



Prison Reading Project



Origin

“A Year of 15-Minute Daily Doses From the Harvard Classics” by Dr. Paula Marantz Cohen, *The Wall Street Journal*

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COMMENTARY

A Year of 15-Minute Daily Doses From the Harvard Classics

Parusing a liberal education with disciplined attention to Cicero, Swift, Hume and others on the five-foot shelf.

By PAULA MARANTZ COHEN
Dec. 26, 2014 6:37 p.m. ET

For years, I've had a set of the Harvard Classics in my study: 50 volumes of "great works" bound in faded green cloth—the "Five-Foot Shelf" as the collection was called when it was first published in 1909. Our set was left to us by my husband's aunt. She acquired it secondhand during the Great Depression and willed it to us because we had a literary bent. It is unclear whether she ever looked at it. Despite our literary bent, we let it gather dust.

One day toward the end of 2013, however, I happened to peruse the slim volume titled "Reading Guide" tucked at the front of the set. I was immediately captivated by what was surely the most extravagant sales pitch for a set of books ever written. These volumes, wrote the editors, "must every read, they entertain when no other book can, they exhilarate and they satisfy. They bring to you the rare pleasure of commingling with great minds, they feed your mind with stimulating thoughts, they turn your mind into fresh channels."

Following this general sales pitch was a more specific one. "In my opinion," pronounced the series' originator, Harvard's former President Charles W. Eliot, "a five-foot shelf would hold books enough to give a liberal education to anyone who would read them with devotion, even if he could spare but fifteen minutes a day for reading." The Guide then proceeded to offer a selection for each day of the year from among the 50 Harvard Classic volumes. Each selection would presumably take no more than 15 minutes to read.

Fifteen minutes a day of prescribed reading and a liberal education could be achieved. This was self-help I could respect.

Having long felt myself insufficiently educated (despite expensive and prolonged schooling), I was intrigued by Dr. Eliot's claim. As 2014 began, I determined to put it to the test. Now, as 2015 approaches, I can assess the result.

I discovered that a reading regimen, even if only 15 minutes a day, requires discipline. William James wrote that discipline is needed in the formation of any new habit. In this case, the habit was reading regularly and outside my comfort zone. I often had to fight against an inclination to skip a day. But the relative brevity of the selections kept me on track—a hint to teachers who assign too much and thereby encourage cribbing and cramming. With a 15-minute assignment, I could push on, knowing that the end was



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had wit.

The editors of the "Reading Guide" were working on the cusp of two worlds: the Victorian and the modern. They returned again and again to predictable classic texts. But they also excerpted repeatedly from Darwin's work on evolution, and included selections from folk and fairy tales that reflected respect for populist culture.

I was most taken with the great essayists: Cicero and Marcus Aurelius, the Enlightenment philosophers, and the proto-bloggers of the 19th century such as Thomas Carlyle and J.K. Mill. These works, well suited to brief reading bytes, were models of critical reasoning, insight, cleverness and taste. Jonathan Swift's "Gulliver's Travels: An Essay on Conversation" clarified for me why I like to talk to some people and not to others.

I could see how many of the readings were intended to shape America's profile at the beginning of the 20th century. The assignments about engineering and conquest spoke to the country's emergence as a world power. I could trace the beginnings of an American canon. Some of the readings seemed strained in this regard, like the constitutions like "The Fundamental Orders of Connecticut," but some were superb: Washington's "Farewell Address," Douglass' "The Poetic Principle." Thoreau's essay on walking. The absence of minority and regional voices was notable, although Emerson's "The American Scholar" and Whitman's Preface to "Leaves of Grass" anticipated a more inclusive future.

To read the canon of another time is to be attuned to omissions. The decision to leave out novels was not, to me, adequately explained in the series' Introduction. Marx and Freud, though culturally influential, were not part of the set. There were no contemporary non-Western readings, despite excerpts from the ancient Bhagavad-Gita, the Quran and Confucius. Perhaps most noteworthy was the absence of female writers except Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Christina Rossetti.

Most of the big names were represented—the major DWIGGIES (dead white European males), as they would be irreverently dubbed later in the century. Having spent the year in their company, I could see how their analytical and skeptical cast of mind had laid the ground for their deconstruction. I also saw the value of returning to them with renewed reverence.

