

TOPIC QUESTIONS FOR ALL COMERS



By John Hartmann, Conversation Café Host, Louisville, Kentucky, USA

John Hartmann has been creating weekly topic questions for his Louisville, Kentucky, Café for 3 years ... and folks keep coming back for more. Here's some 3rd anniversary news from John and a generously diverse collection of questions for you to choose, use, modify, or otherwise be inspired by.

Our *Conversation Café* has its three-year anniversary this July. We've had over 150 conversations on various topics, ranging from the politics of the war in Iraq to relationship issues between men and women, gay marriage, the effect of religion in the struggle for world peace, and how to raise moral children. Patriotism, dissent, communication between the sexes, poetry readings, and New Year's resolutions have also been discussed.

We ask for topic suggestions at the close of each *Café*, and there is often a discussion during the week on the appropriateness of each topic. We try to frame our topics so that no one will feel that her "side" has been slighted in any way, and we are pretty successful in doing this. We want to attract as much diversity as we can. We also try to choose a topic that is current or ongoing, and we make sure that the topic is not too technical, so as not to severely limit the conversation. We have struggled at times with polarization among folks who come, and have indeed had polarization in the USA as a topic on more than one occasion.

We have recently had a dear friend in our conversational group, Steven Tipton, pass away, and almost all of our group attended the visitation. We have had a close knit group. We often get new members, and some folks come for a while and then return again after a period of absence.

We meet every Wednesday evening at the *Heine Brothers' Coffee House* and are always treated excellently by the baristas there. We are looking forward to our 4th year of dialogue, going from small talk to BIG talk, and hope to meet a lot more folks. All of us are very thankful for the opportunity to get together each week and are also very thankful for the folks who originated and work for *Conversation Café!!*

Topic Questions for All Comers

- What is the greatest gift your parents have given you or could have given you, and/or what is the greatest gift you can give to your children?
- Bring three of your favorite poems, your own or otherwise, and be prepared to discuss them with others.
- What are the limits of free speech?
- What needs to be done about Iraq?
- Does social security have a future in the USA?

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- What do you do to keep your spirits elevated in times of strife?
- *May 19, 2004.* Should Donald Rumsfeld stay on as Defense Secretary or should he be fired?
- Which would you prefer: length of life or quality of life?
- Are we witnessing the moral and ethical decline of the United States?
- How did we lose our democracy and become an oligarchy?
- What do you think about the recent news from the Middle East, especially concerning Iran?
- What voluntary choices can improve our air quality?
- Should government be responsible for social well-being? If not, who should?
- What do you feel is necessary for the long-term survival of the Earth: people, nonhumans, vegetation and ecosystems?
- What are the differences between women and men and how do they affect modern society?
- Capital punishment: Is it worth it? Is it effective?
- How can we best prepare our children for their future on this planet?
- *August 18, 2004.* In honor of the ongoing Olympic games, let's talk about the role(s) of competition in our lives. What are the pros and cons of competitive sports and games for children (e.g., life lessons learned)? For adults? Are we teaching our children to be too competitive? Not competitive enough?
- Air pollution in Louisville.
- Is voting enough to fulfill the obligations of citizenship?
- What's the difference between the Republicans and the Democrats?
- How can we achieve empowerment of the citizenry?
- Open topic tonight! What is really alive within you right now?
- Reparations for African-Americans: what do you think?
- The Kentucky Amendment to the Constitution: What do you think? How will you vote? The ballot question for the constitutional amendment will read: Are you in favor of amending the Kentucky Constitution to provide that only a marriage between one man and one woman shall be a marriage in Kentucky, and that a legal status identical to or similar to marriage for unmarried individuals shall not be valid or recognized?
- *October 6, 2004.* How do you feel about how the debates are going? Will they affect the outcome of the election?

