

# THE ART OF CONVERSATION, Pt. 1

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## Discussion Guide

*The Art of Conversation, pt. 1*  
*Becoming Conversant*

**This Week's Reading Assignment**

The Art of Conversation, pt. 1 is the first installment of a two-part article. This first article looks at becoming conversant: understanding a conversation and having something to contribute to it.

**A Note to the Teacher**

Your objective in this session is two-fold. First you want to help the group understand the process by which people adopt new ideas. It is often by a similar process that we come to faith. Secondly, you want your group to begin to become skilled at taking conversations to a deeper level by using the assessment map at the back of the article.

*Class Structure*

Please plan 2 ½ hours for this session.

**10 minutes**

**Hook:** Amazing Grace

**15 minutes**

**Lecture:** Engaging the Imagination

**40 minutes**

**Learning Activity:** Teach me something I already know

**40 minutes**

**Project Discussion**

*Hook:*  
*Amazing Grace*  
*15 minutes*



**Starring:** Ioan Gruffudd, Ramola Garai, Rufus Sewell, Albert Finney  
**Released By:** Samuel Goldwyn Films, Roadside Attractions  
**Run Time:** 1 hr. 51 min  
**Genre:** Art/Foreign, Drama, Politics/Religion  
**Rating:** PG for thematic material involving slavery, and some mild language.

*Movie Synopsis:* *Amazing Grace* documents the efforts of William Wilberforce and the Clapham Saints to bring reform to 18<sup>th</sup> century England. Wilberforce and the Claphamites successfully assembled a diverse coalition of men and women who challenged the long held assumption that England could not survive without the financial underpinnings of the Slave Trade. Wilberforce gave his life for the abolition of the trade and of slavery, standing against some of the most powerful men in the British Empire.

*Scene Introduction:* After the defeat of the initial bill to end the slave trade the Clapham group realizes they need to take a new approach to changing the minds of the members of parliament on the subject of slavery. In this scene we see Wilberforce persuade the group to begin with the imagination. He takes a group of people to smell the slave boats

*Lecture and Discussion:  
Engaging the Imagination  
15 minutes*

In general, people need to imagine a different reality before they will take steps to move in a new direction. We can help others see things from new perspectives by engaging their imaginations.

Imaginative expressions of truth have a better chance of getting past an individual's defenses, as well as those of the cultural gatekeepers of society, than frontal attacks with propositional truths.

Change starts with the imagination. It opens people to new ideas and lowers their defenses to old objections. The gospel is the change agent. We seek to open people to the gospel's influence by engaging their imaginations. In turn, we seek to bring the gospel to bear on people and culture alike.

**ALL** kinds of change start with the imagination: personal, interpersonal, institutional, cultural and societal.

*Change is not an issue of pure logic!*

- The ability to see the ramifications of existing beliefs and underlying assumptions requires a willingness to see things from different perspectives.
- If we never think about our underlying beliefs we can hold mutually exclusive opinions quite comfortably.
- If we never think accurately about how the world really is, our conscience can remain unconcerned.
- Logic assumes that we establish our beliefs because they make sense but often we believe what we do because it conveniently condones our life choices and how we want to live.

Consider the story of Clapham Launchers. As the Clapham group set out to bring the gospel to bear on 18<sup>th</sup> century English culture they determined that it was essential to engage the imagination of those around them through conversation. One thing that the group commonly did was linger at breakfast or after dinner to discuss their upcoming engagements. As a group they would brainstorm for possible "launchers" that were appropriate for what the group had on their schedule. A launcher was a provocative question or statement or picture that would lead people into conversations of substance. These conversations led to all kinds of important issues of cultural reform including the slave trade, child labor, animal protection, gambling, drinking, and foreign missions and saving faith.

Here is an example of one conversation launcher that was created by Josiah Wedgwood: The Slave Medallion.

## The Slave Medallion

From 1787 until his death in 1795, Josiah Wedgwood actively participated in the abolition movement. In the Wedgwood archive correspondence exchanged between Wedgwood and Thomas Clarkson gives considerable insight into Wedgwood's feelings on the matter.



Josiah's most important contribution to the movement for the Abolition of Slavery, the so-called Slave Medallion, was one which brought the attention of the public to the horrors of the Slave Trade. In 1787 a Jasper copy of the emblem of the Society for the Abolition of Slavery was modeled by William Hackwood. Such medallions were intended to adorn hat pins, brooches, and other fashion accessories in order to make known the suffering of slaves.

Wedgwood sent a large number of cameos to Benjamin Franklin in Philadelphia in 1788. He replied to Josiah - 'I am distributing your valuable present of cameos among my friends in whose countenances I have seen such marks of being affected by contemplating the figure of the Suppliant... I am persuaded it may have an effect equal to that of the best written pamphlet in procuring honour to those oppressed people'.

<http://www.wedgwoodmuseum.org.uk/welcome.htm>

*Discussion Question:* Benjamin Franklin considered that the Medallion would have "an effect equal to that of the best written pamphlet" in the cause of abolition. What are the strengths of visual art in stirring the imagination? How and when is the written word more effective?

How do we engage the imagination?

- › Through stories - spoken, in print or video
- › Through debate - agree/disagree discussions
- › Through introductions to new or different kinds of people
- › Through new experiences
- › Through questions
  1. What do you imagine such and such would be like?
  2. What do you imagine it means to...?
  3. How would that make you feel?
  4. How do you think that would make him/her feel?
  5. What-if challenges to long held assumptions.

*Discussion:* Which of these do you under utilize and what is one way you can introduce this to your conversations?

***Learning Activity:***  
***Teach me something I think I already know***  
***30 minutes***

**Objective:** The objective of this activity is to demonstrate that when we engage the imagination of those to whom we wish to communicate, we can communicate at a much deeper level.

**Instructions:** This activity works best in a mixed group, i.e. cross-culturally, male and female, etc. Divide your people into two groups - teachers and learners. Have the teachers attempt to teach the learners something they think they already know. The teachers are trying to bring new insight into an old situation.

Attempt to engage the imagination of the audience by doing a skit, telling a story, drawing a picture or doing a role-play.

When done well this can be an incredible experience and can be a great way to promote empathetic understanding among different groups.

Take time to evaluate after each group presents.

***Project Discussions:***  
***Spot and Utilize Conversation Launchers***  
***40 minutes***

Review the project Assignment, Spot and Utilize Conversation Launchers. Share your experiences and keep a list of different launchers you find in the city. Address any problems people may have with the project. Make it a habit to get into deeper conversations through everyday events.