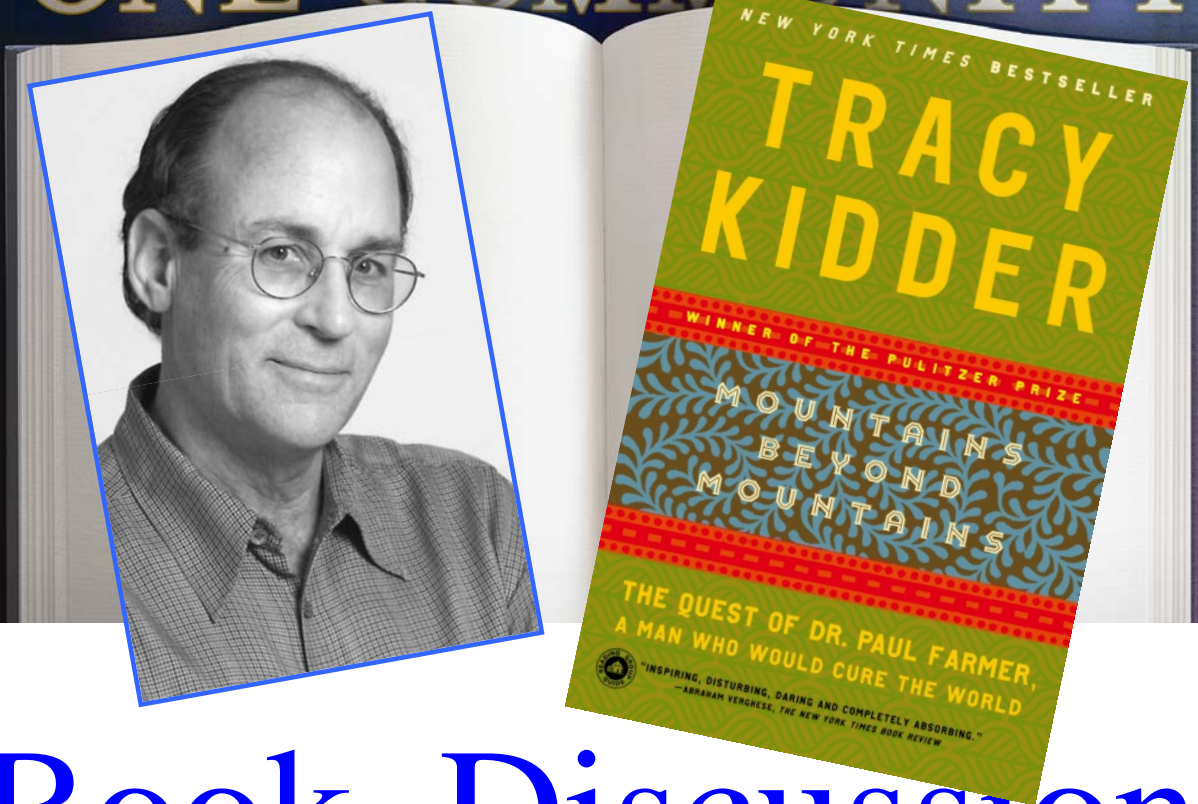


# One Book ONE COMMUNITY



## Book Discussion Tool Kit

# Mountains Beyond Mountains

by Tracy Kidder

## Synopsis:

This beautiful book takes us from Harvard to Haiti, Peru, Cuba, and Russia, as Dr. Paul Farmer changes minds and practices through his dedication to the philosophy that “the only real nation is humanity”—a philosophy that is embodied in the small public charity he founded, **Partners in Health**. He enlists the help of the Gates Foundation, George Soros, the U.N.’s World Health Organization, and others in his ambitious quest to cure the world. At the heart of this book is a life based on hope, and on an understanding of the Haitian proverb “Beyond mountains there are mountains”: as you solve one problem, another problem presents itself, and so you go on and try to solve that one, too. Mr. Kidder reveals how radical change can be fostered through the story of one man who sets out to heal the world.

## Author Bio:

Tracy Kidder was born in New York City in 1945. Kidder attended Harvard College where he earned an AB in 1967. From 1967 until 1969 he served as First Lieutenant in Vietnam and was awarded a bronze star.

After his tour of duty, Kidder obtained an MFA from the University of Iowa, where he participated in the Writer’s Workshop, a program known for the literary luster of both its staff and alumni. At the workshop Kidder met *Atlantic Monthly* contributing editor Dan Wakefield, who helped him get his first assignment for the magazine in 1973, thus beginning a long-term association with the publication. Kidder’s articles in the *Atlantic* have covered a broad range of topics, ranging from railroads to energy, architecture, the environment and more.

