

The Best of Enemies
Teacher's Guide

Proudly made by Giles House, Duke University

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Introduction to the Teacher's Guide

This guide is designed to be a resource for teachers whose classes are reading the book *The Best of Enemies* by Osha Gray Davidson. The questions below can be used either as an in-class discussion or as writing assignments. We recommend a class discussion format, or a writing assignment with a class discussion component.

The guide is divided into several sections, roughly based on the general layout of the book. Each section will have pre- and post-reading questions for discussion.

We have also included a "Teacher's Notes" section with guides to the issues behind the questions, as well as some suggestions for discussion. We hope it will help you stimulate discussion or understand our questions more clearly.

Also attached are optional grading rubrics for both class discussion format and writing assignment format.

We hope this guide helps you and your students to discuss, understand, and learn a little more from this amazing book.

-Giles House

Pre-Reading Questions

1. What is segregation?
2. Do you believe segregation still exists today? How influential is it?
3. How can we combat segregation?

Chapter One

Pre-reading:

What do you think life was like for poor black people in Durham in the 1950s?

Post-reading:

You have just read descriptions of Durham from the period of the civil rights movement. What do you think of these descriptions? Do they agree with your previous conceptions?

C.C. Spaulding, the founder of the Mutual, was a tremendous success. Why were there not more successes? Why was there even a civil rights movement, if people like Spaulding were able to succeed so dramatically?

Chapter Two:

Pre-reading:

What hardships have you had to face to survive?

Post-reading:

Do you think it's a wise decision to encourage people at a socioeconomic disadvantage to settle for a more industrially oriented education instead of pursuing scholarly endeavors, as Booker T. Washington suggested (p. 43)?

Does it seem like poor whites and poor blacks have more in common than people of the same race who are richer or poorer? Why do you think they never realized this?

Chapter Three

Pre-reading:

In Durham at the time, the whites were in control of most of the power. How do you think they managed to stay in power for so long? If you were in power, how would you keep that power?

Post-reading:

What was your first impression of C.P. Ellis?

Does the economic and social structure of Durham in the 1940s reflect the economic and social structure of Durham today? What has changed? What has stayed the same?

Chapter Four

Post-reading:

Religion compelled Ann Atwater to push for social reform. (p. 71) Do you think religion is a positive force for social change?

“Yet had whites been paying attention, they would have known that blacks had been resisting segregation since Jim Crow laws were first enacted.” (p. 74) Why do you think there was so much ignorance in the white community?

Brown vs. Board of Education forced schools to desegregate. Why do you think there was so much resistance to the change? How were schools able to evade the order for so long?

Chapter Five

Post-reading:

Would *you* risk arrest – and in those days, arrest was brutal and quite possibly fatal – “for the right to order a cup of coffee at a five-and-dime lunch counter” (p. 98)? Why do you think Ezell Blair and his friends did?

If you were a shopkeeper at a lunch counter, what would you have done to prevent the students from entering your store? How would you have responded to the protests? (Imagine that you couldn’t allow the students in because it would have hurt your business.)

On p.110, Osha Gray Davidson points out that it’s often more difficult to consider issues of class than race. Do you ever find it difficult to talk about economic status? Can you see why it’s easier to focus on race?

Chapter Six

Post-reading:

Can you imagine not wanting to be associated with a certain group of people, as C.P. Ellis felt (p. 111-112)? Have you ever had that feeling? Remember that it’s not just about race; there are many other characteristics that define groups of people.

On p. 117, we encounter a segregationist flyer depicting blacks as savage brutes, more animal than human, chasing the “pure” incarnation of “Southern Womanhood”. Do you see images of this sort today, designed to make you think in a certain way?

On p. 116, a minister declares that “God himself had created segregation”. This is one of the arguments that convinced C.P. Ellis, and no doubt many others, to join the Klan – a brutal organization which terrorized blacks. Going back to our question from Chapter Four, do you think religion is a positive force for social change?

Chapter Seven

Post-reading:

You probably know some of the history of the Ku Klux Klan – they committed many atrocities, especially against black people. Why do you think the group was so popular? Was everyone in the KKK a “bad” person?

