This anthology has been prepared in draft form for use in a special seminar curriculum and are provided for private, non-commercial use in extraordinary times. Additional information about the seminar and this volume is available from The Aspen Institute, 2300 N Street NW, Suite 700, Washington, DC 20037.

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Other resources,
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aspeninstitute.org/programs/executive-leadership-development/resources-for-living-and-leading/
How to Use this Curriculum

Connected Learning in Times of Confinement is designed to support people and their families, neighborhoods, organizations, and networks by building upon the Aspen Institute’s unique expertise in facilitating meaningful conversations in a seminar setting.

We envisage a weekly curriculum that can be used in pieces, or all at once, or in various combinations. Our hope is that these readings and guidance will allow you and others to reflect on fundamental human questions in ways that nourish our hearts, minds, and fellowship in a time of confinement. A curriculum (from the Latin currere, to run) is a path, an exploration, not something to be mastered but an invitation to discovery and wonder. These materials are curated to intrigue and delight you, and we invite you to reflect upon them on your own, and to share them—with family, friends, neighbors, teams, networks. In this, the journey itself is the destination, a call to thought, dialogue, and action.

In a journey it is often helpful to have a guide, and in this curriculum you will find three guides:

First, the authors themselves—we do not need to follow the authors, but we do well to understand what they are saying;

Second, guiding questions—for each reading, there is a set of guiding questions designed for individual and collective reflection; they are not the only (or even most important) questions, but a way of getting started; these may be found at the back of the packet and are best read after you have read the texts;

Third, general guidance—for each discussion, participants and discussion leaders may want to remind themselves of some best practices; these may be found at the back of this packet.

We invite you to share these readings widely and encourage others to engage in conversation. As you do so, know that fellow seminar graduates and their families, friends, and colleagues are doing the same. We all contribute to a global chorus of conversation about ideas worth sharing and acting upon.

—Todd Breyfogle, PhD
Managing Director, Aspen Executive Leadership Seminars

About Aspen Institute Seminars

The Aspen Institute Executive Leadership Seminars Department drives change through reflection, dialogue, and action in service of a more free, just, and equitable society. We do this by: curating brave spaces of shared meaning which help people become more self-aware, more self-correcting, and more self-fulfilling; deepening participants’ humane sensibilities and capacities for moral judgment through an examination of the humanistic traditions; establishing meaningful connections among diverse people and organizations in service of a better society.

For more information, including information about customized programs for companies and other organizations, please contact Kalissa Hendrickson, PhD, Director, at Kalissa.Hendrickson@aspeninst.org or 202-736-3586. Learn more.
The Aspen Institute starts from an act of faith in the humanistic tradition: one must be reflective in order to insure that all human activity—political, scientific, economic, intellectual or artistic—will serve the needs of human beings and enrich and deepen their lives.

The Institute believes in the value both of the “Great Ideas” of the past as well as the importance of the sometimes inelegant and highly controversial ideas of the present.

The Institute is dedicated to the fundamental educational value of dialogue for mature men and women from different nations and cultures -- intercommunications between people of comparable competence from various backgrounds and specialized fields of experience.

The Aspen idea recognizes that the processes by which persons learn and develop or change their ideas are not mechanical or even purely rational. As there is a mystery at the edge of human thought, so there is a magic about human relationships, and the magic we attempt to invoke in Aspen is that of the sheer beauty of this area of the Rocky Mountains.

With Erasmus, we hold that “nothing human is alien” to the inquiring purposes of the Aspen Institute. The Institute intends to be, in sum, a place of excellence and excitement where men and women of the finest qualities of mind and spirit from all walks of life in the United States and abroad can meet to learn from one another through serious discussion of and work on significant problems facing society and the greatest ideas which have been expressed throughout history and today concerning these problems.

