation or thinking. The intent with these questions is to keep things intentionally broad; each will invite readers to think across chapters and sections of the book as a whole, and responses might well build from several themes and discussions Davis touches on at various points. **BUT!** If you'd like more specific questions relative to the chapters each week, we'll be posting some to our Twitter account each Tuesday. By logging on and following our feed (@AllianceforHEP), you can also discuss specific questions relative to each chapter in real-time as well.

For these more general and open-ended questions, you might want to (for example) allow people to partner up and discuss their ideas in small groups before reporting back. Remember we'll also be engaging these AND our chapter-specific questions week-to-week (Tuesdays) on our Twitter account (@AllianceforHEP). Please join us!

- ▶ According to Davis, what is change? How has it been accomplished in the past? How might it be accomplished in the future? Why is change necessary?
- ▶ Discuss some of Davis's ideas on intersectionality and their importance for the field of higher education in prison.
- ▶ Is prison abolition possible, according to Davis? If so, how can prison abolition be achieved? By what means? By whom?
- ▶ What is a "transnational solidarity?" What implications does the idea have for the field of higher education in prison?
- ▶ Americans often think of "freedom" in personal, individualistic, and even heroic terms—Davis critiques these tendencies as components of an "insidious capitalist individualism." What vision of freedom does she offer as an alternative? How and in what ways, do you see this vision of freedom being realized?