

Vermont Humanities Council

Reading and Discussion Program Scholars

“I couldn’t get through the winter without the Council’s reading and discussion program.”

– Morrisville book group participant

The Vermont Humanities Council’s (VHC) Reading and Discussion program uses literature – fiction, nonfiction, poetry – to stimulate a love and appreciation of the humanities. A nonprofit organization chooses from more than 60 theme-based series. The Council provides the books and a discussion facilitator. Participants make personal connections with neighbors, building stronger communities – a central part of VHC’s vision and mission for the state.

VHC Mission Statement: *The Vermont Humanities Council strives to make Vermont a state in which every individual reads, participates in public affairs, and continues to learn throughout life.*

What are the Humanities?

From the 1965 National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities Act: “The term *humanities* includes, but is not limited to, the study of ... language, both modern and classical; linguistics; literature; history; jurisprudence; philosophy; archaeology; comparative religion; ethics; the history, criticism and theory of the arts; those aspects of social sciences which have humanistic content and employ humanistic methods; and the study and application of the humanities to the human environment with particular attention to reflecting our diverse heritage, traditions, and history and to the relevance of the humanities to the current conditions of national life.”

What is a Scholar?

The “value-added” of the Vermont Humanities Council’s Reading and Discussion program is the discussion facilitator or “Scholar.” She or he leads the group, providing background material and facilitating a lively discussion. The Council aspires to contract with Scholars who present material in an engaging way; who lead an informative, well-researched, animated, and interactive discussion; and who understand and value of the humanities to our lives and embrace the vision and mission of the Council.

In addition to having an advanced degree or equivalent expertise in their field, Scholars must excel at making brief, learned presentations, and facilitating dynamic discussions. People who attend Council programs expect to learn something from the Scholar and to be given ample opportunity and encouragement to express their own thoughts. Scholars must be able to switch gears mid-program, from presenter to facilitator, no longer dominating but merely guiding conversation and actively working to draw out participants. All readers need special attention and encouragement to feel comfortable expressing their own perspectives and opinions.

We expect scholars to research discussion topics thoroughly and to be prepared to provide, for example, background information on a culture, biographical information about an author or illustrator, and information about additional books by the author or related authors. Prior familiarity with the subject matter is desirable, but not a requirement. We simply ask that Scholars be both willing and able to invest the time and energy it takes to make a well-grounded, interesting presentation.

Scholars are listed only for series they specifically ask to be listed for. They are contacted directly by the non-profit organization requesting the program based on the Scholar's travel radius (how far she or he is willing to travel to facilitate discussions) and biographical information available on the Council's website. VHC makes no guarantees as to how often a Scholar may be contacted to facilitate discussions. Scholars are welcome to "sell" themselves and the RD program by approaching their local non-profit organizations – such as libraries, schools, and community groups – about hosting an RD program, but the organization itself must request the program from the Council.

Nuts and Bolts

In addition to introducing themselves, Scholars are asked to open each discussion with a statement similar to: *"Good evening. Welcome to this book discussion program on [name of book], part of the [series name] series. This program is brought to you by the Vermont Humanities Council."* If participants are not familiar with the Council, please review with them the Council's mission statement, what the humanities are, and how these concepts relate to the *Reading and Discussion* program. Our programs are open to the general public, and we encourage respect and a free exchange of ideas among all participants.

Scholars then invite participants to introduce themselves. Next, the Scholar presents a 15-20 minute overview on the book, its author, and the relevance of both to the series. Following that, Scholars throw out questions to stimulate group discussion, and only interject their own comments when necessary to redirect the discussion or maintain its flow. Closing comments from the scholar and group wrap up the evening.

Scholars are expected to submit their evaluation forms, which double as payment vouchers, within three weeks after the program date. Scholars are paid a flat fee of \$200 per discussion session. For more information on the program and Scholar responsibilities, please refer to the Reading and Discussion catalogue and Scholar Tips document, available on our website.

Applying to Be a Scholar

If you're interested in becoming a VHC Scholar, please review the materials associated with the program on our website. To apply, submit the following materials to:

Tess Taylor, Vermont Humanities Council, 11 Loomis Street, Montpelier VT 05602 *or via email* to ttaylor@vermonthumanities.org.

- A letter explaining your interest in the program, your reasons for applying to be a Scholar, your relevant experience, both in analyzing literary and/or historical texts and facilitating lively discussions, and how far you are willing to travel (keep in mind that discussions often take place in the evening);
- A current resume or C.V.; and
- The names and contact information for two references who can attest to your abilities as a discussion facilitator. (We welcome written references, but they are not necessary.)

We will reply as soon as possible to your application. Keep in mind that Scholars are needed in some counties more than others. Assuming you otherwise qualify to be a Scholar, this may impact when and if we are able to offer you a spot on the roster.