—J. E. Slater, President, The Aspen Institute for Humanistic Studies, 1972
5  Herman Melville, *Moby Dick*

7  Jamaica Kincaid, *Lucy*

11  Annie Dillard, "Total Eclispe"

15  Antonio Machado, “Traveler, There is No Path”
Call me Ishmael. Some years ago—never mind how long precisely—having little or no money in my purse, and nothing particular to interest me on shore, I thought I would sail about a little and see the watery part of the world. It is a way I have of driving off the spleen and regulating the circulation. Whenever I find myself growing grim about the mouth; whenever it is a damp, drizzly November in my soul; whenever I find myself involuntarily pausing before coffin warehouses, and bringing up the rear of every funeral I meet; and especially whenever my hypos get such an upper hand of me, that it requires a strong moral principle to prevent me from deliberately stepping into the street, and methodically knocking people's hats off—then, I account it high time to get to sea as soon as I can. This is my substitute for pistol and ball. With a philosophical flourish Cato throws himself upon his sword; I quietly take to the ship. There is nothing surprising in this. If they but knew it, almost all men in their degree, some time or other, cherish very nearly the same feelings towards the ocean with me.…

But look! here come more crowds, pacing straight for the water, and seemingly bound for a dive. Strange! Nothing will content them but the extremest limit of the land; loitering under the shady lee of yonder warehouses will not suffice. No. They must get just as nigh the water as they possibly can without falling in. And there they stand—miles of them—leagues. Inlanders all, they come from lanes and alleys, streets and avenues—north, east, south, and west. Yet here they all unite. Tell me, does the magnetic virtue of the needles of the compasses of all those ships attract them thither?

Once more. Say you are in the country; in some high land of lakes. Take almost any path you please, and ten to one it carries you down in a dale, and leaves you there by a pool in the stream. There is magic in it. Let the most absent-minded of men be plunged in his deepest reveries—stand that man on his legs, set his feet a-going, and he will infallibly lead you to water, if water there be in all that region. Should you ever be athirst in the great American desert, try this experiment, if your caravan happen to be supplied with a metaphysical professor. Yes, as every one knows, meditation and water are wedded for ever.

But here is an artist. He desires to paint you the dreamiest, shadiest, quietest, most enchanting bit of romantic landscape in all the valley of the Saco. What is

From Herman Melville, Moby Dick (Literary Guild of America, 1949) pp. 1-3.
the chief element he employs? There stand his trees, each with a hollow trunk, as if a hermit and a crucifix were within; and here sleeps his meadow, and there sleep his cattle; and up from yonder cottage goes a sleepy smoke. Deep into distant woodlands winds a mazy way, reaching to overlapping spurs of mountains bathed in their hill-side blue. But though the picture lies thus trance’d, and though this pine-tree shakes down its sighs like leaves upon this shepherd’s head, yet all were vain, unless the shepherd’s eye were fixed upon the magic stream before him. Go visit the Prairies in June, when for scores on scores of miles you wade knee-deep among Tiger-lilies—what is the one charm wanting?—Water—there is not a drop of water there! Were Niagara but a cataract of sand, would you travel your thousand miles to see it? Why did the poor poet of Tennessee, upon suddenly receiving two handfuls of silver, deliberate whether to buy him a coat, which he sadly needed, or invest his money in a pedestrian trip to Rockaway Beach? Why is almost every robust healthy boy with a robust healthy soul in him, at some time or other crazy to go to sea? Why upon your first voyage as a passenger, did you yourself feel such a mystical vibration, when first told that you and your ship were now out of sight of land? Why did the old Persians hold the sea holy? Why did the Greeks give it a separate deity, and own brother of Jove? Surely all this is not without meaning. And still deeper the meaning of that story of Narcissus, who because he could not grasp the tormenting, mild image he saw in the fountain, plunged into it and was drowned. But that same image, we ourselves see in all rivers and oceans. It is the image of the ungraspable phantom of life; and this is the key to it all.

