I consider this book a bridge, not only between those in conflict, but also between the academic and nonacademic worlds. I hope that by writing in story form and raising provocative questions about conflict, *Common Ground on Hostile Turf* will be useful in college courses, and relevant and entertaining for everyone else. In that spirit, I have written this Reader’s Guide for both students and book clubs.

My intent is for this guide to stimulate discussion and deeper thinking about the conflicts described in the book. To that end I refer to specific chapters in some of the questions, but all questions can be applicable to all chapters if you choose to treat the guide that way.

The questions should also provoke you to delve into your own approach to conflict and reconsider, or reaffirm, deeply held positions or values. With a strong belief in the power of the story, I encourage you—whether in an academic setting or in a comfortable chair by the fire—to find those stories within that support, challenge, or enrich the conclusions reached in the book.
Understanding conflict: If we are to deal with conflict successfully—and, better yet, if we are to prevent it—we need to understand the roots and the dynamics that nurture it.

- What are some of the roots of conflict illustrated in the stories in the book? Look particularly at chapters 1, 4, and 7.
- Find a conflict from your own experience at home, at work, in the community, or on a larger scale. What are the roots of that conflict? Does that conflict have any surprising roots, or any that are not obvious? Would another person involved in that conflict answer this question differently? If so, how?
- What role does personality play? Look particularly at chapters 6, 8, and 9.
- What are some of the outside forces and seemingly unrelated events that can impact the course of a conflict, for better or worse? Is there a way to prepare for these “unexpecteds”? What can a mediator, or participant, do when faced with these surprises? Have you had a relevant experience?

Kinds of power: In conflict, we muster whatever power we can. This power can come from a wide variety of sources, including our access to money and influential people, our own personality and power of persuasion, and a coincidence of external events that tip the balance in our favor, just to name a few.

- What kinds of power do you see exercised, particularly in chapters 3, 8, and 11?
- What kinds of power have you seen operating in conflicts? What was the basis of that power? How effective was it?
- The book distinguishes between mainstream power and minority power (chapter 12). Does this seem valid to you? Is there a power innate in being part of the mainstream? Is there a comparable power in being part of a minority?
- Some sources of power are innate (e.g., race) while others are a matter of choice (e.g., education). How do you feel about this proposition?
- Are there qualities or characteristics or attributes that might be an asset in one situation and a liability in another? For instance,
Governor Viarril in chapter 1 was a hero to some, a villain to others; his assets in one situation got him in trouble in another. Can you give some other examples from the book or from your own life?

**Setting the table and inviting the guests:** If conflict resolution is an event, then we can imagine the first step as “setting the table.” The resolver needs to consider who should be there, how to word the invitation, what is on the agenda, and even the shape of the table.

- Who has the authority to set the table? What bias might that person(s) bring to the design? Are there ways this authority can be shared, and if so what are the advantages and risks of sharing this task? Consider Colonel DeBow in chapter 6 and the NEPA process. Consider also the dilemma of Western Network in chapter 2.

- What different process designs are illustrated in the stories? What are the factors to consider when choosing one design over another? What are the risks associated with different formats? Consider particularly chapters 5, 9, 10, and the last story in chapter 7.

- What criteria are useful when deciding whom to invite into the process? Consider particularly chapters 4 and 8.

- What are some motivations for agreeing to participate and some reasons for declining? Consider particularly chapters 1, 2, 9, and 11.

- Put yourself in the position of one of the parties in this book and imagine trying to decide the pros and cons of coming to the table. Have you experienced that dilemma yourself?

**Seeking solutions:** Those at the table should consider all their options and regularly pose this question to themselves: If I do not participate in this process, what is the best outcome I could hope for? There can be many possible answers: I can sue the opposition and I might win, but on the other hand I might lose everything. Or: I can stay outside this process, not be bound by any agreement, and keep my options open for later action, but I may miss out on a good deal that the larger group can negotiate. Or:
I can back a certain candidate in the next election, and that will change everything and make this process moot. To stay at the table, each party must be convinced that it is the forum for their best possible outcome, and that other strategies are unlikely to produce a greater benefit.

