1. Patricia Roberts-Miller writes, “productive democratic deliberation requires that we take responsibility for our arguments, including the assumptions we make” (pg. 72). What are the assumptions that shape your core beliefs? Is it hard to identify and articulate your core assumptions? Why?

2. Choose a politician with whom you agree or who shares your political party and who, based on Patricia Roberts-Miller’s definition, you think might use the language of demagoguery. What are three specific examples in their writing, speech, social media, or advertising of this rhetoric. Does your opinion of the politician change whether you agree with them?

3. Watch a political debate. Are there statements where the rhetoric of demagoguery is used? How did the audience respond to the moment? How did the moderator and other candidates respond to the moment? Was the interaction around the moment productive? What would have made it more productive?

4. Patricia Roberts-Miller says, “political problems are complicated in their cause and cure, and there is no such thing as a perfect decision” (pg. 26). Choose a political issue in the news today (e.g. health care, gun control, immigration, climate change, gentrification…). What makes the issue complicated? Identify the stakeholders in the issue. What would each see as a “perfect decision?” What is a possible middle ground? What are barriers to achieving a middle ground?

5. The author speaks primarily of demagoguery in history and political discourse. Where else do we see demagoguery in our culture? Are there influencers and celebrities who use their platform to advance the rhetoric of demagoguery? What films, television shows, or other forms of media relate to the book’s discussion of demagoguery?

6. What impact does social media have on the discourse of demagoguery? How can we, as consumers of social media, shift the conversation?

7. Patricia Roberts-Miller says that one of the ways to combat demagoguery is by “trying to ground our arguments in relevant evidence and credible sources” (pg. 17). Have you ever used a source that you knew to be biased or less credible in order to affirm your own thoughts or beliefs? How can you tell if a source is credible? How can you tell if a source is biased? Is there such a thing as an unbiased source? What are ways to verify bias or accuracy of information? What are ways you can make yourself a more informed citizen?

8. Patricia Roberts-Miller says, “arguments about how we should argue most interfere with demagoguery” (pg. 15). In the classroom, what are some important rules for class discussion? What disrupts productive and civil classroom conversations?

9. Read page 27-28. Then watch “Tomorrow Belongs to Me” from the 1972 film version of the 1966 musical Cabaret. The context is that it is 1930 in Weimer Republic Germany, right before Hitler comes into power. A group of people are spending the afternoon in a biergarten and a young man stands up to sing. What did you initially think the song was about? Were you surprised when the camera panned to the singer’s armband? How did that visual change the meaning of the song? Why did the people in the crowd join in with
the song? Were the people evil for joining in? How did you feel at the end of the song? What does this clip reveal about demagoguery?