Now, when I say that I am in the habit of going to sea whenever I begin to grow hazy about the eyes, and begin to be over conscious of my lungs, I do not mean to have it inferred that I ever go to sea as a passenger. For to go as a passenger you must needs have a purse, and a purse is but a rag unless you have something in it. Besides, passengers get sea-sick—grow quarrelsome—don’t sleep of nights—do not enjoy themselves much, as a general thing;—no, I never go as a passenger;…

Again, I always go to sea as a sailor, because they make a point of paying me for my trouble, whereas they never pay passengers a single penny that I ever heard of. On the contrary, passengers themselves must pay. And there is all the difference in the world between paying and being paid. The act of paying is perhaps the most uncomfortable infliction that the two orchard thieves entailed upon us. But being paid,—what will compare with it? The urbane activity with which a man receives money is really marvellous, considering that we so earnestly believe money to be the root of all earthly ills, and that on no account can a monied man enter heaven. Ah! how cheerfully we consign ourselves to perdition!
Chapter 1: POOR VISITOR

IT WAS MY FIRST DAY. I had come the night before, a gray-black and cold night before—as it was expected to be in the middle of January, though I didn’t know that at the time—and I could not see anything clearly on the way in from the airport, even though there were lights everywhere. As we drove along, someone would single out to me a famous building, an important street, a park, a bridge that when built was thought to be a spectacle. In a daydream I used to have, all these places were points of happiness to me; all these places were lifeboats to my small drowning soul, for I would imagine myself entering and leaving them, and just that—entering and leaving over and over again—would see me through a bad feeling I did not have a name for. I only knew it felt a little like sadness but heavier than that. Now that I saw these places, they looked ordinary, dirty, worn down by so many people entering and leaving them in real life, and it occurred to me that I could not be the only person in the world for whom they were a fixture of fantasy. It was not my first bout with the disappointment of reality and it would not be my last. The undergarments that I wore were all new, bought for my journey, and as I sat in the car, twisting this way and that to get a good view of the sights before me, I was reminded of how uncomfortable the new can make you feel.

I got into an elevator, something I had never done before, and then I was in an apartment and seated at a table, eating food just taken from a refrigerator. In the place I had just come from, I always lived in a house, and my house did not have a refrigerator in it. Everything I was experiencing—the ride in the elevator, being in an apartment, eating day-old food that had been stored in a refrigerator—was such a good idea that I could imagine I would grow used to it and like it very much, but at first it was all so new that I had to smile with my mouth turned down at the corners. I slept soundly that night, but it wasn’t because I was happy and comfortable—quite the opposite; it was because I didn’t want to take in anything else.

That morning, the morning of my first day, the morning that followed my first night, was a sunny morning. It was not the sort of bright sun-yellow making everything curl at the edges, almost in fright, that I was used to, but a pale-yellow

From Jamaica Kincaid, Lucy. (Farrar, Straus and Giroux 1990) pp. 3-11.
sun, as if the sun had grown weak from trying too hard to shine; but still it was sunny, and that was nice and made me miss my home less. And so, seeing the sun, I got up and put on a dress, a gay dress made out of madras cloth—the same sort of dress that I would wear if I were at home and setting out for a day in the country. It was all wrong. The sun was shining but the air was cold. It was the middle of January, after all. But I did not know that the sun could shine and the air remain cold; no one had ever told me. What a feeling that was! How can I explain? Something I had always known—the way I knew my skin was the color brown of a nut rubbed repeatedly with a soft cloth, or the way I knew my own name—something I took completely for granted, “the sun is shining, the air is warm,” was not so. I was no longer in a tropical zone, and this realization now entered my life like a flow of water dividing formerly dry and solid ground, creating two banks, one of which was my past—so familiar and predictable that even my unhappiness then made me happy now just to think of it—the other my future, a gray blank, an overcast seascape on which rain was falling and no boats were in sight. I was no longer in a tropical zone and I felt cold inside and out, the first time such a sensation had come over me.

