2024 Elevate NOVA Book Circle

How to Know a Person: The Art of Seeing Others Deeply and Being Deeply Seen by David Brooks

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Discussion Guide

1. Brooks highlights the paradox of our times where we're more connected than ever (digitally) yet struggle with genuine human connection (8-9). How does this resonate with your personal experiences? Have you found it difficult to form authentic, deep connections in the digital age?

2. Reflect on the potential impact of digital technologies on community-building efforts. How can individuals use online platforms and social media to facilitate meaningful connections, dialogue, and collaboration within their communities?

3. If you had to rate yourself as either an 'Illuminator' or a 'Diminisher', where would you place yourself? Can you recall an instance where you helped someone feel seen, heard, and understood or a time when you might have made someone feel small and unseen?

4. In the Dichotomy of Diminishers and Illuminators, how can one shift from being a Diminisher to an Illuminator? What changes might one need to make in their approach to understanding and valuing others?

5. In the context of understanding and valuing others, Brooks introduces the concept of "ken" (115) to encourage readers to step into the perspectives of others. Considering your own interactions, how have

you applied, or could you apply, the concept of "ken" to better understand and value a topic or person you initially disagreed with?

6. Reflecting on the concept of curiosity as a catalyst for understanding and valuing others, how can individuals cultivate a curious mindset in their interactions with people from diverse backgrounds or with differing viewpoints? Can you think of a time when your curiosity led you to a deeper understanding of someone or something you initially disagreed with?

7. Brooks describes curiosity as a communal journey. Have you seen this reflected in your own life, where your curiosity or pursuit of knowledge was enhanced by interactions with others? How does this contrast with the common view of curiosity as an individual endeavor?

8. In the book, empathy is represented as a combination of mirroring, mentalizing, and caring (143-159). How does this integrated approach amplify the significance of curiosity in individual development? Can you reflect on a personal experience where the application of this approach may have been beneficial or might be in the future?

9. Have you experienced a moment in your life where empathy and compassion significantly transformed your moral character, similar to Carrère's journey (55-70) from self-absorption to empathy in the book? Share your own transformation journey.

10. Brooks highlights that morality lies in engaging in small, meaningful interactions that convey respect and curiosity. In your daily life, can you point to a recent interaction or event that reflects this sentiment? Did this interaction challenge or affirm your understanding of empathy and compassion?

11. Brooks contends that character development is a social practice rooted in human connection. In your view, do you agree or disagree? Can character be developed in isolation, or does it necessitate social interactions?

12. Since reading this book, how have your feelings on "what a person is" changed? How well do you feel like you *know* the people in your life (whether that be family, friends, colleagues, or neighbors)? Has this book helped you go deeper in these relationships?

13. Consider the role of storytelling and narrative in strengthening community bonds and fostering understanding among diverse members. How can communities create spaces for sharing stories and experiences to cultivate empathy and connection?

14. Discuss strategies for fostering inclusivity and belonging within communities, particularly for marginalized or underrepresented groups. How can individuals advocate for equitable access to resources, representation, and decision-making power within their communities?

15. What are some steps individuals can take to apply the principles of empathy, curiosity, and moral engagement in their efforts to build stronger, more resilient communities?