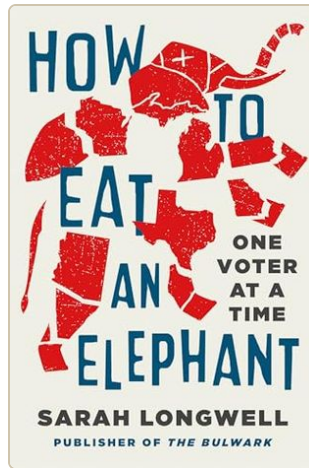


BOOK CLUB NIGHT KIT



How To Eat An Elephant

Sarah Longwell

🌙 COZY NIGHT

Sarah Longwell has spent years sitting in rooms listening to ordinary voters talk, and this book turns all that listening into a hopeful, practical case for a modern pro-democracy movement. It is a warm invitation to think about how we talk to the people around us, which makes it perfect for a group that likes to actually talk.

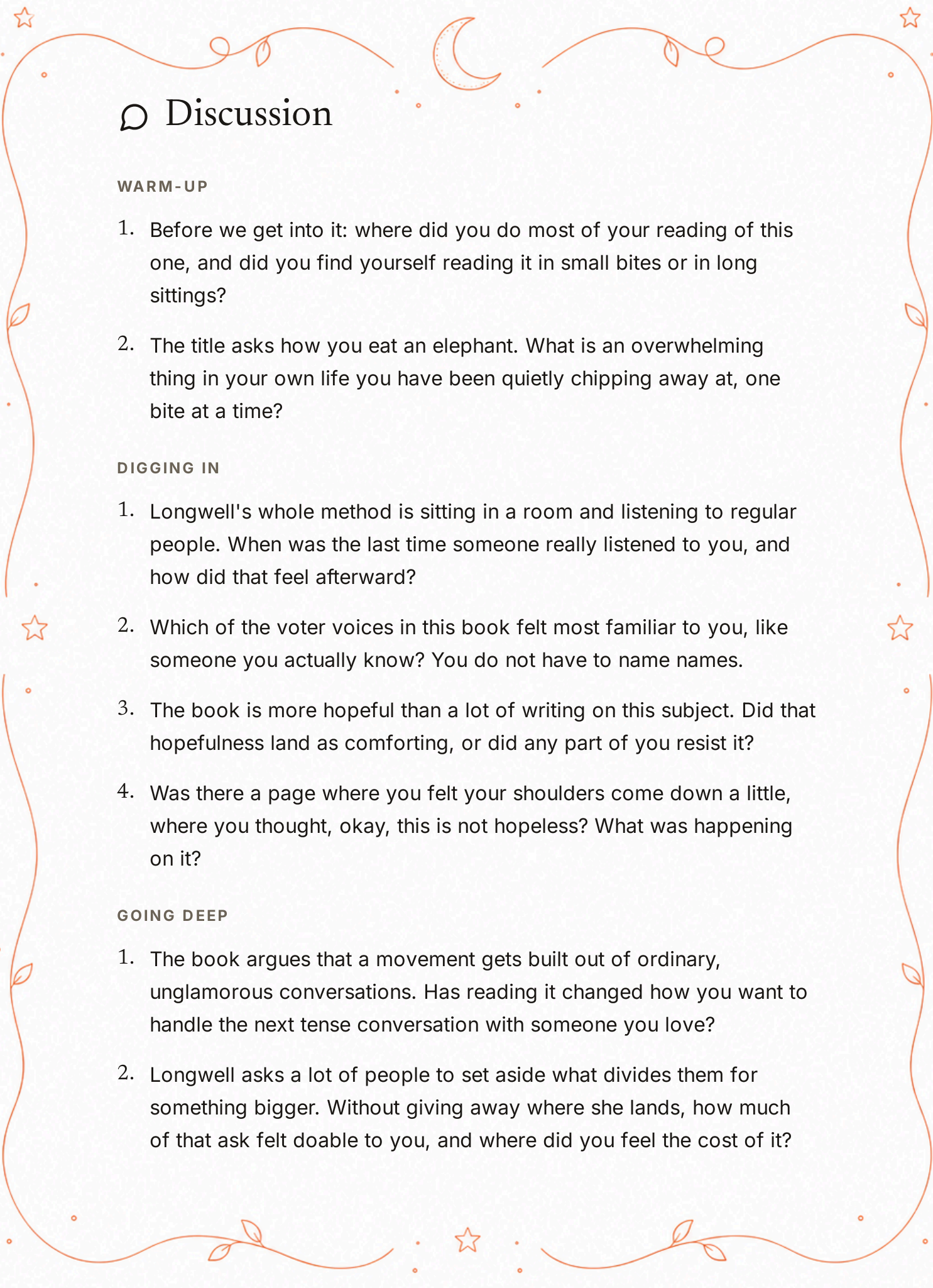
Chili, Pie, and One Bite at a Time

Come eat something warm and talk about Sarah Longwell's *How To Eat An Elephant*, a hopeful book about listening to people. Bring your mug, your appetite, and no agenda.

Reading level: Moderate

Best for: A club that likes nonfiction with a pulse and wants to leave feeling steadier, not angrier.