One of the benefits of the regimen was to open me to authors I had never read before and inspire me to read more. I would definitely return to Ilse, Voltaire and Burke. The passages from Dostoyev's translation of "The Aeneid" (I genuinely liked the rhyming couplets) were enticements to read the whole translation. I was so inspired by the excerpt from "Franklin's Autobiography" where Ben laid out a personal self-improvement plan (complete with charts), that I am contemplating imitating him. By the same token, I hope never to see again Richard Henry Dana's "Two Years Before the

Some of the selections were hard to follow or lacked context. Even so, they generally yielded something of value. I did not understand Faraday's treatise on magnetism, but I could discern a method to his argument. I did not know what was transpiring in Act III of "The School for Scandal," but I could tell that Sheridan

Must," for some reason a favorite with the editors.

The year's readings began with Franklin's resolutions to improve his behavior. Looking ahead, I see they will end with Thomas Carlyle's call for diligent reading to create interest and direction in life. The American genius opened the cycle, the British one would close it. From forward- to backward-looking, from active to reflective, from youth, one could say to age—a worthwhile journey.

Ms. Cohen is a professor of English and dean of Pennoni Honors College at Drexel University. Her latest novel is "Suzanne Davis Gets a Life" (Dial Day Books, 2014).

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Origin

Jan 30, 2015

Dear Mr. Cohen,

I write in conjunction with your recent Wall Street Journal article about the Harvard Classics.

Well done on such an outstanding piece of writing! Aside from being very well written, it was equally motivating to do like wise. Sadly here in the state prison system, a class in an institution library consists of either Sue Grafton or Hours of Amour, with a few Hobbits thrown in for good measure.

As such, I've taken matters into my own hands several years ago by writing local libraries asking for book donations. Surprisingly, I have received many positive responses and now I'm affectionately called "Andy Dufresne" (spelling?), the lead character in the movie The Shawshank Redemption. It's the best prison film ever made.

I receive so many books I'm always giving them away to my fellow inmates here. As a former educator, it does my spirit well to do so.

Your article has planted a seed in my head about trying to put something together along your lines those in the piece. I won't be able to use classics, but other forms of print materials should suffice.

Therefore, would it be okay to duplicate your reading project to benefit some guys here at SCI Fayette and possibly use your wisdom as a sounding board?

It's a real shame in here that so many men are starving for knowledge + education but due to budget cuts, educational classes, the arts + music are almost nonexistent.

Like I said, I give away all the books I can however these young boys seek discipline believe it or not and this basic idea might be perfect for them.

Hopefully I'm not rambling on with you.

Not asking for donations, rather help with putting a plan together for them.

In closing, once again I really liked your article. It's given me an idea & perhaps you might be interested in helping me formulate a plan.

Thank you,

Richard A. Lewis

Course Structure

- I. Brief background on prison life and prison education
- II. Individual selection of texts and class discussions
- III. Mailing of material
- IV. Individual and group analyses of incarcerated responses
- V. Individual responses to incarcerated responses

weekly discussion posts throughout term

I. Brief background on prison life and prison education

“The Stakes are High: Tragedy and Transformation within Prison Walls” by Elizabeth Bobrick

The Stakes are High: Tragedy and Transformation with Prison Walls, by Elizabeth Bobrick/Society for Classical Studies

At the entrance of the maximum security prison where I taught Greek tragedy was a wooden plaque in the shape of a shield. It was emblazoned with a motto: *Non sum qualis eram*. Apart from its incongruity in this place of no Latin and less Greek, the motto struck me as equally a declaration of failure and of hope. The men inside were not what they once were. What were they now?

I knew very little about my students at Cheshire Correctional Institute. I'd been told that over 100 inmates had applied to take classes through Wesleyan University's Center for Prison Education (CPE).¹ Only eighteen had been accepted after tests and interviews with Wesleyan faculty members, CPE staff, and prison administrators. The men had widely differing educational backgrounds, but had proved that they could succeed at Wesleyan course work: biochemistry, essay writing, sociology, and philosophy. By the second year of the pilot program, 2011, when I taught, the cohort had lost only two. Of the remaining sixteen, thirteen were African-American.

