

CALLINGS

*The PURPOSE and
PASSION of WORK*



DAVE ISAY

A STORYCORPS BOOK



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Callings: The Purpose and Passion of Work Guide

In *Callings*, StoryCorps founder Dave Isay presents powerful, unforgettable stories of people who have found meaning in their work. Some are well compensated; others are not. Some discovered their path early in life, while others arrived there much later. Many overcame significant obstacles or made life-changing decisions in pursuit of what matters most to them.

Collected for over two years as part of a national outreach effort, the first of its kind for StoryCorps, these stories highlight voices that, in most cases, have never been previously published or broadcast.

We meet a man from the barrios of Texas whose experiences as a child of migrant farmworkers inspired him to become a public defender. A longtime waitress takes pride in making every customer feel welcome in her Nashville diner. A young man from Chicago's South Side becomes a teacher to support at-risk youth like those who once shaped his own life. A volunteer in Little Rock helps formerly incarcerated individuals rebuild their confidence and reenter the workforce.

Together, these stories demonstrate that work can be about far more than earning a living. They reveal how passion, perseverance, and purpose can transform a job into a calling, bringing deeper meaning and satisfaction to every aspect of life.

About the Author

[Dave Isay](#), a MacArthur Fellow and *New York Times* bestselling author, has dedicated his career to capturing the lived experiences of everyday people. Through StoryCorps, he has helped hundreds of thousands of Americans record and preserve their stories, now archived at the Library of Congress as one of the largest collections of human voices in the world. In addition to his work in media and broadcasting, Isay has expanded his efforts through initiatives like "One Small Step," which aims to foster meaningful dialogue and connection across political divides.

How to Use the Book

In Your Class

- Use this book to analyze current events and foster productive discussion.
- Recognize that some students may not have completed the summer reading. Clearly indicate in your course schedule:
 - When the book will be referenced
 - Whether students are expected to read part or all of the book by that date
- Develop assignments that connect the book to your course outcomes, or use it to reinforce key theories, philosophies, and practices within your discipline.

Outside the Classroom

- Provide students with dedicated time to read the book.
- If students do not have a copy, encourage them to borrow one from K-State Libraries or Sigma Tau Delta's Lending Libraries.
- Create flexible questions or activities inspired by the book to ensure participation—even for those who have not completed the full reading.

Planning Events

- Partner with established campus groups to:
 - Share funding responsibilities
 - Increase visibility and promotion
 - Boost attendance
- Choose event times strategically based on your target audience:
 - **Faculty/Staff:** Weekdays between 8:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m.
 - **Students:** Tuesday/Thursday evenings after 7:00 p.m. (note: these times may overlap with exams)
- Consider class schedules when planning daytime student events:
 - **Monday/Wednesday/Friday classes:** Typically begin on the half hour
 - **Tuesday/Thursday classes:** May begin on the hour, half hour, or five minutes past
- When possible, coordinate with instructors to:

- Schedule events during class time
- Invite them to bring their students as a group

Discussion Questions

- [University High School of Indiana](#) Discussion Questions
 - How would you define a “Calling”?
 - Despite the obvious differences between those individuals interviewed in this book, do you notice any similarities in their experiences and values?
 - What is the difference between happiness and fulfillment?
 - Must a career be a passion?
 - What do you feel called to do at this moment in time?
 - If you were a StoryCorps participant for *Callings*, who would you interview and why?
- We often measure career success by external metrics, such as salary or titles. If all jobs paid the same wage and carried the same social status, how would your current career aspirations change?
- Think of a person in your life whose “calling” is quiet or invisible. If their story is never recorded or broadcast, does it diminish the value of their contribution to the human experience?
- StoryCorps emphasizes the importance of “being heard.” Why does having stories archived, essentially being “witnessed” by a stranger, change the way we value our own lived experiences?
- Is a calling a fixed destination one finds, or is it a skill one develops over time through discipline and habit? How might your definition of a calling change if it were a choice rather than a discovery?
- How do the stories shared in the book challenge the idea that career paths must be linear?
- Do you think complete mastery of a craft is necessary for work to be considered meaningful?
- What role do early life experiences play in shaping a person’s calling?

