



Commissioner's Book Club: Hope in the Dark

Discussion guide

Introduction

The prompts and questions that follow are meant to encourage discussion and support reflection. Human rights-related books highlight challenging issues and topics—take care of yourself in the ways that you need while you dig in.

For more suggestions, including different ways to reflect and share, check out [the Book Club How-to resource](#).

Author bio

Writer, historian and activist [Rebecca Solnit](#) is the author of more than twenty books on feminism, western and urban history, popular power, social change and insurrection, wandering and walking, hope and catastrophe. Her books include *Orwell's Roses*; *Recollections of My Nonexistence*; *Hope in the Dark*; *Men Explain Things to Me*; *A Paradise Built in Hell: The Extraordinary Communities that Arise in Disaster*; and *A Field Guide to Getting Lost*. A product of the California public education system from kindergarten to graduate school, she writes regularly for the *Guardian*, serves on the board of the climate group Oil Change International and recently launched the climate project Not Too Late.¹

¹ "Biography," Rebecca Solnit, accessed 2025, <http://rebeccasolnit.net/biography/>.

Summary

Hope in the Dark by Rebecca Solnit encourages us to find hope in uncertain times by reminding ourselves that hope doesn't mean pretending everything is okay, it means acting even when the outcome is unclear. Drawing on historical and modern examples, the book shows how small actions and unexpected movements can grow into something powerful. Solnit argues hope is not a naïve feeling, but a purposeful choice tethered to action. When we act together, we make room for new possibilities.

Solnit's work on hope has been a guiding light for me in my work on human rights. On days when I feel discouraged about the state of the world, the lack of political will and compassion to address the human rights challenges in our communities or the rise of hate and violence, I turn to her message that hope is not passive optimism but rather the courage to push forward in the face of uncertainty.

—Commissioner Govender

Linking the book to human rights in B.C.

Hope in the Dark is about reclaiming public agency and believing that individuals and small actions matter.

At BC's Office of the Human Rights Commissioner (BCOHRC), many of our actions have resulted in change, and many have not. The [Where We Stand: Recommendations Monitoring Report 2019–2024](#)² explores how many recommendations originating from inquiry, tribunal and policy work are “partially implemented or in progress”, including 58 per cent progress, and 11 per cent fully realized.

Solnit warns against cynicism when progress slows and reminds the reader that a collective voice is needed to transform hopeful policy into lived equality. In other words, the many unfulfilled recommendations for change from BCOHRC—and more broadly, the scope of the human rights work that needs to be done in B.C.—should serve as motivation for the work ahead rather than immobilizing us.

“While it is important to note the strides taken to address human rights concerns in our province, Where We Stand also calls attention to the continued actions that are required to fulfil our human rights obligations,” said Commissioner Kasari Govender.

² “Where we stand: Recommendations monitoring report, 2019–2024,” BC's Office of the Human Rights Commissioner, May 2025, <https://bchumanrights.ca/resources/publications/publication/where-we-stand-2019-2024/>.



“Each of these recommendations is made pursuant to the *Human Rights Code* and is backed by evidence. While I have substantial powers under the Code to compel evidence, investigate systemic human rights issues and make recommendations for change, our mechanisms for holding duty holders to account for making these required changes is more limited. Tracking and publicizing the implementation of recommendations is essential to creating accountability and transparency for public bodies; our societal commitment to human rights must extend from words to actions.”

Discussion guide questions and prompts

Here are some questions to ignite discussion or thought on the connections between the book and human rights. The provided prompts are not the only or complete answers, but some ideas you might want to incorporate into your conversation:

1. **What do you think Solnit means when she says hope is “an embrace of the unknown”?**
 - Answers may vary.
2. **Why does Solnit distrust both cynicism and blind optimism?**
 - She views cynicism as defeatist, and optimism that expects success without effort as unrealistic, where both discourage action. Instead, she encourages critical thinking plus hope.
3. **How does Solnit show the power of grassroots action? What examples did you find the most interesting?**
 - These events start small, with early organizers working quietly and escalating into major change. It shows that big victories (for example, the fall of the Berlin Wall) often originate from grassroots actions, with many small local efforts adding up.
4. **Solnit says stories shape our politics. How does narrative control relate to human rights?**
 - Those in power decide which stories get told, which affects public understanding and policy. People whose stories are silenced may lack access to justice or equal treatment. When marginalized voices are included or centred (stories about discrimination, exclusion and/or protest) they shift public awareness. Solnit insists activism often starts in “marginal zones” where stories begin and that this leads to policy or legal recognition.



5. Inspired by the book, what personal narrative of change or joy in resistance would you want to share?

- Answers will vary.
- Answers may include having joined a meeting, signed a petition, acted on injustice, said something, made a post, attended an event or started a conversation. Sharing that story, no matter how small it seems, can inspire others. Solnit believes voices matter when collected into public narrative.

6. Solnit warns against waiting for “paradise” before acting. What does that mean to you personally and in your role(s)? What is one small action you could commit to after reading this book?

- Answers will vary.