* * *

In books I had read—from time to time, when the plot called for it—someone would suffer from homesickness. A person would leave a not very nice situation and go somewhere else, somewhere a lot better, and then long to go back where it was not very nice. How impatient I would become with such a person, for I would feel that I was in a not very nice situation myself, and how I wanted to go somewhere else. But now I, too, felt that I wanted to be back where I came from. I understood it, I knew where I stood there. If I had had to draw a picture of my future then, it would have been a large gray patch surrounded by black, blacker, blackest.

What a surprise this was to me, that I longed to be back in the place that I came from, that I longed to sleep in a bed I had outgrown, that I longed to be with people whose smallest, most natural gesture would call up in me such a rage that I longed to see them all dead at my feet. Oh, I had imagined that with my one swift act—leaving home and coming to this new place—I could leave behind me, as if it were an old garment never to be worn again, my sad thoughts, my sad feelings, and my discontent with life in general as it presented itself to me. In the past, the thought of being in my present situation had been a comfort, but now I did not even have this to look forward to, and so I lay down on my bed and dreamt I was eating a bowl of pink mullet and green figs cooked in coconut milk, and it had been cooked by my grandmother, which was why the taste of it pleased me so, for she was the person I liked best in all the world and those were the things I liked best to eat also.

The room in which I lay was a small room just off the kitchen—the maid’s room. I was used to a small room, but this was a different sort of small room. The ceiling was very high and the walls went all the way up to the ceiling, enclosing
the room like a box—a box in which cargo traveling a long way should be shipped. But I was not cargo. I was only an unhappy young woman living in a maid’s room, and I was not even the maid. I was the young girl who watches over the children and goes to school at night. How nice everyone was to me, though, saying that I should regard them as my family and make myself at home. I believed them to be sincere, for I knew that such a thing would not be said to a member of their real family. After all, aren’t family the people who become the millstone around your life’s neck? On the last day I spent at home, my cousin—a girl I had known all my life, an unpleasant person even before her parents forced her to become a Seventh-Day Adventist—made a farewell present to me of her own Bible, and with it she made a little speech about God and goodness and blessings. Now it sat before me on a dresser, and I remembered how when we were children we would sit under my house and terrify and torment each other by reading out loud passages from the Book of Revelation, and I wondered if ever in my whole life a day would go by when these people I had left behind, my own family, would not appear before me in one way or another.

There was also a small radio on this dresser, and I had turned it on. At that moment, almost as if to sum up how I was feeling, a song came on, some of the words of which were “Put yourself in my place, if only for a day; see if you can stand the awful emptiness inside.” I sang these words to myself over and over, as if they were a lullaby, and I fell asleep again. I dreamt then that I was holding in my hands one of my old cotton-flannel nightgowns, and it was printed with beautiful scenes of children playing with Christmas-tree decorations. The scenes printed on my nightgown were so real that I could actually hear the children laughing. I felt compelled to know where this nightgown came from, and I started to examine it furiously, looking for the label. I found it just where a label usually is, in the back, and it read “Made in Australia.” I was awakened from this dream by the actual maid, a woman who had let me know right away, on meeting me, that she did not like me, and gave as her reason the way I talked. I thought it was because of something else, but I did not know what. As I opened my eyes, the word “Australia” stood between our faces, and I remembered then that Australia was settled as a prison for bad people, people so bad that they couldn’t be put in a prison in their own country.

*   *   *

My waking hours soon took on a routine. I walked four small girls to their school, and when they returned at midday I gave them a lunch of soup from a tin, and sandwiches. In the afternoon, I read to them and played with them. When they were away, I studied my books, and at night I went to school. I was unhappy. I looked at a map. An ocean stood between me and the place I came from, but would it have made a difference if it had been a teacup of water? I could not go back.

