



Untold Stories

Reading Group
Guide



Dear Reader,

Thank you for signing up to host a conversation about *Untold Stories*! We are excited for you to open your heart and mind to engage others around this important book. Our hope is that this discussion guide will support your reading circle as you explore different reproductive experiences and foster connection among friends, family, and community.

Make sure to go through the entire guide because it has many helpful resources, including:

- 1) Frequently asked questions
- 2) Tips on starting a reading circle
- 3) Tips on leading a book discussion
- 4) Sample emails to recruit readers

The resources in this guide are merely suggestions to support you in hosting a reading circle. Please add your personal touch to build an open and welcoming space.

Also, keep in touch! Email us at any time at untoldstories@seachangeprogram.org to share feedback, questions, advice, ideas, and whatever else you like. We want to hear from you!

Finally, take your time reading and discussing the book. The stories are as tender and powerful as they are funny and thought provoking. They are deeply personal and will spark questions and emotions. This is natural, and it is the first step in engaging with the stories and with other readers. We hope the book inspires you and others to engage in your own sharing and storytelling.

Sincerely,

Grace and everyone at the Untold Stories Project



Frequently Asked Questions

What is the Untold Stories Project?

The Untold Stories Project, created by the Sea Change Program, works to increase awareness and connection around reproductive experiences we rarely discuss, like abortion, adoption, single parenting, infertility, being transgender or intersex, and queer parenting. When we began this project in 2014, we wanted:

- To find storytellers who were willing to invite us into their lives and experiences.
- To gather stories that sparked our interest.
- To share these stories in a book that people could read and discuss together.
- To create an opportunity for anyone to have intimate and curious discussions about these reproductive experiences.
- For people with these common but hidden experiences to feel seen and heard.

We are proud to say that we have achieved each of these goals in our work so far. We are excited to move forward and start new conversations with the help of hosts like you.

Why create a book with so many different reproductive experiences and perspectives?

We decided to publish a new collection of stories that were diverse across age, race, sexuality, gender, and reproductive experience. Most of the stories were written by everyday people who had not previously published their writing. Marginalized voices are often not featured prominently in published works, so we wanted to provide a space for people—especially young people, immigrants, and queer parents—to tell their stories.

How did you pick the stories?

Sea Change put out a national call for stories in early 2014 and got an overwhelming number of personal and thought-provoking stories. Our staff and advisory board chose stories based on their clarity, length, diversity, unique perspective, and capacity to help readers reflect on their own experiences and assumptions.

Who is this book for?

This book is for anyone interested in expanding their understanding of reproductive issues. It offers an opportunity to reflect on different decisions and circumstances that many people face, and shares a wide range of experiences with which you might find a personal connection. This book will educate, provoke, and inspire.

Why reading circles?

Ultimately, the project's impact is about the people who read and discuss these stories. Reading circles are spaces where people gather together to read and to share their perspectives. Research shows that a safe and intimate environment to discuss untold stories about reproduction allows people to talk about things that they haven't previously shared. This increases connection and empathy among group members.

What is the difference between a reading circle and a book club?

We define a book club as a group of people that meets regularly to discuss what they're reading, choosing a new book each time. We define a reading circle as a group that forms to read one book in particular. You may already be part of a book club and decide to propose this book to your group. Or you may decide to start a reading circle around this book. You might hold just one discussion about the book, or plan several to continue

the conversation; you could read and discuss all the stories together, or pick just a few at first. The plan can be adapted for your group's needs and interests.

I am not in a book club. How do I start a reading circle for this book?

Later in this discussion guide, you will find *Tips on Starting a Reading Circle*, plus sample invitation materials. We hope these tools help you create a reading circle, invite members, host the meeting, and discuss the book. If you need further support, please email us at untoldstories@seachangeprogram.org.

What if I've never led a book discussion before?

Not to worry—later in this guide you'll find information on how to lead a book discussion and engage others in the conversation. If you want further support after reading *Tips on Leading a Book Discussion*, feel free to email us at untoldstories@seachangeprogram.org.

What do I do after I read the book?

