The Center for Teaching & Faculty Development is pleased to support the 2014 Common Read Program and the campus discussion of *Orange is the New Black: My Year in a Women’s Prison*, by author Piper Kerman. The following pages contain important information about the context of your discussion session, tips for leading effective discussions, as well as a range of sample teaching activities.

**Possible Learning Outcome Goals**

- Provide students with a positive small-group discussion experience.
- Help students deepen their connection to other new students, faculty, and staff.
- Engage students in a discussion of *Orange is the New Black* that compliments the other campus activities surrounding the book.
- Encourage students to reflect on the consequences of life choices, the realities of incarceration, and what it means to live with people whose backgrounds are different from their own.

**Things to Consider When Planning for your Discussion Session:**

*Context*

- Discussion sessions happen a few weeks into the semester.
- Discussion sessions occur in the evening.
- The book involves approximately 327 pages of summer reading – prepare for the possibility that some students will not have completed the book.

*Pedagogical Tips*

- **Bring your discipline/experience into the conversation!** Use your knowledge to customize your approach to the book.
- **Offer tangibles!** Consider introducing concepts using tangible objects (for example, simple items we may take for granted but which are unavailable in prison).
- **Divide your session into distinctive chunks!** You have an hour for a book discussion, which can be a lot of time. Consider dividing the session into multiple activities. Some options appear on the following pages.
- **Promote an inclusive environment!** Encourage students to explore the themes of the book as it relates to their own identities, backgrounds, and histories.
Sample Activities

What follows is a range of activities you may choose to use in your session. There are obviously more options than you will need, so choose only the activities that appeal to your interests and teaching style.

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**Introductions**

**Goals:** Establish rapport; begin to get to know each other’s names and model appropriate participation; begin building a connection to the text.

- **Introduce Yourself:** Be sure to mention your role at UMass, your teaching and research interests, background, personal interests, and perhaps some anecdote that relates to the book. *(Approx. 5 minutes)*

- **Basic Student Introductions:** Ask students to introduce themselves by stating their name, hometown, and one thing they’ve already learned since arriving at UMass. *(Approx. 10 minutes)*

- **Two-Step Interviews:** Encourage students to introduce themselves to a partner. Then, each student should introduce their partner to the rest of the class. *(Approx. 15 minutes)*

- **3 Details and 1 Wrong Turn:** Ask students to list three details about themselves, and one choice they made that easily could have resulted in a wrong turn in life. *(Approx. 15 minutes)*

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**Discussion Strategies**

**Goals:** Bring the book “into the room” and evoke the tenor of it for everyone whether or not they have read the book. In general, writing exercises help shy students gather their thoughts in preparation for further group interaction. Small group discussions help students develop their ideas and build connections with their peers. Large-group discussions encourage students to communicate their thoughts as well as learn from a variety of perspectives. Reflection exercises allow students to bring closure to the discussion and process learning at a deeper level.

- **A Taste of the Text:** Read aloud a brief paragraph from the book that you found particularly memorable and say how it resonated with you. *(Discussion Starter, Approx. 10 minutes)*

- **Provocative Idea:** Introduce a provocative question, anecdote, or current event that relates to the book. Model the type of intellectual activity you’d like present in the session. *(Discussion Starter, Approx. 10 minutes)*

- **Question Posting:** Ask students to share one aspect of the book they’d like to know more about. Write topics on the board and see if students can answer other students’ questions. *(Discussion Starter, Approx. 15 minutes)*
• Memorable Moments or Themes: Ask students to write for 5 minutes about a specific moment in the book, or a general theme from the book. Then ask them to get into pairs and describe the moment/theme they chose to write about. *(Writing Exercise, Approx. 15 minutes)*

• Small Group Passages: Count students off so that they form small groups of 4 or 5 participants. Pass out short passages from the book written on slips of paper – one per group. Ask students to read and comment on the passages. Do they recall the context of the passage? What issues are raised? What connections can be made to other parts of the book? What connections can be made to their lives and current events? *(Small Group Exercise, Approx. 15 minutes)*

• Small Group Questions: Count students off so that they form small groups of 4 or 5 participants. Explain that you want to give them time to talk both about the book and how it relates to their own experiences. Sample questions: How would you describe your relationship laws? When, if at all, do you choose to ignore laws? *(Small Group Exercise, Approx. 30 minutes)*

• Large Group Synthesis Activity: Ask each small group to report on the things they learned or will take away from their discussion. *(Large Group Exercise, Approx. 20 minutes)*

• Letter to Self: Have students write a letter to themselves responding to one or more of the following questions: How will your first semester of college influence the way you make daily decisions? What new things do you hope to learn and/or accomplish this semester? What sort of impact do you want to make on the world? You might encourage students to seal the letter in an envelope and open it at the end of the semester. They will be able to read what was on their mind in September and may be surprised at how much they have changed. *(Reflection Exercise, Approx. 10 minutes)*

**Wrap Up**

**Goals:** Bring the discussion to a formal close and suggest how the topics in *Orange is the New Black* can be further explored at UMass.

• Solicit Final Thoughts: Provide students with a final opportunity to comment on the content or theme of the book, or to build on a point made earlier in the session. *(Approx. 5 minutes)*

• Review: Help students find common ground by summarizing the discussion. *(Approx. 5 minutes)*

• Ongoing Focus on *Orange is the New Black*: Mention that students may see reference to the book again in their courses. *(Approx. 2 minutes)*

• Strategies for Success on Campus: Mention that students won’t figure out everything in their first semester and that’s okay. They’ll keep learning! Encourage them to reach out and connect with their teachers, fellow students, and other resources on campus. *(Approx. 2 minutes)*
Additional Resources for Discussion Facilitators

Logistical support: The Student Affairs Common Read webpage offers further details about the program: [http://www.umass.edu/newstudent/fall/commonreading/](http://www.umass.edu/newstudent/fall/commonreading/)

Pedagogical support: Center for Teaching & Faculty Development consultants are available all summer. You can reach us at 545-1225.

Student support: David Fleming, English Department, maintains a Common Read blog for students [http://blogs.umass.edu/commonread/](http://blogs.umass.edu/commonread/) and is available to answer questions about the Common Read Essay Contest.