The *Morning Herald* and Jesse Helms often lashed out against civil rights for blacks, while Louis Austin was equally adamant in defending the civil rights movement. Is media a good thing when it is used to deliver opinions?

The students’ demonstrations were very effective in winning concessions from the city of Durham. But at the end of the chapter, the momentum they had was lost in endless committees. How could the students have made a greater impact?

Chapter Eight

Post-reading:

What does “Black Power” mean? Many different interpretations of the phrase are given on p. 177-178. Which do you believe? Why?

Near the end of the chapter, the citizens of Durham try to protest substandard housing in the “proper way”, but “it had gotten them nowhere” (p. 182). What did they do wrong? What could they have done?

The marchers on p. 179 refuse to sing the words “black and white together”, claiming that they wanted blacks alone, rather than cooperation. Is this a reasonable attitude?

Chapter Nine

Mayor Grabarek changed his policies radically to keep his place as mayor, switching his stance from supporting equality for blacks to declaring that he “would not get the bloc vote” (p. 188). Would you support such a politician? How did he win with such a switch in position?

C.P. Ellis and Ann Atwater both find satisfaction in making what they believe is a positive difference – one for black rights, one against. Should they both be equally proud of their accomplishments?

Is it acceptable to fight for what you believe in? How far should the fighting go? Is it okay to blackmail a housing landlord with threats of “numerous zoning violations” (Chapter 8, p. 158)? To threaten violence (p. 195)? To vandalize property (p. 197)? To be prepared to kill (p. 199)?

Chapter Ten

Post-reading:

Should organizations like the Ku Klux Klan be allowed to express their views in politics?

Were Ann Atwater’s and the black rights movement’s demonstrations effective in changing people’s minds?

Was Ann justified in aiding the firebombing?

Chapter Eleven

Post-reading:

Was the massive reaction to King’s death by the government sincere or politically based? What about the reactions of the black community?

Should anyone be allowed to view government proceedings, as Ann and C.P. were constantly striving to do (and outdo each other in doing)?

C.P. Ellis used both clandestine and overt methods to get his way. At the end of the chapter, the two clash as C.P. is snubbed by a politician. How does this reflect the social and political situation of the time?

Chapter Twelve

Pre-reading:

Much of what you are about to read concerns public school desegregation. Why was it such an important issue? Remember to consider it from the white point of view as well as the black.

Post-reading:

Why is a charrette so different from all the previous things that had been tried in Durham? Do you think a charrette works better? Why or why not?

Confess your prejudices. Discuss.

Chapter Thirteen

Post-reading questions:

Do you think the example shown by Ann Atwater and C.P. Ellis can be applied to other people and groups as well? How would you go about doing this?

In this chapter, C.P. receives a threat for working alongside blacks. Have you ever been looked down on by others for associating with a group they didn't like?

Consider the long history of seeming advances towards civil rights in Durham. Remember, many of them fizzled out in the end. Do you think the charrette actually made a positive difference? If so, what was different about it?

Chapter Fourteen

Post-reading questions:

Should C.P. Ellis have been allowed to put up his Klan display? Why or why not?

Do you think what C.P. learned from the charrette – his revelations about the true state of black people – was worth the suffering he had to go through?

Do the problems of segregation – both by race and class – still exist? How can we apply the lessons from the charrette to combat discrimination?

Post-Reading Questions

Reconsider your answers to the pre-reading questions.

1. What is segregation?
2. Do you believe segregation still exists today? How influential is it?
3. How can we combat segregation?

What was the one most important message you got from reading this book?

What were some of the lessons the people of Durham learned during the charrette? How might those lessons be used to fight racism in the future?

On an ending note:

Congratulations! You've finished *The Best of Enemies*, a book about the highly complex issues of class and race and the civil rights movement in Durham – as well as a story about two people who, in spite of being very different, discovered that they had a lot in common after all.

We really hope you enjoyed the book, and we hope these discussion questions helped you to understand and appreciate it a little better. We also hope that you take some of the lessons from this book with you, remember them, and apply them in your life.

It's been a long ride, but you made it. Congratulations again!