Outside, always it was cold, and everyone said that it was the coldest winter they had ever experienced; but the way they said it made me think they said
this every time winter came around. And I couldn’t blame them for not really remembering each year how unpleasant, how unfriendly winter weather could be. The trees with their bare, still limbs looked dead, and as if someone had just placed them there and planned to come back and get them later; all the windows of the houses were shut tight, the way windows are shut up when a house will be empty for a long time; when people walked on the streets they did it quickly, as if they were doing something behind someone’s back, as if they didn’t want to draw attention to themselves, as if being out in the cold too long would cause them to dissolve. How I longed to see someone lingering on a corner, trying to draw my attention to him, trying to engage me in conversation, someone complaining to himself in a voice I could overhear about a God whose love and mercy fell on the just and the unjust.

I wrote home to say how lovely everything was, and I used flourishing words and phrases, as if I were living life in a greeting card—the kind that has a satin ribbon on it, and quilted hearts and roses, and is expected to be so precious to the person receiving it that the manufacturer has placed a leaf of plastic on the front to protect it. Everyone I wrote to said how nice it was to hear from me, how nice it was to know that I was doing well, that I was very much missed, and that they couldn’t wait until the day came when I returned.
Total Eclipse
by Annie Dillard
(1945–)

It had been like dying, that sliding down the mountain pass. It had been like
the death of someone, irrational, that sliding down the mountain pass and into
the region of dread. It was like slipping into fever, or falling down that hole in
sleep from which you wake yourself whimpering. We had crossed the mountains
that day, and now we were in a strange place—a hotel in central Washington, in
a town near Yakima. The eclipse we traveled here to see would occur early next
morning….

It was before dawn when we found a highway out of town and drove into the
unfamiliar countryside. By the growing light we could see a band of cirrostratus
clouds in the sky. Later the rising sun would clear these clouds before the eclipse
began. We drove at random until we came to a range of unfenced hills. We pulled
off the highway, bundled up, and climbed one of these hills. The hill was five
hundred feet high. Long winter-killed grass covered it, as high as our knees. We
climbed and rested, sweating in the cold; we passed clumps of bundled people on
the hillside who were setting up telescopes and fiddling with cameras. The top of
the hill stuck up in the middle of the sky. We tightened our scarves and looked
around….

It began with no ado. Odd that such a well-advertised public event should
have no starting gun, no overture, no introductory speaker. I should have known
right then that I was out of my depth. Without pause or preamble, silent as orbits,
a piece of the sun went away. We looked at it through welders’ goggles. A piece of
the sun was missing; in its place we saw empty sky.

I had seen a partial eclipse in 1970. A partial eclipse is very interesting. It bears
almost no relation to a total eclipse. Seeing a partial eclipse bears the same relation
to seeing a total eclipse as kissing a man does to marrying him, or as flying in an
airplane does to falling out of an airplane. Although the one experience precedes
the other, it in no way prepares you for it. During a partial eclipse the sky does not
darken—not even when 94 percent of the sun is hidden. Nor does the sun, seen
colorless through protective devices, seem terribly strange. We have all seen a
sliver of light in the sky, since we have all seen the crescent moon by day. During

a partial eclipse the air does get cold, precisely as if someone were standing between you and the fire. And blackbirds do fly back to their roosts. It is strange enough. I had seen a partial eclipse before, and here it seemed was another.

What you see in a total eclipse is entirely different from what you know. It is especially different for those of us whose grasp of astronomy is so frail that, given a flashlight, a grapefruit, two oranges, and fifteen years, we still could not figure out which way to set the clocks for daylight saving time. Usually it is a bit of a trick to keep your knowledge from blinding you. But during an eclipse it is easy. What you see is much more convincing than any wild-eyed theory you may know.

You may read that the moon has something to do with eclipses. I have never seen the moon yet. You do not see the moon. So near the sun, it is as completely invisible as the stars are by day. What you see before your eyes is the sun going through phases. It gets narrower and narrower, as the waning moon does, and, like the ordinary moon, it travels alone in the simple sky. The sky is of course background. It does not appear to eat the sun; it is far behind the sun. The sun simply shaves away; gradually, you see less sun and more sky.