Chapter Summaries

Dreamers

A collection of stories illustrating how curiosity, pivotal experiences, and unexpected opportunities shape career paths. Contributors describe formative moments—from a single school assignment to a career-altering injury—that redirected their lives toward purpose-driven work.

John Heyn, 56, talks with his uncle Herman Heyn, 83, a Street-Corner Astronomer

- Herman Heyn traces his dream career back to a single eighth-grade science assignment.
- [Listen to the audio, Herman Heyn and John Heyn](#)

John Maycumber, 42, talks with his girlfriend, Barbara Abelhauser, 44, a Bridgetender

- Barbara Abelhauser discusses why accepting a pay cut and reduced benefits ultimately proved to be the best career move she ever made.
- [Listen to the audio, Barb Abelhauser and John Maycumber](#)

Forensic Artist Sharon Long, 74, talks to her colleague Steve Sutter, 57

- Sharon Long reveals the intricate process and passion behind her life's work of bringing the dead back to life.
- [Listen to the audio, Sharon Long and Steve Sutter](#)

NBA Referee Marat Kogut, 31, talks with his father, Leon Kogut, 63

- Marat Kogut explains how a sprained ankle led to a life in the center of the court, calling the shots instead of taking them.
- [Listen to the audio, Leon Kogut and Marat Kogut](#)

Aeromedical Field Tester Alton Yates, 73, talks with his daughter, Toni Yates, 46

- Alton Yates recalls that a desire to ease his father's burden led him to join the Air Force as a high-stakes test subject.
- [Listen to the audio, Before NASA, Alton Yates' High Speed Contribution to Space Travel](#)

Carl McNair, 57, remembers his brother, Astronaut Ronald McNair, with his friend Vernon Skipper, 57

- Carl McNair honors his brother's relentless curiosity and the long miles he walked just for a chance to learn.
- [Listen to audio, Carl McNair](#)

Library Assistant Storm Reyes, 64, talks to her son, Jeremy Hagquist, 44

- Storm Reyes recalls how a bookmobile ignited the hope and courage she needed to leave her past behind.

- [Storm Reyes and Jeremy Hagquist](#)

Scientist Dr. Dorothy Warburton, 78, talks to her son, Bob Warburton, 51

- Dr. Dorothy Warburton discusses her career tackling reproductive issues in an era when women's health was often glossed over.

Dentist Thomas McGarvey, 71, talks to his friend and patient Anne Brande, 40

- Thomas McGarvey details the long road from a childhood of sudden responsibility to an unexpected career in dentistry.

Generations

These stories explore how callings are passed down, reshaped, or reimagined across families. Parents and children reflect on shared professions and the ways early exposure, mentorship, and legacy influence career choices.

Firefighter Dekalb Walcott Jr., 60, talks with his son, Dekalb Walcott III, 27, also a firefighter

- Dekalb Walcott Jr. shares how his beginnings in the fire department paved the way for his son to follow in his footsteps.
- [Listen to the audio, Dekalb Walcott Jr. and Dekalb Walcott III](#)

Funeral director Don Byles, 65, talks with his daughter and protegee, Mackenzie Byles, 25

- Don and Mackenzie Byles recount the profound honors and heavy burdens of life of serving both the dead and the living.
- [Listen to the audio, Don Byles and Mackenzie Byles](#)

Ledo Lucietto, 80, talks with his daughter, Anne Lucietto, 45, a mechanical engineer

- Ledo Lucietto recalls how Anne's early days shadowing him in his shop sparked the technical curiosity that eventually drove her to pursue her grandfather's trade in engineering.
- [Listen to the audio, Ledo Lucietto and Anne Lucietto](#)

Tool and die maker Phil Kerner, 49, remembers his father and uncle

- Phil Kerner discusses how the legacy of his late father and uncle, both tool and die makers, inspired his own journey in the trade and eventually led him to foster community for small businesses after his own shop closed.

