

OLIVIA 36 Questions for LOVE

Toolkit



National
Public Housing
Museum



36 Questions for CIVIC LOVE

Introduction

In 1997, psychologist Arthur Aron explored whether intimacy between two perfect strangers could be accelerated by asking each other a set of 36 questions. We adapted his questions for use in a new kind of social experiment, aimed at helping us all fall in civic love.

What is civic love?

Civic love is one's love for society, expressed through a commitment to the common good. It is a belief in the idea that we're all better off, when we are all better off. We manifest it through all kinds of actions — volunteering, marching, speaking against systemic injustice, making reparations — but the love itself is the emotional heart of the work.

In the spirit of activist Grace Lee Boggs, 36 Questions for Civic Love is an attempt to help “bring to our communities the limitless capacity to love, serve, and create for and with each other.

“So grateful to feel connected during this time of uncertainty and lack of connection”

– 36 Questions Participant

“I think the biggest thing that surprised me about this experiment was how easy it felt to talk with a complete stranger that I had not met before and answer questions that allowed them to get an inside look into the kind of person I am.”

– 36 Questions Participant



How it works

You and a partner will each ask each other a series of 36 questions – in person, or through an online platform. You should allocate 90 minutes to the process, though previous participants have finished in less time.

Take turns introducing yourself, including your name and pronouns. Continue to take turns, asking your partner each of the 36 questions. You ask a question and your partner answers; your partner then asks you the SAME question and you answer. Repeat using the remaining 35 questions.

Don't jump around. Answer the questions sequentially, 1 to 36. Though some questions may be difficult – challenge yourself to stay in it, answering all of the questions to the best of your ability. This experiment is designed to not only help us share things about ourselves but also to listen, without comment, as someone shares with us. Make every attempt to listen with curiosity, minimizing distractions and interruptions.

Resist the urge to give feedback on your partner's response or to ask additional questions about their answers. Allow them the space to simply share and be heard.

36 Questions for Civic Love

- 1 What's your favorite kitchen smell?
- 2 Can you keep a plant alive?
- 3 What sound wakes you at the start of your day?
- 4 What's one thing you've done for self care recently?
- 5 What do you keep in your cupboard that someone who raised you also kept in theirs?
- 6 What's the one thing that makes wherever you've lived, your home?
- 7 Tell me about the diversity of your high school.
- 8 What makes you feel safe?
- 9 What's your favorite gift you've ever received?
- 10 How were you raised to talk about mental health, if at all?
- 11 Take one minute and tell the story of where you live in as much detail as possible.
- 12 Name three things we appear to have in common.
- 13 What is the best thing I can eat in your neighborhood?
- 14 Who was your most memorable teacher in school?
- 15 If anything, what scares you?
- 16 Tell me about a person that is most important to you. What makes them special?
- 17 Have you turned to your neighbors for help? Why? Why not?
- 18 Have you lived in a place long enough to see it change? What did the change look like?
- 19 What, if anything, is too serious to be joked about?
- 20 Is there anything you need that is not accessible in your neighborhood?
- 21 Do you step in when you overhear a domestic argument?
- 22 What is something you do differently now since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic?
- 23 Under what circumstances would you call the police on a neighbor?
- 24 What chore do you dislike doing the most?
- 25 Describe your favorite place you've ever lived?
- 26 Have you ever been to a protest? What was it for?
- 27 Have you ever done a choreographed dance? Do you remember any moves?
- 28 Who is an unsung hero in your community?
- 29 What law would you change for the betterment of your community?
- 30 Name something you learned about me that surprised you.
- 31 What is something unselfish you've done recently?
- 32 Would you discipline a neighbor's child?
- 33 Where is your place of peace? How do you get there?
- 34 What privilege do you know you have? When did you become aware of that privilege?
- 35 Tell me about a time when you felt isolated or alone.
- 36 Name one thing you learned from this conversation that you want to carry into your life?

Evaluation

36 Questions for Civic Love is truly a social experiment. We are continually improving the project to better grow civic love. We've developed a quick five question survey to help us. You can find it at nphm.org/civiclove.

Spreading the love

As we work to spread the love, we invite you to share your experience on social media using #NPHMLove



About the National Public Housing Museum

The National Public Housing Museum (NPHM) is the first cultural institution in the United States dedicated to interpreting the American experience in public housing and the right of all people to a place they can call home. The Museum's mission is to preserve, promote, and propel public housing as a human right and all of our partnerships and programs are committed to amplifying the voices, experiences, and stories of public housing residents. Ultimately, we believe that storytelling can be a catalyst for innovative public policy solutions that are responsive to people's needs and lived experiences.

This toolkit was created by the National Public Housing Museum with the support of Sarah Pharaon, Principal (Dialogic Consulting), Lauren Meranda (Studio Brazen), and is made possible with funding from Allstate, the Illinois Arts Council Agency, the Kresge Foundation, and the Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events.



About Sarah Pharaon, Principal, Dialogic Consulting

Dialogic Consulting provides planning, program design, facilitation and training services to cultural organizations. Before launching Dialogic in March of 2020, Sarah spent ten years with the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience, training teams around the world in facilitated dialogue, interpretation and community engagement. Sarah has worked as the Director of Education at the Lower East Side Tenement Museum and was the founding curator of the Arab American National Museum.

About Lauren Meranda, Principal Designer, Studio Brazen

Studio Brazen provided the visual identity and experiential design for 36 Questions for Civic Love. Creative pursuits with good intentions, Studio Brazen is a multi-disciplinary design studio run by Lauren Meranda, specializing in projects for cultural institutions, social activism, civic engagement, and public memory through experimental media, collaborative storytelling, and interactive design for physical spaces. As a designer and producer of visual culture, Lauren strives to find means by which to let public memory emerge from the stories of the people it is bound to define. The projects and exhibits she works on seek to empower the individual to participate in the storytelling process and expand public memory to include previously unheard voices.