I turned back to the sun. It was going. The sun was going, and the world was wrong. The grasses were wrong; they were now platinum. Their every detail of stem, head, and blade shone lightless and artificially distinct as an art photographer’s platinum print. This color has never been seen on earth. The hues were metallic; their finish was matte. The hillside was a nineteenth-century tinted photograph from which the tints had faded. All the people you see in the photograph, distinct and detailed as their faces look, are now dead. The sky was navy blue. My hands were silver. All the distant hills’ grasses were fine-spun metal which the wind laid down. I was watching a faded color print of a movie filmed in the Middle Ages; I was standing in it, by some mistake. I was standing in a movie of hillside grasses filmed in the Middle Ages. I missed my own century, the people I knew, and the real light of day.

From all the hills came screams. A piece of sky beside the crescent sun was detaching, a loosened circle of evening sky, suddenly lighted from the back. It was an abrupt black body out of nowhere; it was a flat disk; it was almost over the sun. That’s when the screams began. All at once this disk of sky slid over the sun like a lid. The sky snapped over the sun like a lens cover. The hatch in the brain slammed. Abruptly it was dark night, on the land and in the sky. In the night sky was a tiny ring of light. For the hole where the sun belongs is very small. Just a thin ring of light marked its place. There was no sound. The eyes dried, the arteries drained, the lungs hushed. There was no world. We were the world’s dead people rotating and orbiting around and around, embedded in the planet’s crust, while the earth tolled down. Our minds were light-years distant, forgetful of almost everything. Only an extraordinary act of will could recall to us our former, living selves and our contexts in matter and time. We had, it seems, loved the planet and loved our lives, but could no longer remember the way of them. The light was wrong. In the sky was something that should not be there. In the black sky was a ring of light. It
was a thin ring, an old, thin silver wedding band, an old, worn ring. It was an old wedding band in the sky, or a morsel of bone. There were stars. It was over.

Seeing this black body was like seeing a mushroom cloud. The meaning of the sight overwhelmed its fascination. It obliterated meaning itself. If you were to glance out one day and see a row of mushroom clouds rising on the horizon, you would know at once that what you were seeing, remarkable as it was, was intrinsically not worth remarking. No use running to tell anyone. Significant as this dread sight was, it would not matter a whit. For what is significance? It is significance for people. No people; no significance. This is all I have to tell you.

In the deeps are the violence and terror of which psychology has warned us. But if you ride these monsters deeper down, if you drop with them farther over the world’s rim, you find what our sciences cannot locate or name, the substrate, the ocean or matrix or ether that buoys the rest, that gives goodness its power for good, and evil its power for evil, the unified field: our complex and inexplicable caring for each other, and for our life together here. This is given. It is not learned.

We teach our children one thing only, as we were taught: to wake up. We teach our children to look alive there, to join by words and activities the life of human culture on the planet’s crust. As adults we are almost all adept at waking up. We have so mastered the transition we forgot we ever learned it. Yet it is a transition we make a hundred times a day, as, like so many will-less dolphins, we plunge and surface, lapse and emerge. We live half our waking lives and all of our sleeping lives in some private, useless, and insensible waters we never mention or recall. Useless, I say. Valueless, I might add—until someone hauls their wealth up to the surface and into the wide-awake city, in a form that people can use.
Traveler, There is No Path

by Antonio Machado
(1875–1939)

Everything passes on and everything remains,
But our lot is to pass on,
To go on making paths,
Paths across the sea.

I never sought glory,
Nor to leave my song
In the memory of man;
I love those subtle worlds,
Weightless and graceful,
As bubbles of soap.

I like to watch as they paint themselves
In sunlight and scarlet, floating
Beneath the blue sky, trembling
Suddenly then popping…

I never sought glory.

Traveler, your footprints
Are the path and nothing more;
Traveler, there is no path,
The path is made by walking.

By walking the path is made
And when you look back
You’ll see a road
Never to be trodden again.

Traveler, there is no path,
Only trails across the sea…

Translated by Asa Cusack.
Some time past in that place
Where today the forests are dressed in barbs
A poet was heard to cry
“Traveler, there is no path,
The path is made by walking...”

