



# The Case for Reading Together



To see what people are reading in your state, visit [statehumanities.org](http://statehumanities.org).

## “Read and discuss.”

These words might not appear groundbreaking or revolutionary, but they form the foundation for some of the oldest and most widely adopted humanities programs in the country. Group reading programs are popular and effective—they’ve operated in all **fifty states, five territories, and the District of Columbia**. They’re easy to adapt to new locations and circumstances, and they can be tailored to participants’ backgrounds and knowledge levels. They are inexpensive to facilitate and immensely durable—state councils have run reading groups in backwoods camps, while paddling canoes down a river, in the living room of a halfway house, and deep within the bowels of a medical history museum.



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Reading programs serve all ages—from **Missouri’s** “Read from the Start” initiative, which encourages parents to foster a love of reading in their children, to Humanities **Texas’s** “Veterans’ Voices,” which spurs veterans, military families, and the public to read and reflect on combat, civic responsibility, and the return to civilian life. Reading programs are versatile and capable of addressing an incredible range of needs, like in **Maine**, where social workers, clergy, law enforcement, hospice workers and many others meet at Partners in Peace to read, discuss, and better their response to domestic violence and its effect on their community. These programs appeal to remarkably diverse groups as demonstrated by the kaleidoscope of people who have embraced them, including doctors, nurses, school children, veterans, native peoples, teachers, prisoners, and more.

### **CASE IN POINT**

The **Florida Humanities Council’s** “Reading and Discussion” program unfolds over six sessions and offers participants the chance to engage with books like *Standing Down: From Warrior to Civilian* and *Citizen: An American Lyric*—both texts that challenge individuals to broaden their perspectives and find common ground.



HUMANITIES TENNESSEE  
The Southern Festival of Books  
Tennessee Photographs



**Reading together  
tightens social bonds and  
builds strong communities**

Reading together fulfills a basic need and widespread desire that cuts across education, income, gender, and life experiences. People read to expand their world, to be imaginatively transported, and to gain pleasure and knowledge. People read *together* to learn about their peers and coworkers, build literacy, improve self-expression, and bolster communication skills. Reading together tightens social bonds and builds strong communities—it helps doctors learn about the lives of their patients, helps

teenagers build confidence and contribute to their communities, and helps seniors forge friendships across generations. Reading and discussing may not appear revolutionary, but they have consistently produced revolutionary results, and their broad applicability and diverse benefits make a strong case for the value of reading together.

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