In 1994 Kidder met Dr. Paul Farmer—the subject of his book, *Mountains Beyond Mountains*—when Kidder was in Haiti to report on American soldiers working to reinstate Jean-Bertrand Aristide’s democratically elected government. Kidder and Farmer didn’t see one another again until 1999 when Kidder asked to meet with Farmer to begin work on *The Good Doctor*, a profile of Farmer that was published in *the New Yorker*. This profile proved to be a starting point for *Mountains Beyond Mountains*, published in September 2003 by Random House.

Kidder’s writing has been prolific and outstanding. *The Soul of a New Machine*—a book celebrated for its insight into the world of corporate, high-technology America—earned him a Pulitzer and National Book Award in 1982. Other bestselling works include *House* (1985), *Among Schoolchildren* (1989), *Old Friends* (1993), and *Home Town* (1999). *Among Schoolchildren*, a narrative of one year in the life of a fifth-grade class and its teacher, won Kidder the Robert F. Kennedy Book Award in 1989.

Kidder lives with his wife and family in western Massachusetts and Maine.

# Dr. Paul Farmer

## (A Short Biography)

**“If access to health care is considered a human right, who is considered human enough to have that right?”**

Medical Anthropologist and Physician Paul Farmer has dedicated his life to treating some of the world's poorest populations, and, in the process, helped raise the standard of health care in underdeveloped areas of the world. A founding director of Partners in Health (1987), an international charity organization that provides direct health care services and undertakes research and advocacy activities on behalf of those who are sick and living in poverty, Dr. Farmer and his colleagues have successfully challenged the policymakers and critics who claim that quality health care is impossible to deliver in resource-poor areas.

Paul Farmer began his lifelong commitment to Haiti in 1983 when still a student, working with villages in Haiti's Central Plateau, determined to bring modern health care to the poorest people in the Western Hemisphere. Starting with a one-building clinic in the village of Cange, Farmer's project has grown to a multi-service health complex that includes a primary school, an infirmary, a surgery wing, a training program for health outreach workers, a 104-bed hospital, a women's clinic, and a pediatric care facility. It has become a model for health care for poor communities world wide.

Born in Massachusetts into a family of six children, Farmer grew up in Florida. He received a bachelor's degree from Duke in 1982, and both an M.D. and Ph. D. in Anthropology from Harvard in 1990. He has written or co-written over 100 scholarly papers, as well as books including *Infections and Inequalities* (1998), and *Pathologies of Power* (2003).

In 2003 author Tracy Kidder wrote a best selling book about Farmer and his work, *Mountains Beyond Mountains: the Quest of Dr. Paul Farmer, A Man Who Would Cure the World*. This book brought international attention and support to Farmer's work.

Among the numerous awards Dr. Farmer has received in the last decade is the Heinz Award for the Human Condition. Its citation reads, “To say that Dr. Paul Farmer is a life saver does not begin to describe the impact of his work. Dr. Farmer and his extraordinary organization have been a force in making the world confront the health care needs of those who historically have never had access to proper care. Because of his dedication and compassion, critical health care services are now being administered around the globe to people who previously would have been left untreated.”

# Reviews

## ***Mountains Beyond Mountains***

"In this excellent work, Pulitzer Prize—winner Kidder immerses himself in and beautifully explores the rich drama that exists in the life of Dr. Paul Farmer...Throughout, Kidder captures the almost saintly effect Farmer has on those whom he treats."

-*Publisher's Weekly*, starred review

"[A] Skilled and graceful exploration of the soul of an astonishing human being."

-*Kirkus Reviews*, starred review

"A fine writer and his extraordinary subject: Tracy Kidder, in giving us Paul Farmer, lifts up an image of hope—and challenge—that the world urgently needs. Simply put, this is an important book." -

**James Carroll**, author of **Constantine's Sword**

"The central character of this marvelous book is one of the most provocative, brilliant, funny, unsettling, endlessly energetic, irksome, and charming characters ever to spring to life on the page. He has embarked on an epic struggle that will take you from the halls of Harvard Medical School to a sun-scorched plateau in Haiti, from the slums of Peru to the cold gray prisons of Moscow. He wants to change the world. Certainly this luminous and powerful book will change the way you see it."—

**Jonathan Harr**, author of **A Civil Action**

"Here is a genuine hero alive in our times. **Mountains Beyond Mountains** unfolds with the force of gathering revelation. Like all of Tracy Kidder's books, it is as hard to put down as any good and true story."—**Annie Dillard**, author of **The Writing Life**

"**Mountains Beyond Mountains** is the only book I've read in years that made me feel like cheering. It left me uncomfortable, guilty, and exhausted—but it also inspired me, kept me up all night, and moved me to tears. Some readers will find their lives changed forever; everyone else will emerge, at the very least, with an unexpectedly revised set of values. Tracy Kidder has given us not only an unforgettable book but an unignorable life lesson. Hurrah!" —**Anne Fadiman**, author of **The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down**

