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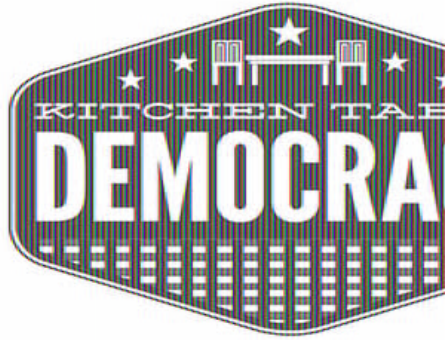
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# **Educated in Oregon**

**Discussion Guide**

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# Oregon Humanities

**This program was made possible in part by a grant from Oregon Humanities (OH), a statewide nonprofit organization and an independent affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities, which funds OH's grant program.**

## Thank you for hosting an *Educated in Oregon* discussion!

***Educated in Oregon* aims to give participants an opportunity to imagine themselves inside of others' experiences and discuss education issues and policy from an empathetic stance. Our hope is participants walk away from the conversations with new insight into individual's experiences and greater connection to the future of education in Oregon and to their community.**

This discussion guide was designed by Kitchen Table Democracy, a national non-profit that promotes collaborative and democratic governance so people can bring their ideas, feedback, and resources together to improve their communities. We hope you'll take the opportunity to host a discussion about exploring what students' experiences tell us about schools now and what schools could be in the future at your table.

This brief packet provides a guide to how you might hold a discussion and what questions you might ask. It is meant for people who are used to leading discussions in small groups, whether on education or on other topics. If you're a teacher, you might consider holding a discussion on these audio stories with your class. If you're a parent, perhaps there's a group of parents you might want to pull together. If you're a student club, you might want to use one of your regular gatherings to have a discussion among your fellow students.

# Gathered at the table: having the conversation

## Conversation Guidelines

**First**, our questions are left open-ended in order to encourage everyone to think creatively and reflect on possibilities.

**Second**, remember that every guest's ideas and stories are important, and the discussion should provide an opportunity for all participants to reflect on what you hear in the audio stories and from each other.

**Third**, think of the discussion as an opportunity for people to try to view school / education through the student perspective.

**And finally**, as host, you know your guests the best! But try to make sure everyone has a chance to talk (one at a time) and recognize people may disagree but encourage them to assume best intentions and to try to listen to understand each other.

# Gathered at the table: having the conversation

## Opening up the conversation

- **Thank people for coming!** You might simply say, *“Thank you for taking the time to share your voices on education in our state. We all want the best education possible for our kids.”* You might want to include some of your own words about why you’ve decided to host the discussion.
- **Give a little background.** You might want to share a little bit about this project and its aims. There’s an information sheet at the end of this guide.

## Moving to the conversation questions / prompts

- Everyone in your discussion may already know each other, but **a good starting question** is, *“What’s your name and one word or image that comes to mind when you think about school?”*
- There are some **central questions** that we’re asking as starting points to reflect on education in our communities and what the students are sharing in the audio stories. We suggest starting with the beginning reflection prompt then transitioning to listening to the audio. Each audio piece is between 5 and 6 minutes. We find the discussion usually lasts 60-90 minutes.

# Beginning Reflections

Some people might be more comfortable with writing out their thoughts; others might prefer to draw something.

*QUESTION FOR REFLECTION: What's important in your mind about the middle school experience?*

Give people about 5 minutes to reflect individually before transitioning to the audio stories.

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# Introducing the Audio Stories

You might say a few words to transition and invite people to leave behind their own experiences and concentrate on what they hear in the stories.

*As we move into the audio stories, you'll hear both positive and negative experiences from the students' perspectives. They may be surprising to you or not. You may have strong feeling about the student's interpretation, especially based on your own experiences. For the sake of this conversation, we're asking you to do the best you can to clear your mind now and to try to imagine yourself in the student's shoes and invite yourself to really reflect on what they are saying.*

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# Listening & Being Heard

Introduction / Episode 1

## *DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:*

- *What stood out to you about what you just heard?*
  - *How do others create spaces where you feel listened to and heard?*
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# Joy & Connection

## Episode 2

### *DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:*

- *What surprised you in the stories you just heard?*
  - *What are you curious about after hearing these stories?*
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# Change

## Episode 3

### *DISCUSSION QUESTION:*

- *Given what you just heard, what do you think is important for students as they grow and change?*
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# Closing Reflections

Again, some people might be more comfortable with writing out their thoughts; others might prefer to draw something.

***QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:** How has your thinking changed about the middle school experience since you walked in the room? What was important in any shifts in your thinking?*

Give people about 5 minutes to reflect individually. Then we suggest opening up a discussion about what's changed.

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# Background on *Educated in Oregon* project

In school board meetings, community listening sessions, and other public processes focused on education, participants are often asked to focus on their own experiences and perspectives, and they aren't necessarily engaged with what others have experienced. Individuals are also commonly focused on very particular components of what is or isn't working in education and haven't been invited to think about the greater purpose of our public education system.

We believe hearing others' experiences with the education system can help individuals reflect and empathize, resulting in broader and more generous conversations. We believe in the power of conversation to connect individuals and create opportunity to connect across differences.

The idea for this project also came out of the recognition that most media outlets don't have the capacity or resources to tell as many stories about what is happening in schools as they used to. Decision makers - including superintendents, school board members, and city and state policymakers - need to be able to hear the stories and experiences of their communities in order to better serve those communities.

Our hope is that this production of audio stories in combination with public conversations becomes a model for elevating voices that may be missing from the discussions and inviting meaningful public dialogue about important community issues.

Our goal with each conversation is to give participants an opportunity to imagine themselves inside of others' experiences and discuss education issues and policy from an empathetic stance. Our hope is participants walk away from the conversations with new insight into individual's experiences and greater connection to the future of education in Oregon and to their community.

# Important Contact Info

## **Kitchen Table Democracy**

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## **Oregon Humanities**

<https://www.oregonhumanities.org/>

**Get discussion guide, audio stories, and submit reflections:**

<http://www.kitchentable.org/initiative/educated-oregon>