



Urban League of  
Greater Kansas City

## ***The Afraid of the Dark*** **Community Reading Circle**

- Making Race Relations Understandable
- Debunking Myths and Stereotypes
- Finding Common Ground and Goals
- Promoting Dialogue & Understanding
- Helping to Appreciate Different Cultures



**Urban League of Greater Kansas City**  
[www.ulkc.org](http://www.ulkc.org)



**Gwen Grant**

An epiphany of one of my white friends, coupled with a book, served as catalysts for the *Afraid of the Dark Reading Circle Initiative*. My friend, Carol Grimaldi, shared an experience when her predominantly white church joined the congregation

from a predominantly black church to discuss the book, *Afraid of the Dark: What Whites and Blacks Need to Know About Each Other*.

Written by Jim Myers, the book offers a platform for discussion about the many things that blacks and whites think about each other but seldom – if ever – talk about. These congruent reasons prompted the Urban League of Greater Kansas City to further its mission of improving race relations by launching the *Afraid of the Dark Community Reading Circle Initiative*. More ultimate reasons were also clear.

We need to learn better ways of talking that will foster fluid lines of communication, and we need to do two things right now. First, stop being afraid of honesty, candor, and differences of opinion when communicating with others. Secondly, start engaging in authentic dialogue across the color line about the deeper issues (while hidden) that perpetuate the doubts, fears and misconceptions that have kept up divided all these years.

The *Afraid of the Dark Reading Circle Initiative* utilizes a safe and structured methodology of discussing racial differences that divide African Americans, Caucasians, and Latinos, and can help us break loose of prejudice, half-truths and ignorance. In doing so, we can begin the intricate journey towards building authentic relationships and bridging the racial divide.

**Gwen Grant**

*President & CEO*

*Urban League of Greater Kansas City*

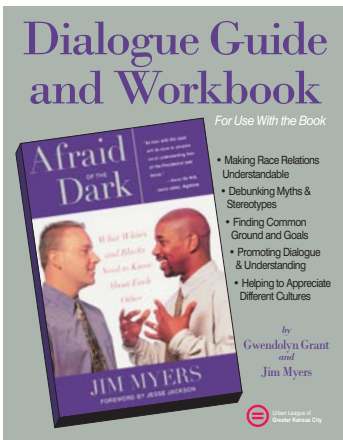
*Founder, Afraid of the Dark Reading Circle Initiative*

## A creative approach to exploring diversity

The *Afraid of the Dark Community Reading Circle Initiative* is an excellent tool for educating business, civic and community leaders, and others on the cultural aspects of structural racism. Awareness, acceptance and respect are essential elements for creating environments that embrace diversity while helping further develop individuals and teams. By engaging in authentic dialogue about issues that have polarized us over the years, we can break down barriers in our communities and in the workplace.

The Community Reading Circle Initiative takes into account the difficulty and discomfort associated with talking about race. Therefore, it is designed on the premise that the more whites, blacks and Latinos interact in positive situations, the higher the likelihood that we will begin to establish more meaningful relationships with each other.

Coupled with the book, the *Afraid of the Dark Dialogue Guide & Workbook* provides the



structured and non-threatening framework in which individuals, pairs, groups, organizations and entire communities, can think and talk about race issues in a constructive manner. This creative approach to exploring

diversity can help people who want to learn and contribute to the effectiveness of their organizations, which ultimately creates a more inclusive community.

## Forming a Reading Circle

To initiate an *Afraid of the Dark Community Reading Circle*, contact the Urban League of Greater Kansas City. Any Reading Circle can be customized to suit the specific needs of any corporation, organization or group.

The Urban League of Greater Kansas City will order the books and dialogue guides and arrange dates for delivery prior to the launch of your reading circle.

*“Afraid of the Dark was published in 2000, but little in American race relations or in attitudes about race seems to have changed since. The issues along the color line that the book describes still exist in the 21st century, reinforced in some cases by new incidents that give credence to old racial attitudes, doubts and fears.”*

**- Jim Myers**

*Author, Afraid of the Dark: What Whites and Blacks Need to Know About Each Other*

Gwen Grant, or a trained facilitator, will present an overview of the book, dialogue guide and workbook, reading circle historical background, outline of your customized reading circle process and desired outcomes, schedule of activities, and conduct a question and answer period.

A before and after attitude awareness survey will be administered to each reading circle to measure the effectiveness of the experience of your organization or group.

## Reading Circle Tools

The book, *Afraid of the Dark: What Whites and Blacks Need to Know About Each Other*, has 18 chapters divided into three parts. It is suggested that participants commit to at least two hours each month (though schedules vary and are framed by readers) of independent study and preparation for the dialogue sessions.