In addition to hosting a reading circle, we hope you will:

- Buy the book for a friend or family member, or lend them your copy.
- Join us on Facebook and Twitter to share your experience of the book. Use the hashtag #UntoldStories and tweet us @SeaChangeProg.
- Help us spread the word about the project—talk about it with people you know, post about it online...feel free to get creative!
- Be a leader in increasing awareness of how reproductive stigma impacts our lives and community.

What do I do after I host a reading circle and discussion of the book?

After you hold a discussion there are several things you can do:

- Encourage members of your group to host a new group with new participants.
- Encourage other friends and family to host a reading circle of their own.
- Send us an email to tell us about your discussion, or ask to schedule a time to share your experience by phone.

If you get inspired and have other ideas about how to continue the conversation, or want to engage in other parts of the project, we'd love to hear from you. Email us at untoldstories@seachangeprogram.org.

Tips on Starting a Reading Circle

Make your list of invitees

Make a list of the people in your networks, friend circles, and neighborhood who would commit to reading a book or who would be interested in a living room conversation. Ideally, choose people who have met each other at least once before, so that everyone can feel comfortable talking and sharing. If this is a new reading circle, invite twice as many people as you hope to host, since it is likely that not everyone will be available to participate.

Keep in mind that having a group of 6-10 people for the discussion is ideal. If well over 10 people want to participate (say, 15-20) consider having more than one conversation, or forming two groups and asking a friend to host one of them. Share this tip sheet with the new host or, better yet, have them email us to get their own Toolkit.

Pick a date and time

We recommend reserving at least two hours to have a satisfying discussion. You can pick a date and time yourself, or consult the group. Free scheduling tools like doodle.com can help the group find the best date and time together. It's best to choose options that are several weeks away, so people can commit to the meeting and have time to read the book.

Send an invitation

Once you pick the date and time, send an invitation four weeks in advance, and make sure the invitation includes the date, time, location, and driving and/or transit directions. Also, ask if anyone has pet or food allergies that you should be aware of. You can send invitations via email, or use a free invitation website such as evite.com or paperlesspost.com. Page 8 of this guide includes sample text for invitations.

What if I have books to give out to the group?

Make sure your email announces a window of time when people can pick up their books from you, and choose a discussion date that allows enough time for people to get and read the books.

Send weekly reminder emails

People are busy and often forget that things are happening unless you remind them regularly. Send a reminder email once or twice before the event with the date, time, location and directions. Perhaps include a favorite quote or a question you want the group to reflect on as they read. You can find sample reminder emails in this guide.

Decide on a set of stories to discuss (or all of them)

Some groups are up for reading the whole book. Other groups may want to select a smaller set of stories—if you do, we suggest choosing some stories that are different from your own experiences or awareness. They will stimulate more questions and reflection and fuel a richer discussion. Also, once people have their books you can ask them to tell you which story they most want to discuss with the group. Either way, let everyone know which stories have been chosen for discussion so they can prepare.

Meeting space

Choose a meeting space that is welcoming and comfortable, such as a living room with comfy chairs and couches. A community center that has a room with comfortable seats where you can close the door is great, too. When people feel relaxed and at ease, it naturally encourages a more open and curious conversation.

Food

Having food available can help create an atmosphere of sharing and caring. Knowing that food will be provided also increases people's investment in coming to the discussion. Decide ahead of time whether there will be snacks or a meal. You can provide these yourself, or you can ask everyone to contribute something (like in a potluck) to enhance the sense of community and sharing.

Tips on Leading a Book Discussion

You will be most successful at leading a robust and respectful book discussion if you prepare a list of open-ended questions beforehand and set a positive tone at the beginning of the discussion.

Setting the tone

It is always good to set the tone of the discussion before you dive in. It helps set boundaries and expectations. Below are some suggestions of what to do and say before you discuss the book:

1. Welcome people and thank them for coming.
2. Review what is going to happen at this gathering.
3. Set a respectful tone by saying, "Not everyone has to be in agreement, but we can avoid personal attacks and have a constructive conversation."
4. Encourage everyone to chime in, and try to make space for those who don't speak up as easily.
5. Make people aware that they can take a break or use the bathroom whenever they need, without worrying about interrupting the discussion.
6. Ask people to bring their questions to the group.
7. Tell people that you hope they enjoy this time and space to connect with one another; that's is what it's for.

