

# GREAT READING

H O U S T O N G R E A T



B O O K S C O U N C I L

**BOOKMARKS :**

- **HGBC Basic Discussion Leading Workshop**, January 21 (See story, p. 1)
- **HGBC MFAH Art Experience**, February 18 (See Note, p. 1)
- **Great Books Chicago**, April 26-29, 2012
- **HGBC Advanced Discussion Workshop**, May 12
- **HGBC Discussion Symposium**, September 22

**SOMETHING NEW!**

Make plans now for the ground-breaking Great Books **MFAH Art Experience!**

For our annual Presidents' Day event in 2012, we're planning to meet at the MFA Houston, view selected works from the museum's collections, and discuss the works in the Café Express on-site, all under the steady guidance of President Eric Timmreck.

## BASIC LEADING WORKSHOP

Expert discussion leaders are essential to the Great Books Shared Inquiry™ approach. Every Great Books discussion group needs a cadre of experienced and knowledgeable leaders to keep its discussions varied and lively.

Our January 21 "basic" workshop will focus on solutions to the common problems every discussion leader has to deal with. The workshop is aimed at experienced and beginning leaders who want to learn and share their insights

into the leading process.

Interested in starting a new group? This workshop



**Basic Leading Workshop**

**When: Saturday, January 21, 2012, 10:00 am—1:00 pm**

**Where: Central Market**

**Cost: Free**

**Pre-Register NOW at:**

<http://bit.ly/GBBasicLeading>

would be ideal for you and your friends.

This workshop would also interest book club organizers, not affiliated with great Books, who might want to introduce more structure into their discussions.

Readings for this workshop will include selections from the *Shared Inquiry Handbook*, a work of fiction, and a work of nonfiction.

The workshop is free, and light refreshments will be provided.

## YOUR \$\$\$ GOES HERE

It's membership time!

With the HGBC membership year adjusted to start in October and run through December of the following year, you have a perfect window to renew your membership — Now!

Membership in HGBC is not required for participation in HGBC discussions, of course. But your \$10

annual membership dues and contributions support a number of important HGBC activities, events and projects. These events and activities include the annual meeting, several other special events throughout the year, and discussion workshops.

Dues and contributions also support the HGBC website. Directors have also

voted to distribute copies of the *Shared Inquiry Handbook* to Discussion Workshop participants.

You can pay your dues directly to any officer or director, as well as online or by mail. For online payment options, or to find the HGBC mailing address, visit our website at

<http://www.houstongreatbooks.net/>.

## BARN BURNING HEATS UP ANNUAL MEETING

In a manner of speaking ...

More than twenty GB Houston members met for our annual meeting on October 2 to snack, vote, and discuss Faulkner's story "Barn Burning."

The members passed revisions to our Bylaws that included changing the annual membership year to begin on October 1 and end on December 31 of the following year.

We also elected the following officers and board members: Frances Leland, Secretary; Bill Hord, Vice-President; Paul Ake, Director; Helen Cohen, Director; and Steve Sims, Director.

Helen Cohen led the discussion of "Barn Burning."



## BUILDING A DISCUSSION GROUP THROUGH A READING LIST

BY WENDY WILKINSON AND ALICE AMAN

Discussion groups are fickle things and dependent upon other people deciding to attend. Recruiting and retaining members may be the hardest obstacle for those of you who have recently started or are thinking about beginning a discussion group. A couple of years ago, I was struggling with my own group and went to Alice Aman for advice since her book groups were flourishing. Her guidance proved to be excellent, so I would like to share some of her recommendations on how to strengthen your turnout.

People attend Great Books discussions for three reasons: one, for social connections; two, because they are looking for self-improvement and believe that reading Great Books helps them become more educated; and three, because they are lifelong readers who love books.

It's easy to work with the first two reasons as a draw. Offer a way for the group to socialize after the discussion. Stress the importance of being part of the Great Books. But as a group organizer, you can't depend upon a strong attendance from these alone. People often put social activities and personal improvement low on their priorities, and often books won't get read or schedules will become too hectic, and your book club becomes another casualty of a busy life.

As the organizer of your group, you need to attract people who love to read and who will make coming to your discussion group a priority. The two best methods for appealing to these readers are, 1) have a consistent day and time to meet; and 2) have a long reading list planned in advanced. A reading list can be especially enticing as readers

know they share common literary interests and anticipate upcoming selections. Once someone attends a few times, they will become invested in the group and begin attending regularly.

After that, use your list of upcoming books as your best advertisement. Posting your reading schedule online is a great tool.

Start a group on our website [www.HoustonGreatBooks.net](http://www.HoustonGreatBooks.net). Other free web-based support include Facebook and Cragislist as well as using Googlegroup.com for meeting reminders. If you can spare a little coin, think about creating your own personal website or use Meetup.com. Whatever resources you choose, be sure to use specifics by putting the title and author of each selection into your events.

Finally, be prepared for some books to be better attended than

others. Part of any public group will be inconsistency, but over time you will discover people who share your passion and attend regularly. This method has worked well for both of us. Some patience and organization goes a lot way to creating rewarding and full discussion group.

Alice is putting her own advice into practice by starting up a non-fiction discussion group. Her plans for the reading list include

history, philosophy, biography, science, business and technology. Preliminary information is posted at [www.houstonbookclubs.org/HoustonNonfiction](http://www.houstonbookclubs.org/HoustonNonfiction) and look for her reading list on [www.houstongreatbooks.net](http://www.houstongreatbooks.net). If anyone is interested in attending this new group, contact Alice or join the googlegroup at [groups.google.com/group/houston-nonfiction-book-club/](https://groups.google.com/group/houston-nonfiction-book-club/).