Bricklayer Barbara Moore, 62, talks with her daughter, Olivia June Fite, 33

- Barbara Moore describes how she paved her own path in bricklaying, prospering in a demanding industry that once dismissed women as too weak or unskilled for the work.
- [Listen to the audio, Olivia Fite and Barbara Moore](#)

Engineer and entrepreneur Noramay Cadena, 34, talks with her daughter, Chassitty Saldana, 16

- Noramay Cadena recalls how working in a factory alongside her mother fueled a drive for change, leading her to earn a master's degree and return to the very industry she once labored in to improve it.
- [Listen to the audio, Chassitty Saldana and Noramay Cadena](#)

Sculptor Olga Ayala, 57, talks to her ex-husband, Efraim Ayala, 61, about her mother, artist Ramona Cruz

- Olga Ayala recounts how her mother's untapped artistic talent ignited her own lifelong passion for creation, fostering a bond of mutual inspiration that fueled both of their creative spirits.

Dr. Larry Michaelis, 73, talks with his daughter, Dr. Laura Michaelis, 47

- Dr. Larry Michaelis describes how growing up in the world of medicine shaped his own career as a surgeon and inspired his daughter to follow in his footsteps.

Farmer Johnny Bradley, 72, talks to his daughter, Kathy Bradley, 52

- Johnny Bradley remembers how the hardships of a sharecropping childhood taught him to endure, fueling a lifelong determination to claim the future he wanted.
- [Listen to the audio, Kathy Bradley and Johnny Bradley](#)

Actor Ricardo Pitts-Wiley, 53, talks to his son, Jonathan Pitts-Wiley, 22

- Ricardo Pitts-Wiley shares how a random high school play ignited his theatrical dreams, and how he willingly set that ambition aside to raise two resilient sons, inspiring one to follow that same calling.

Gayle Lain, 72, talks with his wife, Sheryl Lain, 70, about his father, Red Lain, an oil rig driller

- Gayle Lain shares how his father's untimely death in the oil fields reshaped his own priorities, pushing him to build a close-knit family despite choosing the same demanding profession for himself.

Healers

Centered on service, these narratives highlight individuals motivated by personal loss, hardship, or compassion. Their work—often emotionally demanding—reveals how care for others can become a deeply sustaining calling

Oncology nurse Dana Viviano, 37, talks with her daughter, Sarafina Viviano, 10

- Dana Viviano reflects on her late mother's battle with cancer, recalling how the diagnosis motivated her to complete nursing school and dedicate her career to supporting cancer patients.
- [Listen to the audio, Sarafina Viviano and Dana Viviano](#)

Hospice Chaplain Issan Koyama, 60, talks to his spouse, Paul Boos, 57

- Issan Koyama explains how the loss of his father and the urgency of the AIDS epidemic motivated him to dedicate his career to hospice work.
- [Listen to the audio, These Memories Shaped His Journey Into Hospice Work](#)

Retired firefighter John Vigiano, 68, talks to his wife, Jan Vigiano, 65, about their two sons, firefighter John Vigiano Jr. and Police Detective Joe Vigiano, both of whom died in the September 11 terrorist attacks

- John Vigiano honors the memory of his sons, Firefighter John Jr. and Police Detective Joe, who both laid down their lives in the line of duty on September 11, 2001.
- [Listen to the audio, Jan Vigiano and John Vigiano Sr.](#)

Ironworker Kerry Davis, 52, talks with his coworker and friend Ken Hopper, 53

- Kerry Davis and Ken Hopper share the unique highs and lows of their careers, reflecting on what it's like to be among the few people working on the Golden Gate Bridge.
- [Listen to the audio, Ken Hopper and Kerry Davis](#)

Sanitation worker Angelo Bruno, 60, talks with his former partner Eddie Nieves, 55

- Angelo Bruno and Eddie Nieves reflect on the daily acts of kindness that built strong community relationships along their route and fostered a profound sense of pride in their work.
- [Listen to the audio, NYC Sanitation Workers on Lessons Learned While Picking Up Garbage](#)

Veterans crisis hotline worker Rich Barham, 57, talks with his colleague Nelson Peck, 65

- Rich Barham and Nelson Peck reflect on their post-military experiences, explaining how their hardships motivated them to support and save other veterans navigating similar crises.

Emergency Medical Technician Rowan Allen, 51, talks with his former patient Bryan Lindsay, 29

- Rowan Allen shares how helping to save a child from a car accident left an indelible mark on his life.
- [Listen to the audio, Bryan Lindsay and Rowan Allen](#)

ICU nurse Michelle Alore, 43, talks to her daughter, Jenna Anderson, 16

- Michelle Alore discusses the deep fulfillment she finds in family-centered care, explaining how her passion for supporting patients sustains her through the profession's emotional challenges.