I'd been told that most of the men were serving long sentences for violent crimes. I didn't ask for the particulars of who had done what. I would learn some details later, but for now that was enough. I wanted to think of them as students first and prisoners second.

All well and good, but that they were prisoners was both impossible and pointless to ignore. I was escorted through nine locked gates and doors to my classroom, where a guard watched outside. The men wore identical beige scrubs with immaculate white t-shirts underneath. They ranged in age from early 20s to mid 50s. They wore their hair in cornrows, or buzz cuts, or dreads. Even so, after the first four classes I was still confusing their names—Mr. Morris with Mr. Grey, and so on. § I was embarrassed. When I apologized, one of them said, “That’s the idea, with the uniforms and all. It works. They don’t want us to stand out as individuals. We’re numbers here, not names.”

That response was typical of their courtesy, humor, and remarkable ease with me. Still, I was a bit worried that the atmosphere would become more heavily charged once we got past the Crestala and into dramas of the individual. Ajax was next on the syllabus. How would they respond? After all, weren't their lives the stuff of Greek tragedy—violence, suffering, punishment, misfortunes of birth, crushing regret?

I'd emphasized that the tragedies were not just entertainment, although the performances were assuredly spectacular. When we read the Crestala, I'd talked about tragedy's civic function as a representation of broken societies and ruling families. When we'd finished *Eumenides*, and Ajax was up next, one student asked, “What is the relevance of this play to what we've been talking about?”

Because we were out of time, and the guard was waiting to walk them back to their cells, I gave a pared-down answer. “It's about a man who was very powerful in his community, but then was deeply disrespected. He did something terrible in revenge. He didn't get away with it. His enemies were happy, and their desire for revenge had to be dealt with before everything spun out of control.”

The room went momentarily silent. Those silences—and there were others—told me when something had hit home.

Ajax resonated deeply with the men, but not in the way I had imagined. Interestingly, they had little

sympathy for the wronged hero. Unlike typical undergraduates, my students were not impressed by the heroic way of dealing with obstacles. A number of the men were serving 20 years to life for murder. Killing someone because they disrespected you, because they were physically in your way and wouldn't back down, committing any number of outrages so that others would be afraid of you—this was a life they knew. They'd done these things, or seen them done.

My students focused instead on the chorus and on Ajax's “spare-you bride.” Tecmessa. They scorned Ajax's overwheeled concern with his lost honor, because it made him blind to the pleas of those who relied on him for survival. The students were clearly moved by the panic of Tecmessa and the chorus. Ajax's choice to leave them to face his enemies without his protection struck a chord.

I had never read the chorus' initial response to Ajax's threat of suicide as anything but standard issue woo-is-me. But the men saw it as deeply revelatory of Ajax's character. His suicide was the ultimate mark of hubris to which big men fall prey: they ignore the innocents they leave behind, the family and community, who will suffer because of their disregard for everything but status.

One of the men slammed the book on his desk. I was startled, because he was one of the most gentle in demeanor. They ought to teach this in schools. Every one of us has had a woman begging us not to do something all our lives, but we didn't listen, and here we are. “Another silence.”

Needless to say, I'd never read the plays with students whose lives turned on the outcome of trials. Reading the *Orestea* with this group, in particular the *Eumenides*, was a revelation. Although most of my students were in for murder, many were involved in appeals regarding the lengths of sentences, or serving out their terms at prisons that were not maximum security. They knew a trial when they saw one, even in ancient and mysterious garb, and they read it like the experts they were.

At one point I asked the class what they made of Apollo's argument that the female was simply a vessel for the male seed. “Oh, you know, lawyers,” shrugged one of the men, a former gang leader, in for felony murder. “They have to pull out whatever they can for their guy.” It was funny, but it was insightful as well. Apollo had a weak case. He was playing the misogyny card. He only managed to convince half the Athenian jury on stage, even though they knew they were voting against Athena herself, and none of them would have been fans of husband-killing women.

