Doris Kearns Goodwin’s 2013 book, *The Bully Pulpit: Theodore Roosevelt, William Howard Taft, and the Golden Age of Journalism*, does a remarkable job of tracing the family life and political careers of Theodore Roosevelt and William Howard Taft. These two men, who enjoyed a twenty-five year long friendship, got involved in state and national government at a time when investigative journalists were bringing to light corruptions and abuses in big business, politics, and labor activism throughout America. United in their desire to see practical progressive reforms instituted, Roosevelt’s and Taft’s differing personal characteristics and relationship to the press impacted the success of their presidencies and ultimately ended their friendship.

Given the length of the book, those who plan to plan to read and discuss it might want to separate it into four separate sections.

**Section 1 (Ch. 1 – Ch. 6):** Examines the early life, education, and careers of Roosevelt and Taft. It also follows the beginning of their friendship during Benjamin Harrison’s presidency.

1. In what ways were Roosevelt’s and Taft’s childhoods and college experience different? What impact did this have on their lives as adults?

2. Theodore Roosevelt and William H. Taft both came from privileged backgrounds. What led them to reject the prevailing *laissez faire* doctrines that most people in their social status held? In what sense could both or either be described as “conservative”?

3. How did both Taft and Roosevelt fight corruption and champion reform early in their careers? How did both their failures and successes in these endeavors affect their futures?

4. In what ways did Nellie Herron Taft’s life before marriage not conform to the usual expectations of middle and upper-class women? In what ways were Nellie Taft and Edith Roosevelt similar? How were they different? What explains their differences?

5. What explains Taft’s and Roosevelt’s friendship? How was each man treated by the Harrison administration?

**Section 2 (Ch. 7 – Ch. 13):** These chapters look at the founding of McClure’s Magazine and some of the early investigative reports by journalists like Ida Tarbell and Lincoln Steffens. They examine the appointment of Taft as Governor-General of the Philippines and Roosevelt’s rise from New York City Police Commissioner to President of the United States.

6. How did Ida Tarbell’s life differ from that of Nellie Taft’s or Edith Roosevelt’s? What do her experiences reveal about the limitations and opportunities women faced in this era?

7. Was Roosevelt’s remarkably fast rise from New York City Police Commission to President of the United States primarily the result of circumstances or Roosevelt’s intellect and personality? How important was Roosevelt’s service in the Spanish-American War to his later political success?
8. Goodwin suggests that many of Roosevelt’s accomplishments as President were due to his friendship with members of the press. What examples does she provide to support this position? Are close personal relations between politicians and journalists a good thing in a democracy?

9. Goodwin stresses the role of the press in bringing about popular support for the reforms that Theodore Roosevelt wanted Congress to pass. It is the responsibility of the press to affect social and political change? What role does the press play in today’s political landscape?

10. Was this really the “Golden Age of Journalism”? How do the writers at McClure’s compare to the reporters of the World War II and Watergate eras?

Section 3 (Ch. 14 – Ch. 21): This section begins with Taft joining Roosevelt’s cabinet as Secretary of War, follows the domestic and foreign policy endeavors of Roosevelt’s administration, and concludes with the election of Taft to the presidency as Roosevelt’s successor in 1908. It also shows muckraking journalism at the height of its influence despite controversy at McClure’s Magazine.

11. Theodore Roosevelt, William H. Taft, and the journalists at McClure’s thought the dangerous power of big business was the major issue of their era. Were they correct? To what other issues should they have paid more attention?

12. How important were Roosevelt’s conservation policies to the success of his presidency? What do you think was Roosevelt’s crowning achievement during his time in office?

13. One of Roosevelt’s favorite sayings was “Speak softly and carry a big stick; you will go far.” To what extent did he make use of this philosophy while in office? How effective is this approach in domestic politics? How effective was it in foreign relations?

14. During Roosevelt’s and Taft’s time in office a sitting president did not go out and campaign for himself. How did presidents secure support during this period? How else have presidential campaigns changed since the early 20th century?

Section 4 (Ch. 22 – Ch. 29): The last section follows Roosevelt’s growing unhappiness with Taft’s administration and his decision to run against Taft for the presidency in 1912.

15. Theodore Roosevelt thought the federal government should act to regulate big business, even if it meant accepting monopoly; William Taft thought monopolies were inherently dangerous and should be broken up. Which approach seems best? Which approach have federal officials followed since this era?

16. Roosevelt enjoyed a public image as a bold, confrontational reformer; Taft was portrayed as an affable conciliator. Which image was closer to the truth? How did their private negotiations contradict their public images?

17. Why did Theodore Roosevelt decide to run for a third term in 1912? Does he appear to have been motivated more by principle or his ego?
18. What explains the presidential victory of Woodrow Wilson during the election of 1912? In what ways did Wilson’s political values challenge those of Taft and Roosevelt?

19. After reading about the Roosevelt and Taft administrations, which person do you think was the better president? Which was the more effective politician?