StoryCorps founder Dave Isay, 46, talks with his friend Austin Chen, 51, an OBGYN

- Dr. Austin Chen reflects on her journey from a Taiwanese immigrant to practicing OBGYN, a path that ultimately led her to maintain a seven-day workweek for twelve years.

Lillie Cotlon, 70, talks with her son and business partner, Burnell Cotlon, 47, a grocer

- Burnell Cotlon recounts how he channeled his entrepreneurial spirit into a beacon of hope, rebuilding and breathing new life into his Lower Ninth Ward community after the devastation of Hurricane Katrina.
- [Listen to the audio, Burnell Cotlon and Lillie Cotlon](#)

Assistant Federal Public Defender Vito de la Cruz, 51, talks to his wife, Maria Anastasia Sefchick-Del Paso, 47

- Vito de la Cruz shares how his childhood labor as a migrant farmworker fueled his passion for law, ultimately empowering him to defend the very community he worked alongside as a boy.
- [Listen to the audio, Vito de la Cruz and Maria Sefchick-Del Paso](#)

Policewoman Pat Hays, 74

- Pat Hays reflects on how her dysfunctional family background shaped her approach as a police officer, fueling her commitment to supporting the vulnerable individuals she protects.

Ink removal specialist Dawn Maestas, 42, talks with her client Nicole Mendoza, 22

- Dawn Maestas explains how her calling in laser tattoo removal serves as a path to liberation for abuse survivors, highlighting how her own experiences alongside Nicole Mendoza drive her mission.
- [Listen to the audio, Dawn Maestas](#)

FMF Corpsman Barbara Butler, 58

- Barbara Butler reflects on her time as one of the first groups of women integrated into the Fleet Marine Force, proving skeptics wrong and defying the widespread belief that they would fail.

English Teacher Ayodeji Ogunniyi, 24

- Ayodeji Ogunniyi shares how a family tragedy motivated him to pursue a career in teaching, establishing himself as a vital foundation of guidance and stability for his students.
- [Listen to the audio, Ayodeji Ogunniyi](#)

Philosophers

These stories focus on reflection, meaning-making, and unconventional paths. Individuals describe how inspiration, mentorship, and life transitions guide them toward fulfilling, if sometimes unexpected, work.

Lee Buono, 40, a neurosurgeon, talks with his eighth-grade science teacher, Al Siedlecki, 65

- Dr. Lee Buono recounts how an enthusiastic high school science teacher first put him on the path to becoming a neurosurgeon, leaving a mark on his life that he still vividly remembers today.

- [Listen to the audio, Lee Buono and Al Siedlecki](#)

Artist and educator Sol Aramendi, in her forties, talks with her student Cyntia Gomar, 31

- Sol Aramendi and Cyntia Gomar discuss how creating and experiencing art gave them a vital sense of belonging and comfort after immigrating to the United States.

Beekeeper Ted Dennard, 43, talks to his friend Clay Culver, 35

- Ted Dennard looks back on the unforgettable mentor who ignited his lifelong passion for beekeeping.

Josh Gippin, 33, talks with his grandmother Rose Brudno, 85, a bar owner

- Rose Brudno looks back on her years as a bar owner who fiercely protected her patrons while running a strict, no-nonsense establishment.

Salmon Slicer Leonard “Len” Berk, 85, talks with his friend Joshua Bubitz, 46

- Len Berk reflects on his unconventional career pivot from accountant to salmon slicer, even though it meant a pay cut.
- [Listen to the audio, Joshua Gubitz and Len Berk](#)

Beer vendor Clarence “Clancy” Haskett, 55, talks with his friend and former colleague Jerry Collier, 50

- Clancy Haskett and Jerry Collier chat about the fun, friendly competition and the pure excitement of working as vendors for the Baltimore Orioles.
- [Listen to the audio, The Baltimore Orioles Vendor Who Steals The Show](#)

Entertainer Coach Operator Arnie Knapp, 53, talks with his wife, Judy Knapp, 48

- Arnie Knapp opens up about what it is really like to drive a tour bus more than 300 days a year while keeping his heart anchored to the family waiting for him back home.