Discussion

WARM-UP

1. Before we get into it: where did you do most of your reading of this one, and did you find yourself reading it in small bites or in long sittings?
2. The title asks how you eat an elephant. What is an overwhelming thing in your own life you have been quietly chipping away at, one bite at a time?

DIGGING IN

1. Longwell's whole method is sitting in a room and listening to regular people. When was the last time someone really listened to you, and how did that feel afterward?
2. Which of the voter voices in this book felt most familiar to you, like someone you actually know? You do not have to name names.
3. The book is more hopeful than a lot of writing on this subject. Did that hopefulness land as comforting, or did any part of you resist it?
4. Was there a page where you felt your shoulders come down a little, where you thought, okay, this is not hopeless? What was happening on it?

GOING DEEP

1. The book argues that a movement gets built out of ordinary, unglamorous conversations. Has reading it changed how you want to handle the next tense conversation with someone you love?
2. Longwell asks a lot of people to set aside what divides them for something bigger. Without giving away where she lands, how much of that ask felt doable to you, and where did you feel the cost of it?

☕ On the table & to sip

TO EAT

☕ **A big pot of chili with bowls of toppings**

The classic American potluck food, the thing that actually gets served at the community meetings and church basements where the book's conversations happen. Make it ahead, let it sit, ladle it out.

☕ **Skillet cornbread with honey butter**

Diner and heartland food to match the focus-group rooms in small towns. One pan, one bowl of soft butter, zero fuss.

🥧 **A pie from the good place near you (or a homemade one, no judgment)**

Pie is the food of listening. Slices go around the table while people keep talking, which is exactly the point of the book.

TO SIP

☕ **Bottomless diner coffee, served in mismatched mugs (no alcohol)**

Non-alcoholic and essential. Every conversation in this book could have happened over a refill. Set out cream, sugar, and let people pour their own.

☕ **Hot spiced apple cider with a cinnamon stick (no alcohol)**

Non-alcoholic, warm in the hands, and it makes people slow down. Keep it in a slow cooker so nobody has to host the drinks.

🍷 **A simple bourbon hot toddy**

An American whiskey, honey, and lemon, the drink of a long evening and a hard subject taken gently. Offer it as the optional upgrade to the cider.

Run of show

7:00 Door open, mugs out

Coffee and cider are already hot. No host scrambling. Let people drift in and get warm for fifteen minutes before anything starts.

7:15 Bowls of chili, everyone sits

Eat first, talk second. Pass the cornbread. This is when the room actually relaxes.

7:35 Warm-up questions

Start with the one-bite-at-a-time question. It gets everyone talking about themselves before anyone talks about politics, which is the whole trick.

7:55 The listening round

Move through the theme questions. Ask people to go one at a time with no cross-talk for the first pass, mirroring the book's focus-group format.

8:30 Pie and the deeper two

Cut the pie, then take the two deep questions. Sugar and a full stomach make the harder ones easier.

9:00 Trivia, scorecards, soft landing

Light trivia to break the intensity, fill out scorecards, hand out bookmarks, and let the night trail off instead of ending it.

HOST TIPS

- Say out loud at the start that this is a listening night, not a debating night. One sentence of framing prevents ninety minutes of correcting each other.
- Make everything ahead. Chili, cider, and a bought pie mean you are in the conversation instead of in the kitchen. A slow cooker is your co-host.
- Have a soft exit ready for anyone who gets heated: 'That's a real thing, let's come back to it,' then move to the next person. Nobody should leave this one feeling worse than they arrived.



♪ Playlist

*Warm American roots music, played low: acoustic, unhurried, a little hopeful,
the kind that fills a room without competing with the talking.*

- 01 This Land Is Your Land - Sharon Jones & the Dap-Kings

- 02 The Weight - The Band

- 03 Keep Me in Your Heart - Warren Zevon

- 04 America - Simon & Garfunkel

- 05 Ohio - Over the Rhine

- 06 Hard Times Come Again No More - Mavis Staples

- 07 Long Way Home - Tom Waits

- 08 Take Me Home, Country Roads - John Denver



✧ Trivia

1. Sarah Longwell is the publisher of which political website and media outlet? (The Bulwark.)
2. What research method is Longwell best known for using with voters? (Focus groups. She has run hundreds of them and built much of her commentary on what she hears in them.)
3. The Bulwark was founded largely by writers from which earlier conservative magazine that closed in 2018? (The Weekly Standard.)
4. Longwell hosts a long-running politics podcast associated with The Bulwark. What is it called? (The Focus Group.)
5. What broad political movement does this book set out to describe and build? (A modern pro-democracy movement.)
6. What kind of book is this: memoir, novel, or political nonfiction? (Political nonfiction, drawn from the author's work with voters.)
7. The proverb behind the title asks how you eat an elephant. What is the traditional answer? (One bite at a time.)
8. Longwell's professional background before political commentary was in which field? (Public affairs and communications strategy.)

□ Bookmarks

Print, cut, and tuck one at every seat, a small keepsake from the night.



☆ Rate the book

Warmth ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

Hopefulness ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

Made me want to talk to someone ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

Clarity ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

Staying power ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

One word for how this book left me: _____

The line I want to keep in my pocket: _____

Someone I want to lend this to: _____

THAT'S A WRAP

Thank you for coming

We hope the company was good and the conversation even better. Until the next chapter.



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Book Club Night