- What is the best possible outcome for an environmental participant in chapter 4 who chooses to join this process? For a community member? What is the biggest risk for both in staying at the table? What other options does each side have? Choose another conflict, from the book or your own experience, and answer the same questions.
- How does the mediator contribute to an atmosphere where a solution is possible? Consider particularly chapters 9 and 11.
- What role might a party in the conflict have in promoting that positive atmosphere?
- What is the role of trust in achieving a resolution to conflict? Consider chapters 4, 6, and 10.
- When you are in conflict, what would help put you at ease (besides a total victory!)?
- How can the format and process design influence the likelihood of resolution? Consider particularly chapters 1, 3, and 5.
- Give examples from the book where a personality promoted or prevented resolution of the conflict. Have you been in the presence of one or the other when trying to resolve a conflict? Describe your reactions.

**Measuring success:** If mediation is more art than science, then measuring success can be tricky. We have to ask “in whose opinion,” “at what moment in time,” and “by what criteria.” Two models are offered in the book, one at the beginning of chapter 9 and the other in chapter 12.

- Using the three measures of participant satisfaction (chapter 9)—substantive, process, and psychological—how would you evaluate chapters 3, 6, 9, 10, and 7 (last story)?
- Using the triangle “cheap/fast/good,” (see page 191) where achieving all three is optimum but unlikely, how did the cases in chapters 1, 4, and 8 fare?
• What other measures of success would you suggest?
• See if you can design evaluation instruments to be given at the end of a process to (1) the mediator, (2) the client, and (3) the parties. Would you make it quantitative with number scales of satisfaction/dissatisfaction? Would you try to capture qualitative and anecdotal responses?

Applicability to other kinds of conflict: How applicable do you think the book’s ideas about conflict resolution are to the following types of conflicts?

• Marital disputes—you discover your spouse is unfaithful and you are ready to file for divorce.
• Neighborhood disputes—your neighbor’s dog barks all night and you are ready to do something you will regret.
• Labor disputes—a union prepares to strike for higher wages and shorter hours.
• National issues—a debate rages over a polarizing issue, like the definition of marriage, or privatizing social security.
• International situations—a bloody civil war begs for outside intervention, or a country defaults on obligations and risks financial collapse.

Challenges for the mediator: Some dilemmas for the mediator may involve his or her personality, values, and choices. Here are a few that are particularly confounding:

• The mediator is troubled by the clash between cultural traditions and the best practices of conflict resolution (chapter 5). Do you share her concerns? Do you believe a choice needs to be made? If so, in what cases, and what would be the basis of the choice? If not, how would you handle those situations?
• The mediator theoretically is “neutral”—able to handle controversial situations without taking sides. But there are, of course, times when he or she has preferences, even biases, that necessarily need to be kept under wraps. Consider this dilemma in light of chapter 9, where the mediator is accused of bias but believed that she was simply balancing the power at the table. Do you
think she ran the same risk in chapter 11? Is a mediator allowed to “favor” a party in order to level the playing field?

- In some cases the mediator’s biggest challenge is not the parties at the table, the complexity of the topic, or the level of emotion. The biggest challenge may be the client who does not share the mediator’s vision and does not trust the process, but holds the contract and the purse strings. We saw examples in chapters 5, 6, and 10. Are there times when the mediator should refuse the job, or resign, given this dysfunctional relationship? When is it reasonable to proceed, hoping the client will come around?

- At times the mediator’s biggest dilemma is very close to home—how to determine when he or she is no longer needed or useful. We see the mediator in chapter 6 hanging onto the situation and the parties long after the job she was hired for ended. What are the dangers inherent in this scenario? Consider the mediator’s role in the Millers and Scholes dispute in chapter 7. Is this a similar situation? Can you develop criteria for the mediator to help make that decision about when to get out?

**Getting personal:** Here are some questions to help you connect more personally to the stories in the book. Take a cue from some of the book’s heroes—be bold, honest, and vulnerable, and find that humanity in yourself that you share with others.

- Which character(s) did you most identify with and why?
- At what times in your life have you felt afraid and powerless? How do you think others viewed you—with sympathy, with irritation, with confusion? How did they treat you? What did they say?
- Think about your own power. How would you describe it? How might you exercise it in a conflict situation?
- The author assumes that we all have the power to help resolve conflicts. Do you see yourself in this light? In what way—large or small—have you contributed to the resolution of a conflict?