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- In 2003, the racial attitudes of the town of Jasper, Texas, were exposed to the nation through a documentary film made during the 1999 trials of three white men charged in the brutal murder of African-American James Byrd, Jr. The attitudes in Jasper are not unique. What racial attitudes divide the citizens of our town? What can people who desire racial justice and improved race relations do to make a difference?
- *October 20, 2004.* Regardless of who wins the elections, how can we decrease polarization in this country?
- *October 27, 2004.* What are your hopes for the presidential election? What are your fears?
- *November 3, 2004.* Let's talk about the elections.
- What issues/problems do you have in communicating with the opposite sex?
- Polarization among people: What can be done to bridge the divide?
- What are you thankful for?
- What are your hopes and fears about the future of the United States?
- Why is there so much hate in the United States?
- What unites us as Americans (USA)?
- *December 29, 2004.* What is the greatest gift that you could give/receive in the coming new year? And what are your New Year's resolutions?
- *January 5, 2005.* What do you think of the prospects for the January 30th Iraqi elections?
- What could/should be the role of religion in creating world peace?
- How do you feel about the expression "*Live simply so that others can simply live*"? How rapidly are we using up the Earth's resources? How would the economy of the world be affected if the masses in industrial countries chose to live simple lives, i.e. minimal buying of material goods? What is necessary for this planet to be sustainable for thousands of years into the future? For how many people?
- How do we raise moral children?
- *February 2, 2005.* What are your thoughts on the Iraqi elections?
- *February 9, 2005.* What are your thoughts on the President's State of the Union address?
- What is your faith in the future?
- What do you think of the administration's proposed changes to Social Security?
- How can we create more community in our diverse Metro Louisville?
- How different was our childhood from that of our children and in what ways is it alike?
- Oil revisited: upcoming crisis or not to worry?
- *March 30, 2005.* What are your thoughts about the Terri Schiavo situation?

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- What is the role of literature—especially fiction—in our lives? What does reading novels do for us emotionally? spiritually? politically? creatively?
- *April 13, 2005.* What are your thoughts on the use of filibuster in the US Congress and about the current fracas about the use of filibuster as it relates to the morality of the Democratic Party?
- Robert Fulghum wrote a book titled “All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten”. If this were kindergarten, what would you like to learn for the future?
- What do you think the ideal mother of the 21st Century would resemble?
- It is the year 2010, and you have just awakened from a long sleep. As you look around you see the world just as you always wished and dreamed it would be. What is happening? How is the world different? How is your organization contributing to this new world? What are you doing that makes a difference? (Taken from the book "Appreciative Inquiry Handbook" authored by David L. Cooperrider, Diana Whitney, and Jacqueline M. Stavros, pages 116-117.)
- What is the question that, if you had the answer, would set you free? (Taken from the book "The Answer to How is Yes: Acting on What Matters" authored by Peter Block—page 32.)
- “The pursuit of gain, which Sardello* calls ‘unlimited acquisition,’ gained respectability when it was interpreted ‘as rooted in human nature’ (p. 85). Instead of seeing unlimited gain or self interest as a choice we make, we treat it as a characteristic of human nature. And when we think of it as human nature, we stop seeking other alternatives and yield to its inevitability.” Please discuss. What does this have to do with our concept of capitalism? (*Robert Sardello is the author of "Facing the World with Soul: The Reimagination of Modern Life.")
- What are the benefits of attending a conversation group?
- *June 15, 2005.* Why does the world allow the genocide in Darfur?
- What is worth doing?
- What is our national purpose? Do we have one? If yes, who decides what it is to be? If no, why don't we? Would it be desirable to have a national purpose decided upon by the citizens? How would that work? Could it work? What would you suggest for a national purpose?
- What has been the highpoint in your life so far?
- *July 13, 2005.* Recently, Saudi Arabian officials said that the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) will be unable to meet projected Western demand in 10-15 years. With that in mind, what should we be doing about this now?
- Does war by elected governments justify retaliative war by the opponent power directly on the civilian population (voters, taxpayers and draftees)?
- Just what power do corporations have over people?