Subway conductor Paquita Williams, 55, talks with her passenger, Laura Lane, 28

- Paquita Williams shares how she found her calling as a conductor and the joy she finds in using her position to connect deeply with others.
- [Listen to the audio, Paquita Williams and Laura Lane](#)

Sydney Reed, 10, talks with her grandfather Jim Clyburn, 66, a congressman

- Jim Clyburn looks back on his long journey in politics, sharing how his steady perseverance ultimately led to success despite many early setbacks.
- [Listen to the audio, "There Was Just Something That Kept Telling Me That You Got To Stick This Out": Rep. James Clyburn On Success and Failure](#)

Employment counselor Darlene Lewis, 60, talks with her employee and friend James Taylor, 40

- Darlene Lewis and James Taylor talk about their journey together and explain how they are expanding Darlene’s outreach work to guide and uplift local teenagers.
- [Listen to the audio, Darlene Lewis and James Taylor](#)

Waitress and blues singer Miranda Louise, 57

- Miranda Louise talks about her time at Brown's Diner, sharing her heartfelt love for the close-knit community and the sense of belonging that makes the restaurant so special.

Groundbreakers

Profiles of individuals who challenged norms, overcame systemic barriers, and pursued their callings despite resistance. Their stories highlight courage, innovation, and long-term impact.

Marc Anderson Lawson, 42, talks with his sister, Karen Lawson, 45, about their father, video game inventor Jerry Lawson

- Marc Anderson Lawson and Karen Lawson share memories of their tinkerer of a father and discuss how his love of building things inspired Marc to pursue a career in software development.
- [Listen to the audio, "He Created His Own Destiny": Siblings Remember Their Video Game Pioneer Dad](#)

County Clerk Clela Rorex, 71, talks with her friend Sue Larson, 57

- Clela Rorex shares her experience as a county clerk who made the deeply important and revolutionary choice to grant a marriage license to a same-sex couple during a time of great controversy.
- [Listen to the audio, Sue Larson and Clela Rorex](#)

Reverend Eric D. Williams, 54, talks to his colleague Jannette Berkeley-Patton, 46

- Reverend Eric D. Williams recounts how his decision to hold a funeral for an individual lost to AIDS, even though another church had refused, completely changed his life and ministry.
- [Listen to the audio, Reverend Eric Williams and Jannette Berkley-Patton](#)

Chef and restaurateur Laura Martinez, 30, talks with her business adviser, Andrew Fogaty, 57

- Laura Martinez describes the hurdles she overcame alongside Andrew Fogaty to achieve her dream of opening a restaurant as a blind chef.

Ford assembly plant supervisor Dorothy Ginton, 64, talks to her son Sonari Ginton, 33

- Dorothy Ginton talks about what motivated her to join the Ford company and move into management despite trouble from her male colleagues, and how she went on to help create positive changes for women.
- [Listen to the audio, Sonari Ginton and Dorothy Ginton](#)

Frank Scott, 67, remembers his father, NASCAR driver Wendell Scott, with his son, Warrick Scott, 37

- Frank Scott reflects on his father's deep dedication to his career, showing how his perseverance carried him through the challenges he faced due to racial discrimination.

- [Listen to the audio, Frank Scott and Warrick Scott](#)

Building contractor Lyle Link, 90, talks to his granddaughter Cary Dreher, 24

- Lyle Link recounts his start as a contractor, reflecting on how his honesty and hard work helped him build lasting structures he could always be proud of.
- [Listen to the audio, Lyle Link and Carly Dreher](#)

Resources

Videos & Podcasts

- Podcast: [StoryCorps 466: Callings](#)
- Podcast: [David Isay - Listening as an Act of Love](#) - On Being with Krista Tippett
- Podcast: [Reducing toxic polarization - one conversation at a time](#) | Dave Isay - Ted Talks Daily
- Video: [Finding what you are meant to do | Dave Isay](#) - Signature Views
- Video: [Dave Isay: Everyone around you has a story the world needs to hear](#) - TED
- Video: [Author Dave Isay - Callings: The Purpose and Purpose of Work](#) - Appalachian State University Common Reading Program
- Video: [An Introduction to StoryCorps from our Founder, Dave Isay](#) - StoryCorps
- Video: [One Small Step: A Sixth Street Conversation with Dave Isay](#) - Sixth Street

