

UNITED AMERICA

WAYNE BAKER

Images of America Discussion Guide

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Read The Spirit Books



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UnitedAmericaBook.com

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A United America **discussion guide**

Introductory “Images of America” discussion activity to be done prior to reading or early in reading *United America* by Dr. Wayne Baker.

This easy-to-use discussion guide describes a one-session exercise (about 1 hour) that enables participants to connect with one another and talk about their common beliefs and feelings when they consider American values.

- Tested and proven in various settings
- Stimulates meaningful discussion in a safe way
- Ideal for group discussions in classroom sections
- Used as an ice-breaker or anytime during a course
- Excellent introduction to the 10 core values described in *United America*.

Preparation

Print on 8 1/2" x 11" paper a variety of the 100+ photos from the Gallery of American Images available on UnitedAmericaBook.com. These images are free for your use. (Additional images are available at: <http://commons.wikimedia.org>.) You will need approximately 10 - 12 different images for each small group. NOTE: Printing photos on paper frees you from having to find digital means of displaying the images, but you could load them onto iPads, laptops or other handheld devices for each group to view. It is important for the groups to carefully look at the images as they talk, so it is not effective to ask participants to remember the images from a one-time projection on a big screen.

Prepare one index card for each small group with these questions on each card. You could also write these questions on a board or present as a PowerPoint slide.

1. Which image sparks the deepest feelings about America? Why?
2. What emotions does the image represent?
3. What memories do you associate with this image?

Small Group Discussion Activity

Divide your class into small groups of three to six people. Having the participants “number off” around the room will facilitate separating friends or previous acquaintances into different small groups and set the stage for an honest discussion of values.

Have each group display the images of America where everyone can see them, either on the floor within a circle of chairs or in the center of a table. Have each group spend some time looking carefully at the images. Some are quite famous; some might be new to some students. Randomly choose one student in each group and hand them the question index card with the discussion questions. Ask them to lead the small group discussion by using the prepared questions.

Encourage the students to discuss their various reactions. The emotions discussed might range from pride to worry, humor to sadness. A chosen image might trigger a common national memory, or it might trigger a personal memory from a student’s own life. As the discussion starts to wane, ask each group to choose one student who will talk about the image that their group felt sparked the deepest feelings and why. (If a group has not reached consensus, ask one person to present and describe the image that is the most meaningful to him or her.)

Reassemble the whole group for class discussion. Give the student selected from each group a few minutes to present and talk about the image. Depending on the amount of time you have, you can be flexible with the time each person has to speak.

Wrap Up

As each group reports their findings back to the larger group, take note when they refer to any of the Ten Core Values, which are discussed in detail in *United America*.

In a larger group you will find that students choose a wide variety of images that spark deep feelings about America. Examples from previous groups include a man who spoke emotionally about the Google logo, connecting Google's helpful global interface with the same spirit that sent America into World War II and into post-WWII rebuilding of Europe. "We've always tried to help the world and we're still doing it," he said. You may agree or disagree with this man's assessment, but he spoke with obvious emotion about his pride in America.

Another example is a group that included a young immigrant from Somalia who chose a century-old photograph of a young girl working in a textile-manufacturing factory. This recent immigrant from Africa said that he immediately felt a bond with that girl who, so long ago, was trying hard to make a fresh start in America. In fact, it is unclear whether the girl in that classic photograph was a recent immigrant, but participants in this exercise often draw their own narratives from the photos they are viewing.

In one group, a student about to enter college chose a photo of a classic American car and described how proud he was of family members who worked in the heyday of the domestic auto industry. The student added that he wanted to become an engineer, but wondered if there would be a job for him in that industry that had supported his family.

Reports from classes that have used this exercise show that many issues, hopes and concerns surface very quickly, meeting the goal of helping to build student excitement for the class and to form connections with other students as these stories are shared.

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AMERICA'S TEN CORE VALUES

1 Respect for others: Acceptance and appreciation of people of different racial, ethnic and religious groups

2 Symbolic patriotism: An emotional connection to country; feeling good when seeing the American flag or hearing the national anthem

3 Freedom: Having the right to participate in politics and elections; expression of unpopular ideas without fearing for one's safety

4 Security: Keeping the nation safe and secure from external and internal threats

5 Self-reliance & individualism: Reliance on oneself; independence; emphasis on individual strengths and accomplishments

6 Equal opportunity: Equal access to jobs, education, voting, etc. regardless of age, gender, race, or other factors; a level playing field

7 Getting ahead: Individual achievement, status, and success

8 Pursuit of happiness: Enjoyment, leisure, pleasure

9 Justice & fairness: All the world's people should live in harmony; justice and fairness for all, even people we don't know

10 Critical patriotism: Tough love of country; criticism of America stems from love of country and desire for improvement

This exercise serves to introduce the topic of 10 shared American core values as discussed in *United America*. We hope that you and your students find it interesting, sometimes surprising and always uniting. We invite you to email us at OurValuesProject@gmail.com to share your classroom experiences with this activity. If you find other free-to-share online images that should be included in our recommended collection of images, please send them to the address above.

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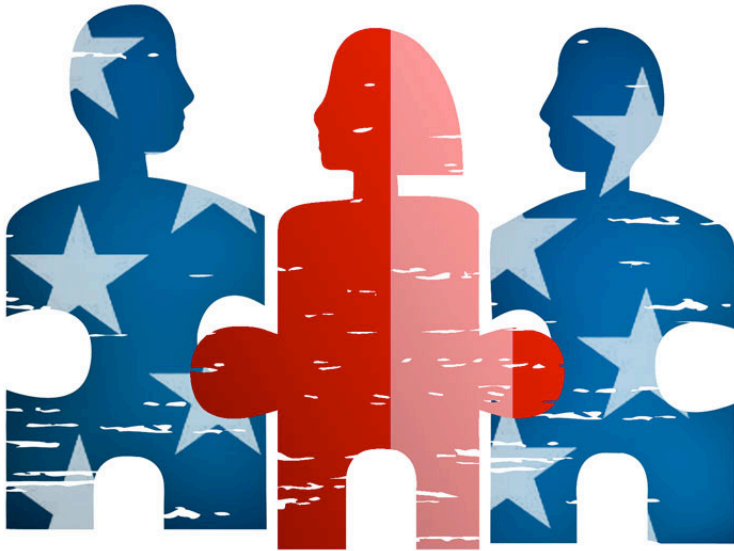
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UNITED AMERICA

The surprising truth about American values,
American identity and the 10 beliefs that a large
majority of Americans hold dear

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Preface by Brian McLaren

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