-Giles House

Teacher's Notes

Pre-reading

Before you begin reading the book, here are some questions to get you thinking. What is segregation? We personally define it as people being separated based on a characteristic. This is much more general than the term "racism". People voluntarily segregate themselves all the time – by race, class, gender, interests, and a host of other factors. Is segregation necessarily bad? How can we avoid the pitfalls of segregation?

Chapter One

The very first chapter paints a very rosy picture of life in Durham, one quite at odds with the traditional view. However, we have reason to be skeptical of this rosy picture. If your class has previously studied some of Durham's history, they may already be familiar with some of the racial tensions that were rife in the city during this period. Ask them to reconcile these two views of Durham. Why would there be such a wonderful image of Durham when the reality was so different?

Chapter Two

This pre-reading question is designed to get students thinking about their lives today, comparing their lives with the life of Ann Atwater, whose entire life was a struggle to put food on the table and keep her house in working condition. Think about what her life must have been like. No doubt some of the kids complain about their living conditions, but most of them probably don't have a problem just having food every night. If some of them do, then you may have an even more interesting discussion of the similarities and differences between their situation and Ann Atwater's as a post-reading discussion.

The other questions are meant to illuminate some of the "problems" with life in Durham. The second question illustrates Booker T. Washington's belief in economic equality, as opposed to social and political equality, and that's an interesting debate – should black people have striven for political equality, or simply worked their way up the social ladder through economic gain? The third question concerns one of the central questions of the book – that of the often-ignored difference between social class and race. At a time when many focused on race, the book points out that poor blacks and poor whites often had much more in common than those of the same skin color.

Chapter Three

In this chapter, the character of C.P. Ellis is introduced – the archetype of a social class we don't think about very much. Chapter 3 highlights the problems of the white working class and underscores the similarity between their experiences and those of the poor blacks like Ann Atwater. We're also introduced to the power structure in Durham at the time – rich whites on top, a small minority of rich blacks to lend a veneer of authenticity, then the poor whites and poor blacks on the bottom, kept there by continual fighting between the two groups.

Chapter Four

Chapter Four relates some of Ann Atwater's tribulations in Durham, as well as a bit of Durham's history. The purpose of these discussion questions is to stimulate some general discussion about reform and social change – the motivations behind it and the ways to evade or delay it.

The first question concerns morality as a driving force behind social change. We'll see this many times throughout the book – how the churches were often the focus of the civil rights movement. This should be a fairly easy question to answer – after all, the churches spurred blacks to make things better for themselves. We'll revisit this question in a later chapter.

The second and third questions deal with the white community. Many times in the book, we find that whites really don't know the true state of affairs in Durham. Was that deliberate ignorance – turning a blind eye – on their part, or were they truly just not aware of what it was like for blacks and what blacks thought? Can you find similar examples in the present day? Do you know the main concerns of the black community in Durham today? What about the white community? The Hispanic community?

Chapter Five

This chapter is about the lunch-counter protests. These discussion questions are designed to get people thinking about the courage (or foolish optimism, depending on your viewpoint) of the protesters. Our goal is to have students consider the students' motivations, as well as the motivations of the opposing side. Were the lunch counter managers as biased as Osha Gray Davidson portrays? Or were they just trying to ensure the best business possible? After all, they did serve blacks as well...why stir up trouble by offending their white customers?

We end with a question about class. It's an intriguing point which Davidson follows up later in the book – that many of the problems that seem to be caused by race actually have a hidden component of class. Have students think about what Davidson mentions – does class really have such a great impact? Think about what the civil rights movement is all about – equality of races – but what about those like Ann Atwater and C.P. Ellis, often marginalized by those who think only about white and black divisions?

Chapter Six

This chapter is about the Ku Klux Klan and how C.P. Ellis encountered and joined it. As we see, the Klan was a powerful force in those days, attracting many marginalized whites with a promise of “winning the Lost Cause” and restoring the ideals of nobility from the days of the Confederacy. This gives you a chance to discuss some of the ideas and justifications behind racism from the white point of view, and discuss contemporary incidences of propaganda. We also return to the question of religion and morality as influencers of social change, because as we have seen, religion can be used to defend contradictory points of view. Which, then, is correct? How should religion be used when the same religion is used to justify two different viewpoints?