Articles

- [EducationWeek](#): Q&A With StoryCorps' Dave Isay
- [The Public's Radio](#): *'This is what I was meant to do': Dave Isay reflects on a career of storytelling, bridging America's political and social divide*
- [New York Times](#): *Now Is the Time to Ask Your Loved Ones About Their Lives*
- [CBS News](#): *Bridging America's political divide with conversations, "One Small Step" at a time*

Teaching and Learning Styles

K-State offers a range of teaching approaches designed to support different learning styles and help students adapt to college-level expectations. By engaging with multiple formats, students can identify strategies that work best for them and strengthen their ability to learn effectively.

Common Teaching Methods

- **Lecture**
Instructors present material—often with slides or other visual aids—while students listen and take notes. Questions are typically asked when invited.
- **Seminar**
Smaller, discussion-based classes where students are encouraged to ask questions and engage deeply with the material.
- **Flipped Classroom**
Students review lectures or course content before class (e.g., videos or readings), using class time for discussion, questions, and applied activities.
- **Lab and Lecture**
A combination of lecture and hands-on work. Students often complete pre-lab assignments, discuss concepts in lecture, and then apply them in a lab setting. Common in science and engineering.
- **Student-Conducted Classroom**
Students lead discussions on assigned topics, with the instructor serving as a resource for guidance and clarification.
- **Online Courses**
Students work independently through course materials and assessments. Instructors are available via email, phone, or virtual communication. Some courses may include in-person components.
- **Demonstrations**
Instructors show how a concept works in practice. Students may observe or participate. Common in applied disciplines such as science and engineering.
- **Simulations**
Students engage in realistic scenarios that require critical thinking and decision-making without real-world risk. Frequently used in fields like science, engineering, and aviation.
- **Cooperative Learning**
Students work in small groups to solve problems or complete tasks collaboratively.
- **Case Studies**
Students apply knowledge to analyze and solve hypothetical or real-world scenarios, individually or in groups.

- **Role Play**
Students take on different roles to explore complex issues, practicing problem-solving through guided scenarios.
- **Problem-Based and Inquiry Learning**
Instructors present a problem that students must investigate and solve through research, analysis, and explanation.

Classroom Activities

Creating opportunities to teach *Callings* can be both simple and flexible. The following activities can be adapted to fit your course content and the time you have available. They are effective for building community and encouraging active engagement. You might use them to open a class session and spark discussion, or as a closing activity if your planned material runs short. Discussion questions from earlier in the guide can also be easily incorporated into these activities.

Faculty Announcement

Time: 5 minutes or less

Benefits:

- Encourages students to engage with the K-State First Book experience beyond the classroom
- Enriches classroom discussion through shared experiences

Directions:

Encourage students to attend the author event or other First Book related programs. Establish a meeting location at the venue so students can gather beforehand and sit together.

Professional/Business Writing Activity

Time: 10–20 minutes

Benefits:

- Helps students connect literary content with professional communication practices
- Encourages interdisciplinary thinking

Directions:

Select a story in the book and have students rewrite it using professional or business writing conventions.

Two Circles

Time: 4–5 minutes per question

Benefits:

- Promotes focused discussion of key questions

- Builds community through one-on-one interaction
- Increases student confidence in speaking

Directions:

Divide the class in half. One group forms a circle facing outward; the other forms an outer circle facing inward, pairing with a partner.

- Pose a discussion question
 - Allow pairs to discuss
 - Debrief briefly as a full group
 - Rotate the inner or outer circle and repeat
-

Student-Led Discussion

Time: 5–8 minutes per group

Benefits:

- Reinforces learning through teaching
- Develops public speaking and leadership skills
- Helps instructors assess student understanding
- Builds connections among students with similar academic interests

Directions:

Group students by major or academic interest. Assign each group a topic or set of discussion questions relevant to their field. Have students lead the discussion.