Each chapter, and each section, is a build on previous narratives that provoke critical thinking and conversation, but sheds a bright light on topics that we might be afraid to address with others “not like us.”

The companion *Dialogue Guide & Workbook*, written by Gwen Grant and Jim Myers, is designed for both individual work or with a partner or group. The guide & workbook stimulates honesty, observations, a deeper self-awareness, and authentic conversation. This creative method is excellent for capturing thoughts and collateral notes that could serve as additional discussion topics, prompting an even deeper understanding of the races.

The most important tool, however, are those individuals who participate in the *Afraid of the Dark Community Reading Circle Initiative*. Their commitment to learn while gaining a better understanding of themselves and others is essential to the process. It is for people who want to facilitate change now and in the future.



## Building bridges through participation

Since its inception in the spring of 2004, more than 1,500 individuals, corporations, community-based organizations and groups have formed Reading Circles. That number continues to grow daily.

Following is a sampling of Reading Circle participants:

*AARP Missouri*

*City of Leawood, KS*

*City of Raytown, MO*

*Greater Kansas City Chamber of Commerce*

*H&R Block*

*Kansas City Power & Light/Great Plains Energy*

*Kansas City, MO Mayor's Commission on Race*

*Kansas City, MO Police Department*

*Mazuma Credit Union*

*Missouri Leadership Conference*

*NAACP*

*Sonnenschien Nath & Rosenthal*

*Unity on the Plaza*

*Urban League Board of Directors*

*“In my efforts to build bridges to the movers and shakers on Wall Street, LaSalle Street, and the Silicon Valley, most of whom are white, I have discovered that the class gap is a result of the cultural gap. These powerful and influential leaders simply do not tap into the underserved markets where there are underutilized resources and circles. These corporate leaders simply have no contact with minorities.”*

*- Rev. Jesse L. Jackson, Sr.  
from his foreword*

## About Jim Myers

Career writer Jim Myers has written about race relations for such diverse publications as USA Today and USA Weekend, Atlantic Monthly, and The Washington Post.

Myers was born in Ithaca, NY, attended Cornell University and the New School, and lived in Spain from 1964 to 1973. He was author of a 1972 book on Spanish culture that the London Sunday Telegraph called “as readable as Hemmingway.”

Myers began his newspaper career with his hometown Ithaca Journal newspaper. He spent eight years with the Rochester (NY) Democrat and Chronicle and nine years with USA Today as a cover story writer based in Washington, DC. He left USA Today in 1995 to pursue freelance writing. He was also a technical consultant to the CBS-TV drama series “The District.” Myers wrote *Afraid of the Dark: What Whites and Blacks Need to Know About Each Other*, published in 2000.

## About Gwen Grant

Gwen Grant, a native of Kansas City, MO, has been the President & CEO of the Urban League of Greater Kansas City since 2001. Prior to joining the Urban League in 1995, Grant was manager of Pioneer Campus of the Metropolitan Community Colleges system where she was responsible for developing, marketing and facilitating training programs for business, industry and agencies in the Greater Kansas City area.

Grant holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Business Administration and an Executive Fellows MBA from Rockhurst University. She has further enriched her skills and expertise with numerous courses of specialized training in the areas of leadership and organizational development. In addition to serving as the editor of *The State of Black Kansas City* and author of various essays on race relations and leadership development, Mrs. Grant writes a monthly op-ed column for *The Kansas City Call* entitled *A Point of View*. The *Kansas City Call* is one of the oldest African-American owned newspapers in the United States.

Grant volunteers as Chair of the Mayor’s Commission on Race; Commissioner on the Tax Increment Financing Commission, chairing the Affirmative Action Committee; Metropolitan Arts Council Board of Directors; KCMO School District Buildings Corporation; University of Missouri-Kansas City Institute for Urban Education Advisory Board; National Urban League Association of Executives; and Commissioner on the Downtown Economic Stimulus Authority.



Urban League of  
Greater Kansas City

## Empowering Communities. Changing Lives.

### Our Mission

The mission of the Urban League of Greater Kansas City is to achieve equality and promote socio-economic opportunity to improve the quality of life for African Americans and others.

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The Urban League of Greater Kansas City is a non-profit, nonpartisan, civil rights and community-based movement that serves 7940 people, providing direct services, research and policy advocacy to help individuals and communities reach their fullest potential. Primarily working with African Americans and other emerging ethnic communities, its network is working to close equality gaps for people in all economic levels and stages of life, and giving citizens a chance to give back as volunteers.

To learn more, contact:

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