Euripides' plays were the most troubling to the men and the hardest for them to relate to. These criminals believed passionately in justice and in the personal and political significance of suffering. Euripides presents a world in which justice was perverted, at best, if not completely meaningless. Human suffering was depicted in painful detail; divine indifference was complete. For example, the men were horrified by the punishment visited upon Cadmus in the *Bacchae*. What purpose did it serve? What had the old man done wrong? The nihilistic universe of *Helen* shocked them too: the deaths of countless warriors and, as we say now, non-combatants, all because of a divine shell game.

Our class was not just a discussion group in which the students shared their responses to the readings. They had to take exams of the same difficulty as those assigned to Wesleyan students. These panicked even the most confident. A bad grade might lead to having a professor think less of you. More than one bad grade might lead to getting kicked out. Poor performance would make the entire program look bad, and then it would be closed down.

I couldn't calm them down. I finally realized that it was the men's work to face their anxieties. This was part of being a student: do your best and hope for the best. I but their lives had shown them that it was foolish to assume that things would turn out okay. Statements that might meet with approval from the authorities were dangerous.

Things came to a head one day in class. We had a lengthy take-home test coming up. I was trying to move away from time-consuming, anxious questions and back to the play we were reading. “You'll do fine,” I said. “The stakes are not that high. Tests are only part of your grade.” One of the men, an excellent writer who had done beautifully on his papers so far, all but exploded. It was the first time anyone had raised his voice in class. “You all don't understand you and the TAs. It's not the same for us as it is for the Wesleyan kids. The stakes are high. I send every one of my papers and tests to my 15-year-old son. I want him to see what I am doing. I need to do well, so that he can see that he can do it too, that he doesn't have to do what I did. I want him to stay in school.” The class looked at me apprehensively. I did my best to acknowledge that I had heard him, and then steered us back to the play.

This man and I got to talk privately later. (“Private”) is a prison means standing in a corner of a crowded room, out of earshot.) He apologized for raising his voice; I apologized for seeming to make light of his concerns. “I am just so frustrated,” he said. There was no point in my saying that I understood, because I could never understand.

Most of us go into teaching believing that education will change our students' lives. But few of us imagine that they will use what they learn in our classrooms to save their children from repeating their mistakes. We don't think that a student will ever say to us, as one did to me, “This is the one place where I feel really human.”

I have no idea how these intelligent, and, in many cases, deeply religious men had ever been capable of what they had done. How had they transformed themselves? “Becoming humble” or “achieving humility” were phrases the men used often when discussing the tragedies. Perhaps there was another interpretation of the prison's motto, *non sum qualis eram*. I have changed. I have become humble.

Once my students asked me if I was scared, coming into a prison. “Of you all? Nah, come on.” I said. They laughed. “But why do you even want to come into this place?” one persisted. “It's a nightmare.”

Of course, it wasn't a nightmare for me. I got to leave. But why did I want to come in? Because in the prison, I learned how powerful education could be. I'd lost sight of that, in the years I spent teaching more privileged students. With the men, I saw what it was like not to have an education, and to want it enough to risk failure and humiliation. When I left each class, having taken questions from every direction at top speed about everything I knew, I was equally exhausted and exhilarated. I remembered why I wanted to become a professor in the first place, when I was 18 and decided to major in Classics. The men at Cheshire gave me a renewed awareness of why we continue to read the dead white men's plays, and I continue to marvel at how these masterpiece shows themselves differently to every reader. *Non sum qualis eram*.

I. Brief background on prison life and prison education

Toe Tag Parole HBO Documentary



Student engagement: online discussions

Thread: The Beginning of Revenge Posted Date: October 4, 2015 1:47 PM
Post: The Beginning of Revenge Status: Published
Author: Emily Ballantyne

I began my weekend by watching "Toe Tag Parole" and I gained more from the film than I originally expected. My initial thoughts upon reading the intro led me to believe that the film would simply be about daily life in a prison yard. I did not have high hopes for the morality of the prisoners, and, as we discussed in class, I was skeptical of whether the men chose to speak were being honest with their intentions. I believe that it is hard for many people to get beyond the idea that these people have committed terrible crimes, and it can be challenging to offer our own forgiveness. I try to approach all people with an open heart and mind, but it is challenging for me to trust someone who has violated the most basic of human rights: life.

