

LIVE LIKE A CITIZEN

A Discussion Guide



We're so glad you're reading Eric Liu's book, [Live Like a Citizen](#), and even more glad you want to do it alongside others – whether friends, neighbors or strangers!

Each chapter asks something of you – not just to understand a specific civic capacity, but to actually practice it. We've designed this guide as a resource, whether you're hosting an hour-long conversation or stewarding a community read over several months. Pick and choose the questions that are most relevant to your group's interests and challenges or go deep through the whole text together.

This guide follows a simple rhythm to help you dive in, chapter by chapter:

What — What are Eric Liu, and the people reflected in the chapter, saying or showing about what it means to build and practice this capacity and why it matters?

So What — How does this relate to my own life? What am I understanding differently or newly about how I practice this capacity? What must I personally work on, in embodying it in both spirit and skill?

Now What — What opportunities do I see to authentically practice and role-model this capacity? How can I integrate it into my life actively, fully?

Each section within carries an accompanying 'pairing' — thematically linked songs, poems, or pieces of inspiration. Consider weaving in some spirited sights or sounds as you go!

[Chapter 1: How to See](#) | [Chapter 2: How to Listen](#) | [Chapter 3: How to Feel](#) |
[Chapter 4: How to Join](#) | [Chapter 5: How to Fight](#) | [Chapter 6: How to Change](#) |
[Chapter 7: How to Imagine](#) | [Chapter 8: How to Commit](#)

Chapter 1: HOW TO SEE

🎵 [For What It's Worth \(Stop, Hey What's That Sound\)](#) — Buffalo Springfield

🎵 [What's Going On](#) — Marvin Gaye

- What are Eric, and the people reflected in this chapter, saying or showing about what "seeing like a citizen" means, and why it matters? What's at stake if we don't?
- When you look around your community, what do you tend to notice first — and how might your own wants or fears be shaping what you take in or filter out?
- What do you want to prioritize paying closer attention to over the next two weeks? How — precisely! — will you do it?

Chapter 2: HOW TO LISTEN

 [The Sound of Silence – Simon & Garfunkel](#)

 [The Shepard tone: What it is and how it works](#)

- What are Eric, and the people reflected in this chapter, saying or showing about how to “listen like a citizen,” and why it matters? Did any ideas, stories, or lessons stay with you — any excerpts worth lifting up?
- Try to “watch yourself” listening to other people, in your own mind. What do you notice — about your body language, the reactions or questions you tend to offer, or how your style shifts with different people? Of the types of listening Eric describes — documentary, caregiver, immigrant, listening like a judge — which reflect how you tend to listen?
- What opportunities do you have to practice one of these approaches more deeply? Describe a person or place in which you can practice deeply present listening. How will you help yourself begin, or continue?

Chapter 3: HOW TO FEEL

 ["WHEREAS" by Layli Long Soldier](#)

 ["Don't Hesitate" by Mary Oliver](#)

- What are Eric, and the people reflected in this chapter, saying or showing about how to feel “like a citizen,” and why it matters to be in tune with our emotions this way?
- When do you feel joy in your community — what makes it possible, alive, contagious? And how do you express love in civic settings, in ways that are actually felt?
- Where does that become harder — when do you notice your own civic grief, or find it hard to “govern” yourself in civic life? What helps?
- At the end of the chapter, Eric asks: “What do you want to make out of your pain?” How might you answer — or, another angle: what do you want to build or transform with the love you carry?

Chapter 4: HOW TO JOIN

 ["One Today" by Richard Blanco](#)

 [Won't You Be My Neighbor? – Mr. Rogers](#)

- What are Eric, and the people reflected in this chapter, saying or showing about what to join, and how to join? What can their stories teach us about why it matters to get involved in strengthening community up close?
- What has specifically motivated you to join the civic activities you're already part of? Try to recall your earliest memory of realizing “I'm part of something bigger than myself — and I've got to show up.” At the same time: what, if anything, has made it hard to get or stay involved in causes or communities you care about?
- Think about Eric's call to create a culture of invitation. Who in your community could you invite into more active, powerful citizenship? How would you approach it — how could you start a conversation that actually makes a difference?
- What conditions need to be in place for joining to feel possible — to you, and others? What's within your control to influence or change? And who might you collaborate with to create more opportunities for people to join in what you're already doing?

