



This guide is intended for young people, educators and grassroots groups who want to use the powerful story of Lemon Andersen—as told in the award-winning documentary LEMON—as a springboard for dialogue, empowerment and action. In the film, we witness the struggles and triumphs of Puerto Rican poet Lemon Andersen as he uses the power of his voice to pull himself and his family out of poverty. While his complex story doesn't offer simple answers, it does open up opportunities for young people and other marginalized voices to explore and discuss personal and structural challenges, and to move from a place of frustration and disempowerment to one of hope and action. The discussion questions, facilitation recommendations and participation tips below are intended to foster meaningful discussions as a jumping off point for longer-term personal transformation.

## FOR FACILITATORS

Discussing Lemon's story may raise some personal issues, sensitivities and even potential conflict or disagreement. The following section provides some broad guidelines for the facilitation process.

### SETTING GUIDELINES

Before delving into intimate conversations, it is important to establish guidelines and create a “safe space” in which participants trust each other enough to share their experiences. Given that people will be sharing personal experiences, make sure to let everyone know that what is discussed is completely confidential and will not leave the room. In addition, consider some of the following guidelines:

- **Step Up, Step Back:** If you are a quieter person, feel empowered to share your experiences, and if you speak a lot, step back so others have a chance to speak.
- **Throw Glitter, Not Shade:** Be positive when others share their ideas.
- **One Mic:** One person speaks at a time.
- **“I” Statements:** Speak from your own experience as much as possible and lead statements with “I think”, “I feel” or “I believe.”
- **No Wrong Answers:** Most of these questions are geared towards personal reflection and story sharing. Your experiences and your perspectives are always correct!
- **Share What You Can:** Share as much or as little as you want. Don’t feel like you have to answer every question if you’re not ready.

### ENSURING PARTICIPATION

- Lively facilitation keeps participants engaged. Conveying your own passion, energy and commitment is the best way to ensure others feel it too.
- Look at participants when they speak.
- Promote listening by asking a participant who is speaking to speak up—especially if you notice others are distracted. Use prompts such as, “Did everyone hear that? Can you repeat that to the speaker?” Make sure that participants respond to each other’s comments. For example, “What did you think about what he/she said?” or “Do you agree with what he/she said?”
- Check to see if you understand the meaning of a participant’s statements by reflecting back to them a summary of the main points that you think he/she was making. This helps clarify that you understand and also helps ensure that other participants understand as well.

**TIP:** Write down the discussion guidelines on a white board or flipchart to make sure everyone, including the facilitator, sticks to them!



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## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Feel free to pick and choose the questions that are most interesting and relevant to you and your group.

### GETTING THE CONVERSATION STARTED

- What did you think about Lemon's story? Was there a particular moment or scene that really jumped out at you?
- Does Lemon's story relate to your own life, or your family and friends? How?

### WORK ETHIC - noun:

A set of values based on the moral virtues of hard work and diligence.

### DELVING DEEPER

- According to Lemon, "The pen isn't the weapon. The work ethic is the weapon." What do you think he means by this statement?
- At one point Lemon says, "Poetry doesn't discriminate." What do you think he means by this statement? What sort of everyday discrimination was he facing in the story? Can you relate to his experience of being discriminated against?
- While in prison, Lemon said it took one poem to change his life. In fact, poetry inspires him to strive for a better life. Have you ever been transformed by a small experience? What in your life inspires you to do well? How can you use that to your advantage?
- How do you think it was possible for Lemon to overcome some of the barriers he was up against? Are all people given the same opportunities as Lemon? Do you think he got really lucky or did he succeed through his hard work?
- What were some of the people and situations that helped support Lemon's success? Has there been anyone or anything in your own life that has given you hope to succeed?
- Lemon seems to feel torn about his decision to leave his producer for the more famous theater production company. The producer says, "I feel like the lover you come back to after you've been kicked out." Why do you think Lemon chose to go with the more famous theater production company? What would you have done if you were in his shoes? Have you ever been in a situation where you had to choose between something trusted and familiar and something less predictable but with more opportunity?
- Lemon and his wife get into an argument about her role as the provider in the family. Do you think Lemon had a right to get upset with her? When she eventually quits her job, do you think she was putting Lemon before herself? What would you have done in her situation? Were there other ways she could have supported him?
- Lemon talks about how he doesn't want to be pitied while seeking support from his family and colleagues. Can you relate to his statement? What do you think is the difference between pity and support?
- At one point Lemon says, "I will work hard enough to stop the tradition of bad luck in my family and bring prosperity." Do you believe poor families like Lemon's are victims of bad luck? Why or why not? Can you point to any other factors that might contribute to a "tradition of bad luck"?
- Toward the end of his theater piece Lemon says, "Watch me take my lemons and make the best goddamn lemonade." What are your personal "lemons"? How can you turn those lemons into lemonade?



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## TAKE ACTION-MAKE LEMONADE!

- **Join the LEMON Community:** Fan the LEMON Facebook page and stay in touch for more creative activities and Make Lemonade opportunities.
- **Keep the Conversation Going:** Host your own screening at home, church or school. Visit [www.cinematlibrestudio.com](http://www.cinematlibrestudio.com) for more information about getting a DVD.
- **Come Up with Your Own Recipe for Success:** We all face "lemons" in our lives. Make a list of your own lemons and identify the "ingredients" it will take to make your own lemonade. Perhaps you need a strong mentor, job opportunities or a support group. As you hone in on what your personal challenges are you can take the steps to identify what it'll take to move in a positive direction.
- **Find Your Own Voice:** Visit [www.youthspeaks.org](http://www.youthspeaks.org) to find a local organization that can help you explore poetry and other creative ways to get your voice out.
- **Register to Vote:** One of the most powerful tools we have is our right to vote. Think about ways you can make your opinion known by getting more involved in the political process and use your power! Register to vote and help pick the decision makers that will take your needs into account. If you are unable to vote, talk to your friends and family about the issues that mean the most to you and encourage them to vote. Visit [www.votolatino.org](http://www.votolatino.org) for more information.
- **Bring the Arts into Your School:** Contact your school administrators about the value of the arts in inspiring and motivating young people. Use a clip from the film to demonstrate its power. Consider allying with the PTA (Parent-Teacher Association) and student groups to host a lemon-themed fundraiser for arts education. (Get creative! Host a bake sale with lemonade, lemon cookies and more.)

### MAKE LEMONADE?

"If life gives you lemons, make lemonade" is a popular age-old quote that means you should try to make the best of bad situations.

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