Watching the film helped me to put a face to a model inmate. The men in Yard A have proven themselves to be thoughtful and hopeful in the face of nearly no hope. I believe that living with the understanding that you will likely live and die while the world turns around you, and not lashing out in anger is a feat that not many free people could accomplish. It is not a situation that is easy to come to terms with, I imagine.

I was particularly moved by the story of the man who went on to have a family, though he is a lifer in all senses of the word. The clip of his daughter speaking struck me as honest and without a political agenda. My favorite part of her speaking was the moment when she stated, "There's a point where justice stops and revenge begins." Although I don't believe that all criminals can be rehabilitated, I do think that it's a greater possibility than I originally thought.

Where does justice stop and revenge begin? When does a person come to terms with what they have done, and feel enough guilt and remorse for society to consider them "forgiven" or "better"? I believe that the man's daughter makes quite a point in that eventually, many people could come to terms with their crime, look inside themselves, and become a new person. But how do we, the so-called "normal" members of society, make this decision? And decide someone else's chance at freedom? Do the tables ever turn and shine light on the fact that the laws do not allow for a changed man/woman to go free after sufficient punishment? But then again, what is considered sufficient punishment for

stealing another's life...

I still have many questions, and I struggle to develop clear and opinionated thoughts on the matter. But each week, through the readings and discussions, I hope to break down my current thinking and build a clearer picture of the broader implications of the prison system, guided by how education impacts quality of life and self.

(Post is Read)

Thread: The Beginning of Revenge Posted Date: October 6, 2015 1:00 PM
Post: RE: The Beginning of Revenge Status: Published
Author: Joseph Denshaw

Hi Emily,

I found myself struggling with the same idea this week. On one hand, I know that I'd have a damn near impossible time forgiving someone if they brought harmed to a loved one. However, I also see the soul-crushing reality that is life without parole. To sit in a bathroom-sized cell and re-hash my mistakes over-and-over, day-after-day would be enough to drive me crazy. If I found myself in that situation, I'd definitely pray for mercy. To be held accountable for the wrong I'd done, but to have some chance at redemption. To me, it boils down to this: Can people find it in their hearts to forgive someone who's committed a terrible wrong? Would someone be able to live with the reality that a criminal served a long sentence, but was given an opportunity to be released somewhere down the line? Since I don't know if that answer would be a unanimous "yes", I don't see how you can make reforms. Perhaps this line of thought would be more applicable to non-violent offenders, since they haven't caused irreplicable damage. I'll look forward to discussing this idea more, in-class.

Thread: The Beginning of Revenge Posted Date: October 7, 2015 12:06 PM
Post: RE: The Beginning of Revenge Status: Published
Author: Kathleen McInerney

Emily and Matt,

I really do think that this "justive versus revenge" point was very powerful when it was brought up in Toe Tag Parole. Emily, I want to note that the little girl you're talking about was so impressively positive about the whole situation; I'm not ashamed to say that I was really

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inspired by her attitude towards her father, even if it may have been dismissed as a child's faith.

Ideally, I'm very fond of the idea of releasing rehabilitated inmates back into society. Unfortunately I think that an issue is there's no way to totally effectively assess rehabilitation, and also that there's no way that punishments and the length of sentence will affect all convicts the same way (which makes it difficult to legislate.) Also, if prisoners could be changed rapidly into better people, would we still want to imprison them simply for the purpose of vengeance?

Matt, yours is an interesting idea about whether victims and the families of victims can forgive perpetrators for committing violent crimes, but you also admitted that you found life sentences entirely inhumane. Do you think there will ever come a day when they are recognized as such, and those offended victims don't even have the right to demand a life sentence? I can almost foresee a world where imprisonment is considered an archaic, and even barbaric thing to do in light of the other options. I think the ultimate question then would be whether people could limit their wishes to a safe society when they could have the power to inflict suffering on the people that wronged them.