Think–Pair–Share

Time: Approximately 10 minutes

Benefits:

- Encourages both individual reflection and collaborative learning
- Increases participation and idea-sharing

Directions:

- Pose a question from the discussion guide
- Have students write a brief individual response

- Pair students to share their ideas
- Invite pairs to report back, either voluntarily or in a structured round

Facts, Statistics, and Terms to Know

Encourage students to explore key terms from the book, relevant demographic data, and related mental health resources to deepen understanding.

Spinning Yarns (*Benjamin Ward, 2011*)

Objective

Inspired by the tradition of “talking sticks” used in talking circles, *Spinning Yarns* encourages discussion and participation by allowing only the person holding the ball of yarn to speak. The activity also visually demonstrates the interconnectedness of participants through the web formed during play.

Time: 10-40 minutes (depending on the number of questions)

Number of Players:

- At least 10

Materials:

- One ball of yarn (avoid winding it too tightly)

Preparation:

- Prepare a series of discussion questions in advance.
- Questions from the earlier discussion guide work well, especially those that build on one another.

Directions:

1. Ask students to raise their hands to be called on to answer questions. Emphasize that only the person holding the yarn may speak.
2. Hold the end of the yarn, ask the first question, and gently toss the ball to a student with a raised hand.
 - If the student contributes meaningfully, they keep hold of their section of yarn.
3. Ask the next question. The student who just responded selects the next participant and tosses the yarn to them.
 - If a student does not contribute or answer the question, they return the yarn to the previous holder and do not become part of the “web” yet. They may join later by contributing.

4. Continue the process until:
 - All questions have been asked,
 - You run out of yarn, or
 - Time expires.
5. Conclude by discussing key themes or insights that emerged.
6. Carefully have students release the yarn and help gather it.

Tips and Considerations

- Use questions that build a narrative, theme, or set of interconnected ideas for the most effective experience.
- Expect the yarn to become tangled and plan accordingly.
- Longer tosses can increase energy and engagement but remind students to stay attentive and toss gently to ensure safety.

Awards

K-State First Book Faculty/Staff Award

Faculty and staff are encouraged to submit learning activities developed in connection with the common book for recognition.

Eligible submissions may include, but are not limited to:

- Course assignments
- Events and programs
- Class discussions or activities

Submissions are evaluated based on:

- Creative application of the book's themes
- Level of student engagement in the activity
- Demonstrated commitment to enhancing the educational experience at K-State

K-State First Book Student Awards

Students are invited to reflect on the themes and issues raised in *Callings* through a creative or reflective project.

Submissions may take a variety of forms, including:

- Nonfiction essays
- Creative writing
- Music or video
- Visual or performance art (including recorded performance)
- A short (approximately two-minute) personal video

Entries should clearly identify the source of inspiration, such as:

- The book itself
- The author lecture
- A class discussion
- Another related event, program, or reading

This contest is open to all K-State students. The winning student will receive a \$1,000 scholarship for the spring semester.

For more information, visit [K-State First Awards](#)

Kirmser Undergraduate Research Award

The Kirmser Award recognizes and promotes outstanding undergraduate research at Kansas State University. Awards are presented in the following categories:

- Freshman (individual)
- Non-freshman (individual)
- Group project

Award Amounts:

- Individual categories: \$1,000 grand prize
- Group category: minimum of \$2,000 (adjusted based on group size)

Research projects must:

- Be completed as part of a K-State course
- Represent any academic discipline
- Demonstrate meaningful use of library resources

For more information, visit [Kirmser Undergraduate Research Awards](#)

Faculty, Alumni, and Community

You do not have to be an incoming K-State student to participate in the First Book program. Here are a few ways to engage with friends, family, and your community.

Read the Book

- Purchase a copy online or from your local bookstore
- Borrow a print copy from your public library

Start a Discussion

Engage in conversation with your incoming student—or others—about the book. Consider using questions like:

- How would you define a “calling”?
- If you were participating in a StoryCorps *Callings* interview, who would you choose to interview, and why?
- What role do early life experiences play in shaping a person’s calling?
- We often measure career success by external markers such as salary or job title. If all careers offered the same pay and status, how might your aspirations change?

Get Involved

- Start a discussion group or incorporate *Callings* into your book club
- Explore additional resources on the K-State First Book website, including recommended books, films, and related materials
- Follow K-State First on Facebook and Instagram @kstatefirst
- Attend events hosted on the K-State campus throughout the academic year