Questions

This list of questions is a guide. We invite you to ask your own questions as well. Keep in mind that *open-ended* questions give people an opportunity to share their thoughts and feelings and go deeper into how the book has made an impact on them. If you find yourself asking questions where the answer can be yes, no, or maybe, then chances are it's a closed-ended question. For example, "Did you like the book?" is a closed-ended question. On the other hand, "What did you like about the book?" and "What didn't you like about the book?" are open-ended questions.

Starter Questions:

- What made you decide to join this conversation?
- What did you think this book would be about?
- What did it end up being about?
- Which story did you identify with the most?

Deepen The Conversation:

- What is one moment from the book that stayed with you?
- What questions did you find yourself asking as you were reading the stories?
- What challenged you about a story?
- What surprised you about a story?

Wrapping Up The Discussion:

- How does this story relate to your own life experience?

- What did you learn through the discussion?
- Who do you most want to share this book with?
- What could other people in your community gain from this book?
What would the impact be?

If you have a lively discussion going, and the conversation is still active after an hour and 45 minutes, check in with your group to see if people want to extend it for another 30 or 60 minutes, or if they prefer to wrap things up.

After the Discussion

If you haven't already, discuss and decide whether to meet again. The group might have plans to discuss *Untold Stories* again, or perhaps want to start a regular book club and choose other books.

Additional resources on starting a book club

- "10 Tips for Book Clubs" by Lise Funderburg
<http://www.oprah.com/oathome/10-Book-Club-Tips-from-Lise-Funderburg>
- "How to Start Your Own Book Club" from Oprah.com
<http://www.oprah.com/oprahsbookclub/How-to-Start-Your-Own-Book-Club>

Sample Emails to Organize a Reading Circle

1) Invitation Email

SUBJECT LINE: Book on Life, Love, and Reproduction – Join my reading circle!

Hi, [NAME]. I hope this email finds you well. I want to invite you to participate in my reading circle to discuss this amazing book called *Untold Stories: Life, Love, and Reproduction*. The book features short personal stories from 17 people around different issues like infertility, adoption, queer parenting, abortion, and more. I will be hosting the conversation and thought that you would be a great participant. It will be a time to learn about different people's experiences, ask questions, and connect. The book is part of the Untold Stories Project, so our small group participating will also be part of something really big.

We'll have food and drinks, so let me know if you have allergies. Also, let me know if you want to invite others! Below are more details. Please email me to say if you think you can come or not (and to ask me any questions). Looking forward to hearing from you!

All my best,
[YOUR NAME]

DATE AND TIME
LOCATION
DETAILS ON REFRESHMENTS
Please RSVP

2) Reminder Email for Non-Response

SUBJECT LINE: Will you join us for the reading circle?

Hi, [NAME]. I hope this email finds you well. I'm just following up from my last email inviting you to a reading discussion of *Untold Stories: Life, Love, and Reproduction*. The book has 17 stories around many different reproductive issues. Angelique, one of the writers, said, "*Untold Stories* really opened my eyes. Wow, there is so much stigma that we carry around in our body, minds and hearts. The book is a symbolic way of letting go or leaving behind all this pent-up stigma that we've been carrying with us."

I hope you'll consider joining us in reading and discussing these powerful stories. We'll have food and drinks. Let me know if you want to invite others, if you have any allergies, and if you have questions. Looking forward to hearing from you!

All my best,
[your name]

DATE AND TIME
LOCATION

DETAILS ON REFRESHMENTS

Please RSVP

3) *Reminder Email for Those Participating*

Subject Line: Can't wait to discuss Untold Stories with you!

Hi, [NAME]. Just sending a friendly reminder that we'll be gathering on [day of week, date, time] at [location] to discuss the book *Untold Stories: Life, Love, and Reproduction*. One question that has been on my mind is [insert your own discussion question here]. Can't wait to hear what your reflections are. Let me know if you still plan on coming or if you have any questions.

All my best,
[your name]