



Video Tour Discussion Questions

Grades 5-12

Social Studies, Current Events, Family and Consumer Science

After showing students a video from the Purple America city tour, you may choose from the following questions to facilitate a discussion about American values with your students. You may also ask them to write down their answers to some of the questions before discussing them together in small groups or as a class.

Questions Relevant to All Videos:

1. What are values? Are values important? Why or why not? Name three values that are important to you.
2. Who or what affects your values? Does your family help determine what values you believe are important? Name a value that is important in your family.
3. Are values different for different people? Can you name some examples of differences in values for a group of people that is different than yourself?
4. What does it mean to you to do things “the right way”? Describe examples of how we in America do and do not do things the right way? Can you do anything to change any of these situations? What would you do?
5. In 1967, sociologist Robert Bellah coined the term “American civil religion.” According to Bellah, Americans embrace a common civil religion with certain fundamental beliefs, values, holidays and rituals, parallel or independent of their chosen religion. Another sociologist, Seymour Lipset, referred to “Americanism” and the “American Creed” as a distinct set of values that Americans hold with quasi-religious fervor.

After watching these videos, do you think we have a common ‘civil religion’ or ‘American creed’? If so, what beliefs and values does it include? What holidays and rituals? What holds us together besides our country’s borders?

6. In the late 1700s, a French historian named Alexis DeToqueville wrote a book called DEMOCRACY IN AMERICA which pointed out that Americans had unique features, among which was the propensity to volunteer. Some say that America is still the most “volunteering” country in the world.

Can anyone here who has lived in another country talk about whether they believe that claim is true? Why would Americans choose to volunteer more than people in other countries? Are we more civic-minded? More compassionate? Do we have greater need? Based on your own experiences, what do we get out of volunteering?

Questions Relevant to the Cleveland Video Tour:

1. A man in the video stated that ‘values are eroding’ and ‘values are not like they used to be.’ What does it mean for values to ‘erode’? Do you agree with this perspective? Why or why not?
2. Some values described by people in Cleveland were **family, community, love and respect, freedom and opportunity**. Are these values important to you? What other values would you add to this list? Which values do you believe are most important?
3. One person stated that ‘We aspire to achieving what we want.’ What do you aspire to achieve? Name three things and explain why they are important to you.

Questions Relevant to the Atlanta Video Tour:

1. People in Atlanta described various freedoms as important values:
 - Freedom to be who we are
 - Freedom to do what we want to do
 - Freedom to live in a safe environment
 - Freedom of sexual orientation
 - Freedom of speech
 - Freedom of choice
 - Freedom of movement
 - Freedom of religion

Are these freedoms important to you? Do all people in America really have these freedoms? Can you describe examples of people who do not have these freedoms? Why don't all Americans have freedom?

2. What are material values? How important are they? One man described his value as 'doing whatever you have to do to get what you want.' Another person said, 'Money is ruling the world.' Is this one of your values? How far would you go to achieve a material thing?
3. We may not agree (on everything) but it (discussion) brings people together. Do you agree with this statement? Why is it important to talk about things even if we have different opinions or points of view?
4. The homeless woman reminded us that we are all human and we should love and help one another. Should this be an American value? Why or why not?

Questions Relevant to the New York City Video Tour:

1. What did you think about the firefighters who were at Ground Zero during and after 9/11? How do they exemplify American values to you?
2. What did you think about the woman who said we were a nation with Christian values? Were you surprised to see her in New York City?
3. What did you think about the taxi driver who said that Americans are most respectful to other Americans and that we have a way to go to live up to our ideals? Have you seen examples of that here? Have any of you experienced that kind of disrespect from other Americans?
4. The 'Naked Cowgirl' told the Muszynskis that she was a great example of American values and the American dream because she makes enough money from her summer tips to travel the rest of the year. What do you think of that? Where would you draw the line for yourself when it comes to making money?
5. The two men at Times Square said that sometimes poor people have to do whatever it takes to succeed because that's what the government and wealthy people do. Do you agree with them? What do you think about that idea?
6. The man from India spoke about the greater freedoms that he has found here. What freedoms in the U.S. mean the most to you? What freedoms do you think have been 'over-rated'?

What do we need to do to be sure to keep our freedoms? (i.e., voting; calling, writing & emailing our representatives; signing a petition; peaceful protest, etc.)

What have any of you done to stand up for a right or freedom you have or believe you deserve? How would you try to gain a new freedom or right for students at our school?

Questions Relevant to the Los Angeles Video Tour:

1. What does America stand for? What values are unique to people living in America (i.e., freedom and democracy)?
2. Someone in the video said if we “pay it forward, everything will get better in the future.” What does it mean to ‘pay it forward’? Do you agree with this statement? Have you ever ‘paid it forward’? Share or describe that experience.
3. Throughout our lives, we must make choices and decisions. How do the choices we make indicate who we are and what we will or will not do? What important choice(s) did you make recently that indicated or affected who you are?
4. Some valued family activities described in the video were 1) earning a decent wage to support a family, 2) fitting into a group but still being an individual, 3) being able to come together when we need to, and 4) finding your own identity within a safe environment. Do you believe these activities are important for families to maintain in order to become and remain strong? How can families be strengthened by these activities?
5. Someone in the video said that tolerance should be a key American value because it enables us to learn about others and where they come from. What is tolerance? Do you agree that it should be a key American value?
6. In America, high standards hold us together. Some of these standards are honesty, respect, tolerance and excellence. Are these standards important to you? Why or why not? What other standards are important to Americans?



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