Chapter Seven

This chapter details some of the history of Durham in the 1950s and early 1960s, including the election of Mayor Grabarek and the hope of moving forward, which eventually “ran out of gas” (p. 151). This decade marks the beginning of the civil rights movement in Durham, as a new generation begins to fight for their rights. In the discussion questions, we examine the issues of the resurgence of the Ku Klux Klan – you may want to talk about the effects of the fear of Communism here, as much of the Klan’s allure was its devotion to preventing a “Communist conspiracy”.

The next question examines the effects of the media on people’s opinions, and essentially asks to what level free speech should be tolerated. Should it be tolerated even when it preaches hatred for others?

Our last question asks why the demonstrations, in the end, had so little impact. The answer implied in the book, of course, is the endless committees that were formed. Go a bit deeper. Talk about the white upper class in power as opposed to the Klan. How did they work together to stop blacks from making progress? How could the blacks have made more progress? Perhaps more demonstrations, rather than accepting Grabarek’s concessions? Or would that have been too hostile a stance?

Chapter Eight

This chapter is more of the history of Durham, as the movement becomes gradually more radical and more impatient. In this chapter, we learn of the term “Black Power”, an ambiguous term with several meanings. The first question aims to get students thinking about the Black Power movement, and in particular how it was interpreted very differently by blacks and whites. Neither side is “right” or “wrong”, but it is a good illustration of how a term can often be misinterpreted, and how that can lead to trouble.

The second question is meant to get students to reflect on what is “right” – whether the black citizens made the right choice, and what happens when following the “proper channels” just doesn’t work.

The third question is an extension of the second – if blacks never got anywhere by cooperating with whites, does that give them a moral reason to go it alone, excluding whites from their community? Do you turn the other cheek or do you just give up? Again, we stress that there is no right or wrong answer. There are good arguments for both sides, and we trust that you and your students will find them.

Chapter Nine

This is a fairly short chapter about the summer of 1967, and in particular about C.P. Ellis. C.P.'s story raises some moral questions, because he seems like an essentially honorable person, willing to fight for what he believes in – and yet what he believes in, we would strongly condemn today. These discussion questions center around this and other moral questions raised in this chapter.

The first one concerns Mayor Grabarek – and other politicians – in their practically reflexive shift to race when they aren't doing well at the polls. Is this ethical? Why was it accepted? Did white voters really hate blacks so much that they were willing to vote for a waffling character because he chose to be anti-black?

The second is about C.P. and the problem we just discussed. The gist of the question is, should C.P. be just as praised for his work in the Klan as Ann for her work in Operation Breakthrough and UOCI, since the two followed very similar, almost parallel paths? One argument is that yes, they should, because they worked hard and that's what matters. The other is that in retrospect, C.P. was clearly fighting for the wrong side, and should be ashamed of his actions, not proud.

The third concerns C.P.'s willingness to shoot black protesters – and, more generally, the question of where the line should be drawn. We see examples of possible moral gray area, going toward increasingly immoral actions. It should be interesting to have your students establish a "boundary" between what is ethical in fighting for what you believe in and what is morally wrong.

Chapter Ten

This chapter concerns the Klan "going public" under C.P.'s guidance, as well as the escalating tension in Durham at the time and the beginning of violence, as shown in the firebombing of several buildings. The end of the chapter also deals with the city of Durham's response to these events, suggesting that they were unsatisfactory in some regard.

The first discussion question is again a debate between the right to freedom of expression and moral uncertainty, such as racism.

The second discussion question examines the effectiveness of the demonstrations – were they getting anywhere? What purpose did they serve?

The third question poses a difficult moral question. Many would condemn C.P. for getting his shotgun ready in the previous chapter. Yet here, the people fighting *for* black equality also resort to violence to defend their views. Do they still have the moral high ground?

Chapter Eleven

This chapter concerns the late stages of the civil rights movement in Durham, as Martin Luther King is assassinated the day before he was due to arrive in Durham. It also deals with the dichotomy that C.P. Ellis had to face, as rich whites were willing to support him “behind the scenes” but weren’t willing to associate with him directly.

The first question is slightly cynical – a question of how genuine the government’s reaction was, and how much was simply to garner votes. The second question is a general question which you can use to introduce the notions of privacy vs. publicity.

