

DARE TO SPEAK

TEACHING GUIDE

by SUZANNE NOSSEL

ABOUT THE BOOK:

From online trolls and fascist chat groups to controversies over campus lectures, “call-outs” and celebrities being “canceled,” the daily hazards and debates surrounding free speech make headlines and social media fodder. In an era where one tweet can launch (or end) your career, and where free speech is often invoked as a principle but rarely fully understood, learning how to maneuver the fast-changing, fraught landscape of public discourse has never been more urgent.

In *Dare to Speak: Defending Free Speech for All*, Suzanne Nossel, the CEO of PEN America and a leading voice on free expression, delivers a vital, necessary guide to maintaining a democratic debate that is edifying, tolerant, fair and true. Centered on twenty simple, practical principles, Nossel’s primer equips readers with the tools needed to navigate today’s diverse, digitized and highly divided society without resorting to curbs on free speech.

At a time when free speech is often pitted against other liberal axioms—including diversity and equality—*Dare to Speak: Defending Free Speech for All* presents a principled yet nuanced argument that the essential drive to create a more inclusive society need not—and must not—compromise robust protections for free speech. She offers concrete guidance for how to reconcile these sometimes competing values within universities, on social media, and in daily life. Nossel’s treatise shows readers how, for example, how to use language conscientiously without self-censoring ideas; how to defend the right to express unpopular views and how to protest without shutting speech down. She offers timely cautions of the dangers of embracing expanded government and corporate controls over speech and argues persuasively that free speech defenders must actively make space for less-heard voices.

Replete with insightful arguments and salient advice, *Dare to Speak* brings much-needed clarity and guidance to this pressing—and often misunderstood—debate.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Suzanne Nossel is the CEO of PEN America, the foremost organization working to protect and advance human rights, free expression and literature. As CEO, Nossel has led campaigns for free expression in Hong Kong and China, Myanmar, Russia, Eurasia, and the United States. Her career has spanned government service and leadership roles in the corporate and nonprofit sectors. Nossel has also served as the Chief Operating Officer of Human Rights Watch and as Executive Director of Amnesty International USA; and held senior State Department positions in the Clinton and Obama administrations. A graduate of Harvard College and Harvard Law School, Nossel frequently writes op-eds for the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and other publications, as well as a regular column for *Foreign Policy* magazine.

ABOUT THIS GUIDE:

This guide is organized into two sections: discussion questions that ask both larger thematic questions about the book as a means of allowing students to think across the entire text, as well as questions which put parts of *Dare to Speak* in conversation with each other.

A set of writing prompts is also included; these questions can also be used for discussion.

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

Part I: Principles for Speaking

- How can one use conscientiousness with language to avoid having words misinterpreted or causing unintended offense? At what point does conscientiousness cross over into self-censorship?
- Are there certain speakers and situations where people bear a heightened responsibility – or duty of care – in terms of what they say and how they say it? What special responsibilities do leaders and influencers bear when it comes to using their platforms and speech rights?
- If you have a controversial idea or viewpoint that you want to express, what should you think about as you voice your opinion?
- What are the benefits of anticipating and addressing up-front the counter-arguments to your argument and viewpoint?

Part II: Principles for Listening

- Why do free speech advocates urge people to consider the intent and content of a statement before determining whether it is offensive?
- What is the difference between “calling out” and “calling in” troublesome speech? What circumstances should influence which approach is taken?
- What is counterspeech and how does it relate to hate speech?
- How can protests inhibit free speech, and how can you effectively protest without silencing a speaker?
- Nossel writes “Several recent instances help provide a road map for how individuals who have committed speech-related transgressions can redeem themselves. Three elements emerge as keys.” (125) What are these elements for achieving forgiveness for errant speech?

Part III: Principles to Follow When Debating Free Speech Questions

- “[W]ords can do harm, as U.S. courts have long recognized. We can think these harms as falling into three categories: injurious, instigating, and intercommunal.” (133) How does Nossel define these categories?
- What ways do speech and violence intersect? How are they different?
- What are some of the ways that free speech can reinforce inequality? What can be done to remedy those disparities?

Part IV: Principles to Follow in Considering Speech-related Policies

- What are the legal limits of free speech?
- How have corporations expanded their controls on speech? What are some ways to limit this expansion?
- Why is free speech essential to personal autonomy?

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The Freedom
to Write



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WRITING PROMPTS:

- In the introduction Nossel writes, “When you bring up ‘free speech’ to Americans, there’s a good chance that, in their response, they’ll use the words ‘First Amendment’... Yet many free speech conflicts lie outside the purview of constitutional law.” What is free speech? How does it differ from—or extend beyond—the provisions of the First Amendment?
- What are the limits to the First Amendment? Should there be additional categories of speech that are considered exceptions to the protection of the First Amendment—why or why not?
- Nossel states, “Although speech can cause genuine harm, it is important not to overstate such harms or use them as an excuse to shut down disfavored speech.” What are some examples in the news or in current events of free speech being portrayed as harmful? How do we determine when free speech is genuinely harmful versus when the harms of speech are being overstated?
- From guidelines on how to be a conscientious speaker to advice on how apologize, Nossel provides readers with guidelines for speaking up without hindering free speech. How can readers these guidelines help readers to navigate the constantly changing landscape of free speech?

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The Freedom
to Write