"Rarely has idealism fared so well on the planet as in Tracy Kidder's eloquently reported **Mountains Beyond Mountains**. One is tempted to call Paul Farmer's passionate sensibilities and loving ambitions otherworldly, but only in sadness that there are too few of him in the world. Kidder has provided us all, as the Farmerites say, with a road map to decency, and such an endowment is beyond measure." —**Bob Shacochis**, author of **Easy in the Islands**

"Is there anything Tracy Kidder can't do? This is a beautiful book, and a masterful one. Even better, **Mountains Beyond Mountains** is a page-turner that will crack your conscience open." -**Stacey Schiff**, author of **Vera**

"An incredible story about an incredible man told by an incredible writer. **Mountains Beyond Mountains** is the sort of book that makes you want to buy a hundred copies and pass them out like a street corner evangelist. It's the sort of book that will affect your life in a profound way. In a good way." -**Thom Jones**, author of **The Pugilist at Rest**

"Saints are notoriously difficult people, but who knew one could be so funny, so utterly charming, and finally so deft in accomplishing that most impossible of all job descriptions--changing the world? Tracy Kidder's spellbinding story presents us with an unlikely saint and finally, with inspiration so compelling it makes the usual cynicism about global change seem indulgent foolishness."

-**Patricia Hampf**, author of **A Romantic Education**

***MOUNTAINS BEYOND MOUNTAINS***  
by Tracy Kidder

**Sample Discussion Questions\***

1. Paul Farmer finds ways of connecting with people whose backgrounds are vastly different from his own. How does he do this? Are his methods something to which we can all aspire?
2. Paul Farmer believes that "if you're making sacrifices...you're trying to lessen some psychic discomfort" (24). Do you agree with the way that Farmer makes personal sacrifices? For what kinds of things do you make sacrifices, and when do you expect others to make them?
3. Kidder states that Farmer is dissatisfied with the current distribution of money and medicine in the world. What is your opinion of the distribution of these forms of wealth? What would you change, if you could?
4. Farmer designed a study to find out whether there was a correlation between his Haitian patients' belief in sorcery as the cause of TB and their recovery from that disease through medical treatment. What did he discover about the relative importance of cultural beliefs among his impoverished patients and their material circumstances? Do you think that this discovery might have broad application – for instance, to situations in the United States?
5. The title of the book comes from the Haitian proverb "Beyond mountains there are mountains." What does the saying mean in the context of the Haitian culture, and what does it mean in relation to Farmer's work? Can you think of other personal or societal situations for which this proverb might be apt?
6. Paul Farmer had an eccentric childhood and his accomplishments have been unique. Do you see a correlation between the way Farmer was raised and how he's chosen to live his life? How has your own background influenced your life and your decisions?
7. Compare Zanmi Lasante to the Socios en Salud project in Carabayllo. Consider how the projects got started, the relationships between doctors and patients, and also the involvement of the international community.
8. Kidder explains that Farmer and his colleagues at PIH were asked by some academics, "Why do you call your patients poor people? They don't call themselves poor people." How do Farmer and Jim Kim confront the issue of how to speak honestly about the people they work to help? How do they learn to speak honestly with each other, and what is the importance of the code words and acronyms that they share (for example, AMC's, or Areas of Moral Clarity)?
9. Ophelia Dahl and Tom White both play critical roles in this book and in the story Partners in Health. How are their acts of compassion different from Farmer's?
10. Tracy Kidder has written elsewhere that the choice of point of view is the most important an author makes in constructing a work of narrative non-fiction. He has also written that finding a point of view that works is a matter of making a choice among tools, and that the choice should be determined, not by theory, but by an author's immersion in the materials of the story itself. Kidder has never before written a book in which he made himself a character. Can you think of some of the reasons he might have had for doing this in *Mountains Beyond Mountains*.

## Suggested Reading

1. *Pathologies of Power: Health, Human Rights, and the New War on the Poor*  
by Paul Farmer
2. *Infections and Inequalities: the Modern Plagues*  
by Paul Farmer
3. *The Uses of Haiti*  
by Paul Farmer
4. *Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books*  
by Azar Nafisi
5. *The Kite Runner*  
by Khaled Hosseini
6. *The Known World*  
by Edward P. Jones
7. *As I Live and Breathe: Notes of a Patient-Doctor*  
by Dr. Jamie Weisman
8. *Dying For Growth: Global Inequality and the Health of the Poor*  
by Jim Yong Kim
9. *My Own Country: A Doctor's Story*  
by Abraham Verghese
10. *Betrayal of Trust: The Collapse of Global Public Health*  
by Laurie Garrett