## IN MEMORIAM

Earl Bissex, long-time Secretary for the Cypress Creek group, died on November 29 as a result of injuries suffered in a traffic accident.

The *Houston Chronicle* has published [Dr. Bissex's full obituary online](#).

## NOT TO MENTION ...

### 3 Discussion Quality Events Planned for 2012

In addition to the Basic Leading Workshop in January (see story, p. 1), there will be two other Discussion Quality events next year.

Watch for an Advanced Discussion Workshop in May. This workshop will focus on a key aspect of leading discussions or how to discuss a kind of reading, for experienced leaders.

Look for our first Discussion Symposium in September. This will be a chance for experienced participants to share and explore their expertise on a major area of concern, such as discussing non-

fiction or longer works.

### New Ideas from the HGBC Board Meeting, November 6

Always on the lookout for ways to promote quality discussions of significant texts, the Board not only took care of the normal business (such as a new budget) at its November meeting.

The Board is also exploring using Facebook and other social media to promote our activities. There's also a video of a representative discussion in preparation for our website.

### Great Reading Celebrates

This issue marks the 1-year anniversary of Great Reading.

During the past year, we've promoted Discussion Workshops, printed articles about what makes a quality discussion, highlighted what groups are reading, and more.

In future issues, we'd like to publish articles about the activities of different groups and the issues that are important to you in your groups. If you have an idea for a story, or if your group is trying something new, please contact Bill Hord at [bill-hord@gmail.com](mailto:bill-hord@gmail.com).

## WHAT THE HEGEL! WORKSHOP APPROACHES ABSOLUTE

Even though we may not know absolutely what Hegel was talking about in his "Introduction" to the *Phenomenology*, we have a better idea. A number of participants expressed an interest in learning more about Hegel.

The group of 17 used Hegel's text and another by J. L. Austin, to examine some of the difficulties that hinder discussions of difficult (and not so difficult) philosophy texts.

The workshop, led by Bill Hord,

met on Saturday, September 22, at Central Market.

Among other ideas, the group considered the value of distributing a list of questions ahead of time and sticking to what the text actually says (and doesn't say).

WE'RE ON THE WEB!  
HOUSTONGREATBOOKS.NET



On the web at [houstongreatbooks.net](http://houstongreatbooks.net)

**HGBC BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

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**Don't Stay Home and Read Alone! Join a discussion group and get more out of your book. Find a group at [houstongreatbooks.net](http://houstongreatbooks.net)!**

**Great Reading is published quarterly by Houston Great Books Council; Bill Hord and Wendy Wilkinson, editors.**

Great Books discussion groups are forums for thoughtful readers. Discussions are lively, friendly, sometimes contentious – and a good deal of fun. The object of a Great Books discussion is not to go home with the “right answer.” Participants challenge their own and others’ beliefs and opinions in the light of a rich, thought-provoking text.

Great Books discussions employ a method called Shared Inquiry™. Shared Inquiry is a Socratic, collaborative, and question-driven discussion method. The leader’s role is to advance conversation through careful questioning, letting participants reflect, speak and explore together.

For more information about Houston Great Books and what’s happening in any of our more than 20 discussion groups, visit our website at <http://houstongreatbooks.net>.

**WHAT HOUSTON GREAT BOOKS ARE READING,  
DECEMBER, 2011 - FEBRUARY, 2012**

If you haven't visited the Houston Great Books website recently to check out what our groups are reading, you're missing some great opportunities. Here's a **sample** of what you'll find.

Always on Sunday: Stories from the Great Books Short Story Omnibus (ongoing)

Central Market: *Spring Torrents*, Turgenev (December 12)

Clear Lake: “A Still Moment,” Welty (February 23)

Cypress Creek: *Great Books 3<sup>rd</sup> Series* (ongoing)

Explorers: *Electra*, Sophocles and Euripides versions (January 4)

Heights: Four detective stories by Poe (February 11)

Nonfiction Book Club: *The Great Crash, 1929*, Galbraith (February 15)

Life & Times: *Finnegans Wake*, James Joyce, and *A Skeleton Key to Finnegans Wake*, Joseph Campbell (ongoing)

Looscan: *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, Larsson (January 19)

Memorial: *Being-in-the-World*, Hubert Dreyfus (ongoing)

Meyerland: *A Christmas Carol*, Dickens (Dec. 13)

Montrose: *The Adventures of Augie March*, Bellow (February 2)

Monumental Great Books: *The Three Musketeers* (January 28); *Gravity's Rainbow* (April 28)

Philosophy Cafe: *Candide*, Voltaire (January 15)

Political Philosophy: *Outline of the Historical Progress of the Human Mind*, Condorcet (December 8 and January 12)

Speculative Fiction: *This Immortal*, Zelazny (December 10)

Sugar Land (First Colony): *A Visit from the Goon Squad*, Egan (January 17)

West University: “The Body of the Condemned” (from *Discipline and Punishment*), Foucault (January 10)

Woodlands: Selections from *Great Books Even Deadlier* (ongoing)

Young Thinkers: *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius*, Eggers (January 31)

**Look for the next *Great Reading* in your mailbox again around March!**