The third question should stimulate a good discussion of the issues of class and race – how C.P. truly believed that he was doing the right thing by fighting blacks, that rich whites were truly on his side, when in reality their goal was to keep the two groups fighting each other. You could lead this into a discussion of whether the rich whites’ goals were really that sinister, or whether they were truly guided by their instincts to slip C.P. money but shun him in public.

Chapter Twelve

This chapter is very interesting – it depicts the beginning of the charrette, an event which transformed both school segregation and the lives of everyone who participated – notably C.P. Ellis and Ann Atwater. A charrette was a novel system of solving problems utterly counter to the conventional method of careful negotiation and politically correct phrases. Instead, people from all walks of life were encouraged to come and vent their emotions, channeling that energy into positive change. This charrette was about school desegregation, an important issue reflecting not only the racism inherent in the education system, but also the issue of class – upper-class whites could simply move their kids to private schools, whereas lower-class whites were “stuck” with the blacks in the public schools.

These discussion questions are made to stimulate discussion both about the issue of school desegregation and the idea of a charrette. We end with an interesting question, a reflection of the confession of hypocrisy told in the charrette. Hopefully this will lead to some interesting discussion of how self-segregation and discrimination are still alive in our society today. (It may help if you go first with this question – give a relatively harmless example of your prejudices, such as “Homeless people sometimes scare me.”)

Chapter Thirteen

This chapter is really the heart of the charrette section. Our discussion questions revolve around the various obstacles the charrette faced, and the basic point of the charrette itself.

Our first question asks whether we can use the idea of the charrette in everyday life. This ties in with the previous chapter's question to "confess your prejudices". We hope you had an interesting discussion over that question. Now think about what happened there. Did you learn anything meaningful from it? Did you make progress in solving the problem of prejudice?

In the second question, we discuss the high price of abandoning your social structure. Is it worth it? Discuss the courage C.P. Ellis showed in doing so, and try to relate it once again to the students on a personal level.

The third question asks an important question about the charrette, one which many black residents of Durham must have asked themselves – how much good would the charrette do, considering Durham's long and dismal history? The charrette was very different mostly because it involved confrontation, rather than newspaper articles or endless committees or closed-door negotiations. Is that an advantage? Quite possibly. We leave it to you and your students to discuss that issue. Again, there is no right or wrong answer.

Chapter Fourteen

This is almost an epilogue chapter, describing the changes that C.P. went through following the charrette. Our discussion questions are reflections on some of the things C.P. learned during the charrette. Our first one returns to the theme of equality vs. what we believe to be morally correct. Our second asks if the truth was worthwhile, whether the suffering he subsequently went through (even attempting suicide) was a reasonable price for the understanding he gained. The third is a more general reflection on the theme of racism and "classism", as we might call it – discrimination more by class than race. Do the lessons from the book apply to the present day? Try to find examples in the students' lives, or in your own. Could we find a charrette-like solution to these problems?

Post-reading

These questions are meant to get the class thinking about what you learned from the book. Look back on your discussion on segregation. Have those views changed at all, learning about the class divisions as well as the racial ones evident in Durham's history? What else did you learn from the book? What did you think of C.P. at the end? We're sure you have many more questions for your students, and we hope you enjoy this last discussion.

Optional Grading Rubric – Class Discussion Format

<i>Insight</i> – does student demonstrate understanding of the dilemmas or ethical problems posed by these questions?		/20
<i>Evidence</i> – does student support arguments with quotes, citations, arguments from the book?		/15
<i>Reference to previous arguments</i> – does student listen to and build on (or argue against) others' arguments?		/10
<i>Participation</i> – is student active in discussion?		/5
Total		/50

Optional Grading Rubric – Writing Assignment Format

<i>Insight</i> – do student’s answers demonstrate understanding of the dilemmas or ethical problems posed by these questions?		/20
<i>Evidence</i> – does student support arguments with quotes, citations, arguments from the book?		/15
<i>Writing Fluency</i> – is student’s writing clear; does it contribute to the argument?		/10
<i>Syntax</i> – is student’s writing grammatically correct?		/5
Total		/50