Beat by beat, verse by verse...

The poet died far from home.
He lies beneath the dust of a neighboring land.
As he walked away he was seen to weep.
“Traveler, there is no path,
The path is made by walking...”

Beat by beat, verse by verse...

When the goldfinch cannot sing,
When the poet is a pilgrim,
When prayer will do us no good.
“Traveler, there is no path,
The path is made by walking...”

Beat by beat, verse by verse.
Image of the Week

Guiding Questions

The best questions arise from careful listening (to the author, oneself, and others), and from the spontaneity of wonder

Herman Melville, *Moby Dick*

*Note: Melville makes more sense when read aloud!*

- How does Ishmael describe himself in the first two paragraphs? Do you see yourself at all in his self-description?
- What feeling does Ishmael’s longing for the ocean—for water—elicit in you? Is there a destination you long for?
- The last two paragraphs contrast that passenger and the sailor. Does your sense of exploration change whether you are a “passenger” or a “sailor”?

Jamaica Kincaid, *Lucy*

- Is our narrator an explorer?
- What are her expectations of the new city? Are her expectations met?
- What connects her to her home?
- What does our narrator discover about herself?
- What is it like to be homesick? Is our narrator’s experience one of invisibility or revelation?

Antonio Machado, “Traveler, There is No Path”

- Read the poem aloud: What words, images, and/or feelings does the poem evoke in you?
- Is this a poem about permanence or impermanence?
- Do you wait for the path to become clear before you take up your provisions and set forth?
- What keeps you in place? What draws you into the unknown despite your uncertainty?
- Are you on the right path?

Jerry Uelsmann, *Untitled (1976)*

- Set a timer and look at the image for 3 minutes: What do you see? What feelings does the image evoke?
- Is the image one of limitation or possibility?
- What path is the figure walking?
- Does the image evoke in you a desire to stay home or escape from home?
- How do you balance the regularities of civilization with the invitations of the open sky?

Annie Dillard, “Total Eclipse”

- In what ways does Dillard know what she is seeking? In what ways does she not?
- Is this story a story of discovery? If so, in what ways?
- What does Dillard mean by “waking up”?
- Have you ever experienced a “total eclipse”? Are there other experiences that you’ve had which echo the experience Dillard describes here?
- What does it mean to see a total eclipse? Is it possible to maintain the effect of that vision?

General questions for the week

- How do you prepare yourself for discovering something new? What gets in the way of discovery?
- What is the territory you are exploring even while much of your time is spent within four walls? What new territory are you called to explore?
- How are your outer and inner journeys related at the moment?
General Principles for Participants

- Read the text(s) to be discussed in their entirety (ideally twice)
- Make notes about what you understand, don’t understand, agree or disagree with
- Focus comments and conversation on the ideas expressed in the shared text(s), not on outside knowledge
- Seek to understand your fellow participants, not to persuade them
- Be freely authentic and morally present
- Listen to the text, to others, and to yourself

General principles for discussion leaders:

- Hold the space for honesty and vulnerability: be honest and vulnerable yourself
- Ask questions, don’t teach: the aim is shared understanding and meaning, not agreement
- Be attached to the conversation: avoid rigidly following your planned order of questions
- Make sure every voice is heard: don’t move too quickly to fill the silence
- Start and end on time: end not with conclusions but with questions you’re taking away

Format:

- Match the texts to the time allotted (Each text can productively stimulate 20-40 minutes of discussion, and can be read discussed individually or together in one sitting, depending on the time available; it is better to end with more to be said, rather than straining to fill the time)
- Begin with introductions:
  - name (if not everyone is well known to one another)

Some helpful tips to keep the conversation going (for discussion leaders and participants):

- “say more about that”
- “where do you see that in the text?”
- “how is that related to what N said earlier?”
- “do you think that’s true?”
- “do others see it the same way?”
- “what did you see in the text that we haven’t addressed?”