

Book Club Discussion Guide

**THE FRONTLINES OF
PEACE**



Séverine Autesserre

Prepared by Annie Renas, Mary Soledad Craig, and Sajdah Bey

A Letter from the Author

Dear Reader,

Thank you for choosing to read *The Frontlines of Peace* and bringing it to your book club's discussion. I feel grateful that you are taking the time to share the valuable messages of hope, peace, and resilience that I convey through my book.

My name is Séverine Autesserre ([pronounced](#) sev-REEN' oh-tuh-SEHR') and I am an award-winning author, peacebuilder, and researcher, as well as a Professor of Political Science at Barnard College, Columbia University. I am the author of *The Trouble with the Congo* and *Peaceland*, in addition to articles for publications such as *The New York Times* and *Foreign Affairs*. You can read more about my research and teaching at my [website](http://www.severineautesserre.com), <http://www.severineautesserre.com>.

If you choose to read *The Frontlines of Peace* with your book club, I would be happy to join your discussion. I am available for up to one hour and I can participate through an online platform such as Zoom or Skype. My email, sa435@columbia.edu is always the surest way to reach me. Please provide me with ample advance notice of your preferred dates, bearing in mind my availability and potential time zone constraints. I am used to working with Zoom, but Skype works as well if you prefer.

In the event that we can't find a time that works for me to join your discussion, not all is lost! You can also attend one of the [events](#) that I have scheduled to talk about my book.

Lastly, as you know, book reviews are tremendously important for both authors and readers. After you have read the book, I would be very grateful if you could ask your members to review it. This is an excellent way for members to consolidate their views and opinions on the book before coming to discussion. Additionally, it helps future readers to decide if this is the book for them. You can review *The Frontlines of Peace* on [Amazon](#), [Barnes and Noble](#), [Books-a-Million](#), [Goodreads](#), [Indigo](#), or your own favorite sites.

Thanks for reading!

All the best,



Séverine Autesserre

About the Guide

This discussion guide offers thought-provoking questions to foster conversation on Séverine Autesserre's *The Frontlines of Peace*. It is useful for non-fiction book clubs and politics book clubs, or anyone hoping to deepen their engagement with this book. In addition to fifteen discussion questions, there are five activities to further enhance your book club and a list of resources to continue engaging with the author and her work.

About the Book

In *The Frontlines of Peace*, Séverine Autesserre examines the well-intentioned but inherently flawed peace industry. She explains how most aid interveners have been getting it wrong, and, more importantly, how some of them have been getting it right. In a lively and engaging narrative, Autesserre reveals that peace can grow in the most unlikely circumstances with the help of the most unlikely heroes. She makes the compelling case that we must change our approach radically if we hope to build lasting peace around us—no matter where we live.

Discussion Questions

- 1** What were your expectations about *The Frontlines of Peace* before reading? How did you feel during reading, and what feeling did it leave you with upon finishing?
- 2** Before reading, what did you know about peacebuilding practices? Did you have any positive or negative assumptions? Has your view expanded or changed after reading?
- 3** In the Preface, Autesserre provides a short autobiography of how she came to immerse herself in the peacebuilding world. Which of her stories resonated with you the most and why?
- 4** Autesserre tells of the discrepancy between foreign diplomats' understanding of a conflict and the reality on the ground. What can be done to address this discrepancy? Do you see it in your own government's approach to peacebuilding in foreign conflicts?

5 Do you agree with the approach to peacebuilding of the Life & Peace Institute? What are the benefits and limitations, if any, to their methods?

6 Chapter Three is centered around Autesserre's discussion of "insiders and outsiders." Think of an example of a conflict zone in which you would be an "outsider," and imagine you are working there as a peacebuilder. What could you do to improve your relationship to "insiders"?

7 In Chapter Four, Autesserre discusses "the election fetish" that dominates prevailing peacebuilding practices. She asserts: "Contrary to the conventional wisdom, democratization is not an antidote to violence." Why does the author espouse this position? In your view, should democratization be the ultimate goal of peacemakers?

8 Autesserre routinely comments on the legacy of colonialism as it pertains to the relationships between foreign peacebuilders and local residents. How, in the author's view, do the effects of colonialism continue to influence these relationships? Do you agree or disagree with the author's viewpoint on this matter?

9 In Chapter Six, Autesserre writes, "in recent years, there has been a new fad in intervention circles: the idea of bringing 'African solutions to African problems' (or Latin American solutions to Latin American problems, and so on)." What is the author's opinion on this notion? What is your perspective on this topic, especially as it relates to peacebuilding practices?

10 Autesserre describes what she considers "the model intervener." What are your reactions to some of these traits? Why are they important to peacebuilding? Did any of them surprise you?

11 In Chapter Seven, Autesserre states that "we can make great strides just by interacting informally with those who despise us or those whom we hate." Do you agree with this assertion? Can you think of a time in your own life when this method has helped to break down barriers or solve a conflict?

12 Autesserre ultimately concludes that the most constructive approach to peacebuilding is one that combines the expertise of both foreign interveners and ordinary citizens. Do you agree with this notion? Why or why not?

13 While the book discusses violence, war, and the harrowing effects of conflict, it is centered around uplifting stories of success. How does the author define “success” as it relates to peacebuilding? Do you agree with this definition of “success?”

14 Do you think *The Frontlines of Peace* leaves the reader with hope for the future of peacebuilding and conflict resolution? Why or why not?

15 *The Frontlines of Peace* includes several anecdotes that illustrate the power of locally-led peacebuilding efforts. Of these case studies, which resonated with you the most, and why?

Enhance Your Book Club

1 Have book club members identify a conflict in their immediate community. Can you draw parallels to the conflicts mentioned in the book? What techniques could be learned from the examples of successful peacebuilding and applied to your own conflicts?

2 Have the group design their own model of the “ideal peacebuilder.” What elements do you draw on from the book? Where do you agree/disagree with the author? Can the group reach a singular consensus on what should and should not be included?

3 Have your group look through [photos of the people and places](#) from *The Frontlines of Peace* (posted on Instagram and on Facebook). Peruse through them to match faces to the names you have read throughout the book. What do these images reveal about the people and places in the text? Which photos did you find most illuminating or surprising?

4 Have your group go to <https://www.peaceinsight.org>, a project by Peace Direct and the Alliance for Peacebuilding that has mapped over 1,800 peacebuilding organizations around the world. They can click on a country of interest and read up on a local peacebuilding organization. What organization interests you the most and why? What parallels can you see between that group and the ones described in *The Frontlines of Peace*?

5 Have your group members think about ways in which they can be a local peacebuilder in their own community. What would that look like? Is your group interested in using Autesserre’s tools to become an agent of change?

Further Resources

- Many additional resources for book clubs and discussion groups are available [here](#) (scroll down to the “More information” section and click the “Book Clubs” tab)
- Séverine Autesserre can be found on social media as [@SeverineAR](#) on Twitter, [@SeverineARA](#) on Instagram, and [@SevererineAR](#) on Facebook.
- Hear Séverine Autesserre in conversation with a fellow peace builder on [The Peace Corner Podcast](#).
- Watch these videos in [English](#) and [French](#) to learn more about Séverine Autesserre and her journey as a peacebuilder.
- Enjoy [listening to a podcast, watching a video, or reading an article](#) about *The Frontlines of Peace* (scroll down to the “More information” section and click the “Media Coverage” tab).