

Family Paideia Seminar Plan

Text: Only Connect by E. M. Forster

*Ideas*, Values: **Community, Prose & Poetry, One & Many, Relation**

Pre-Seminar Content

Big Ideas Chat:

Discuss together what kinds of things seem disconnected during a time of “social distancing.” People, places, experiences … families and friends, etc. Of the disconnections in our current life, which are most distressing?

1st Read:

Have a volunteer read the excerpt aloud while family and/or friends listen. Check for any words that are unfamiliar; talk about them after you finish reading the text. (Consider sharing that the phrase, “Only Connect,” has become quite familiar in popular culture, and its usage springs directly from this paragraph in a novel titled *Howard’s End* by the British novelist, E. M. Forster.

Vocabulary:

Discuss the unfamiliar words in the excerpt. Explain what they mean, figure them out from the context, or look them up in a dictionary.

2nd Read:

After the initial exhortation, “Only Connect!” this short excerpt consists of three sentences. Assign each of the three sentences to one participant (or a small group depending on numbers) and have that person or group think about how the assigned sentence might explain Forster’s meaning. Share your thoughts.

Pre-Seminar Process:

* Share why you are having the discussion.

(Sample script from our classroom Paideia Seminars: Modify to fit your household.)

*“A Paideia seminar is a collaborative, intellectual dialogue about a text, facilitated with open ended questions.”*

*“The main purpose of seminar is to arrive at a fuller understanding of the textual ideas and values, of ourselves, and of each other.”*

* Describe what you want to accomplish.
* Set a Family Goal.
* To balance the talk time
* To refer to the text
* To ask a question
* To speak out of uncertainty
* To build on others’ comments

Seminar Questions:

* Opening (Identify main ideas from the text):
* After the initial phrase, “Only connect,” which of the three sentences do you think is most important? (Don’t share why until everyone has had a chance to answer.)
* What makes that sentence so important? (anyone can share)
* Core (Analyze textual details):
* What do you think Forster means when he writes, “only connect the prose and the passion”? Why would that connection exalt both?
* How might connecting the prose and passion elevate human love?
* Who or what do you think might be represented by the “beast” in sentence three? By the “monk”?
* Why would they die if we succeeded in connecting?
* How many different ways do you think Forster means us to stop living “in fragments”?
* Closing (Personalize and apply the ideas):
* What connections do you see between Forster’s plea that we “only connect” and your current life—with all the restrictions created by social distancing? What lessons can we learn from this passage that apply to our current *and* future lives?

Post-Seminar Process:

*“Ask each person what they liked most about the discussion.”*

* Have the family do a quick check of the discussion goal.

Post Seminar Content:

* Transition to Writing:

Discuss as a group the kinds of disconnections you described during the initial “Big Ideas Chat” and what the seminar discussion teaches you about those disconnections.

* Writing:

After reading and discussing “Only Connect,” by E. M. Forster, write a letter (or a poem or a song or a story) to a specific friend in which you describe a more connected life with that friend after the current social distancing restrictions are lifted.

* Brainstorm:

Use the list of disconnections that family members generated during the Big Ideas Chat and have each individual plan his or her letter (poem, song, story) to address a specific disconnection with a specific person.

* Structure the Writing:

Have all participants write their letters (poems / songs / stories) and share with the group UNLESS THE LETTER IS TOO PERSONAL. Then have each individual send the letter to the person it is intended for. (Note that the letter could be sent electronically in a number of different media, which might be considered safer, but it might be even more personal if it arrived through the physical mail so that the recipient also received the sender’s own handwriting, etc.)

This Paideia Lesson Plan was created by:

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Organization: National Paideia Center

\*Text is attached if open sourced.

\*Text is cited if it needs to be procured.

## **“ONLY CONNECT”**

## By E. M. Forster

## Only connect! … Only connect the prose and the passion, and both will be exalted, and human love will be seen at its height. Live in fragments no longer. Only connect, and the beast and the monk, robbed of the isolation that is life to either, will die.

## From *Howard’s End*