Chapter 5: HOW TO FIGHT

 [“won't you celebrate with me” by Lucille Clifton](#)

 [Rise – Black Violin](#)

- What are Eric, and the people reflected in this chapter, saying or showing about how to fight responsibly and effectively in civic life and why approaching fighting with integrity and skill matters?
- What forms of fighting are present in your community – and what forms are missing? Eric describes arguing becoming more effective when we take winning off the table, prioritize relationships, pay attention to context, model vulnerability, and make room for transformation. Looking at your community as a whole, which of these qualities feel present and which feel absent?
- Now turn it inward. Eric also outlines five personal strategies for fighting constructively: how to argue (fight with), how to advocate (fight for), how to oppose (fight against), how to win (fight well), and how to lose, and lose forward (fight again). Which of these feel familiar or easy to you – and which do you struggle with?
- What's helped you strengthen your ability to argue constructively? And after reading this chapter, how will you commit to fighting differently? Be specific!

Chapter 6: HOW TO CHANGE

 [“The Guest House” by Rumi](#)

 [Relativity, from M.C. Escher \(1953\)](#)

- What are Eric, and the people reflected in this chapter, saying or showing about how to change your mind and why it matters? What's at stake if we stay rooted in our existing perceptions without exploring more?
- Do you think about where your ideas, perspectives, and deep stories come from – who and what have helped form them, and who or what hasn't been in the mix? What sources do you find yourself seeking out, and what's missing?
- Where might cognitive dissonance be showing up in your life? Has there been a moment when you broke out of that loop, or realized you were wrong? What did it take for that to happen?
- Eric suggests that changing your mind requires knowing your own mind, learning and knowing minds different from yours, and assessing what you've got invested in your current mindset. Use this as a mirror: what do you notice about when, or how, you actually prioritize these? And did this chapter reinforce or complicate something you already believed – about yourself, public life, or an issue that matters to you?

Chapter 7: HOW TO IMAGINE

 [“A House Called Tomorrow” by Alberto Rios](#)

 [For Freedoms: Where Do We Go From Here?](#)

- What are Eric, and the people reflected in this chapter, saying or showing about how to “imagine as citizens,” and what effects this has on people and communities?
- Whether inside yourself, or within your community, where do you see a lack of imagination – a tendency to cling to the status quo? What are the risks if that doesn't shift? And on the other side: who do you see in your community practicing imagination in powerful, creative ways?

- Eric offers a “5D” frame for understanding ourselves as both responsible and capable citizens: imagining who you are (your roles in community), yourself in time (your place in a long, unending chain of people and possibility), where you are (what it means to be in relationship with the place you are), and what you do (how your role, your time, and your place crystallize into your deeds). What does this frame surface for you? What could it offer?
- How – and with whom – can you practice imagination? How might you develop this as a muscle, a part of who you are and how you move in the world, day by day?

Chapter 8: HOW TO COMMIT

🎵 [With My Own Two Hands – Jack Johnson](#)

🎬 [Create America, – Vincent Harding](#)

🙏 [Sworn-Again America: An Oath](#)

- What have you come to learn or remember about your role in civic life through reading this book with each other?
- What felt difficult, uncomfortable, or unresolved for you as you read or completed the book? What did those moments reveal?
- As you complete & consider the final chapter of this book – and its call to being and action – what commitments are you making for yourself, about how you will contribute to your community, in terms of skills and spirit? How will you practice asking for support?

Ready for more?

Citizen University offers programming for communities looking to grow their capacities in the habits and skills needed to strengthen civic culture. Learn more at citizenuniversity.us.

