

DARE TO SPEAK

READING GROUP GUIDE

by SUZANNE NOSSEL

1. What was your stance on freedom of speech prior to reading *Dare to Speak*? Have your views on free speech changed after reading the book? Why or why not?
2. Can you think of a time when you have been hesitant to voice an opinion, disagree with someone or speak out on a subject for fear of how others will respond? Did the book change how you look back on this moment? Would you handle it differently if you had it to do again?
3. Nossel states, “Although speech can cause genuine harm, it is important not to overstate such harms or use them as an excuse to shut down disfavored speech.” What are some examples in the news or in current events of free speech being portrayed as harmful? How do we determine when free speech is genuinely harmful versus when the harms of speech are being overstated? Are some people too sensitive to the impact of speech, and what can be done to address that?
4. *Dare to Speak* describes several instances of protests on college campuses against invited speakers. Do you think colleges should continue to invite polarizing speakers to speak at their campuses? Are there benefits to having polarizing speakers speak at college campuses? When a speaker is invited by an academic department or student group and protests result, should the administration consider rescinding the invitation?
5. Do all of us enjoy an equal right to free speech in practice? What factors in society can hold people back from expressing themselves? Is there an obligation to do anything about or for people and groups that may have trouble speaking up for themselves?
6. Throughout the book, Nossel describes a number of speech controversies. Choose one of these controversies and discuss its impact on free speech.
7. Nossel argues that protestors should not silence opposing speakers— shouting them down or heckling to the point where they cannot be heard. Do you agree? Why or why not? What if the speaker is spewing bigoted invective?
8. Does the First Amendment go too far in protecting even harmful kinds of speech, like hateful expression, bullying and deliberate falsehoods? Would it be a good idea to expand the power of government to ban and punish certain types of speech?
9. Nossel states that “To better guarantee that an evolving Internet continues to respect freedom of speech, Internet companies and civil society organizations should come together to establish a robust global system for content defense.” Do you agree with the idea that social media companies need to do more to address the concerns of users who believe that their speech has been unjustifiably suppressed on their platforms?
10. From guidelines on how to be a conscientious speaker to advice on how apologize, Nossel provides readers with guidelines for speaking up without hindering free speech. Do you plan to apply any of these guidelines to the way that you voice your thoughts, or to the way that you listen to the voices of others? Why or why not?