Thread: The Beginning of Revenge Posted Date: October 7, 2015 12:36 PM
Post: RE: The Beginning of Revenge Status: Published
Author: Steven Blumberg

Hi Emily,

I really connected with your struggle of -- well the prisoner did violate another persons human rights and should be punished but is it right for society to then take theirs for the rest of their lives without any opportunity to change that. I think that is a really complex question that as you said, we will break down each week and try to answer. I think that by learning about more prisoners, not just exemplary ones where we really just see their actions today (painting walls, playing music, etc.) and start to see more prisoners, victims, and crimes we will have our views change. The question that comes to my mind is the body versus the soul. We punish a 20 year old soul by imprisoning their body forever. It gets tough when the persons 50 year old soul, which is very different from the 20 year old version, is still imprisoned in the body by society. I think if we could separate the two this may be a less complex question...although that is almost impossible since people can manipulate others to get out of prison when their soul had not changed at all...

Just a thought!

Steven

II. Individual selection of texts and class discussions

- Introduction
- Questions for discussion and written response
- ~15 minute reading

Why I Chose the Moth Essay

Introduction:

The Death of a Moth is a personal narrative written by Annie Dillard, isolated in her 30s and heavily contemplating her purpose in life. She struggles with her faith in God, and her conflicting feelings about her own loneliness. She writes about a specific camping trip which she recalls during a moment of revelation. I personally believe that it is not only a story about herself, but a sort of imploration for all of her readers, like her students, to find their calling and dedicate their lives to a single passion.

I don't want to speculate too much, so that no one reads the essay with and preconceived notions about her purpose. Although it is short, I believe that this is the most direct and inspirational piece of writing that I've ever read. It was given to me by my high school AP Language teacher, at a time where my place in life was entirely undetermined. I could have done anything, but I felt lethargic and purposeless and robotic; so I did the homework that was assigned to me, and watched the shows that were recommended to me. I craved the energy to be a pioneer, and that's what Annie Dillard gave me.

Discussion Questions:

1. What was your first impression of Annie Dillard?
2. How do you think that Dillard's character development paralleled the world around her? Who/what was she indirectly comparing herself to?
3. Why was she so frustrated with her students at the end?
4. Consider the benefits of working alone; do you think that loneliness is a necessity, or at least a facilitator, for great works of genius and inspiration?

Writing Questions:

1. Think about your greatest moments of inspiration and journal about them, much like Annie did about her camping trip.
2. Refer to the second to last paragraph on page 5 and consider the quote, "Otherwise, I'd forget everything, and life wouldn't accumulate, but merely pass." Write about something you'd heard or seen throughout the day that you found interesting; or about something you feel you've granted too little significance.

"The Death of a Moth" by Annie Dillard

I live on northern Pigeon Sound, in Washington State alone. I have a gold cat, who sleeps on my legs, named Small. In the morning, I joke to her black face. Do you remember last night? Do you remember? I throw her out before breakfast, so I can eat.

There is a spider, too, in the bathroom, with whom I keep a certain company. Her little outfit always reminds of a certain moth I helped to kill. The spider herself is of uncertain lineage, bulbous at the abdomen and drab. Her six-inch mess of web works, works somehow, works miraculously, to keep her alive and me amazed. The web itself is in a corner behind the toilet, connecting tile wall to the wall and floor, in a place where there is, I find I would have thought, scant traffic. Yet under the web are sixteen or so corpses: she has tormented to the floor.

The corpses appear to be mostly sow bugs, those little armadillo creatures who live to travel flat out in houses, and the round. There is also a new strand of sewing, three old spider skins crinkled and clenched, and two moth bodies, wingless and limp and empty, moth bodies I dropped to my knees to see.

Today the sewing shines darkly and gleams, what there is of him: a dorsal curve of thorax and abdomen, and a smooth pair of cerci by which I know his name. Next week, if the other bodies are any indication, he will be drunken and gray, wedged to the floor with dust. The sow bugs beside him are hollow and empty of color, fragile, a breath away from brittle fluff. The spider skins lie on their sides, translucent and ragged, their legs dying in knots. And the moths, the empty moths, stagger against each other, headless, in a confusion of arcing strips of chitin like peeling varnish, like a jumble of bottoms for catholic virgins, like nothing resembling moths, so that I would hesitate to call them moths, except that I have had some experience with the figure Moth reduced to a nub.

Two summers ago, I was camping alone in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia. I had hauled myself and gear up there to read, among other things, James Ulman's *The Dry on Fire*, a novel about Ransbald that had made me want to be a writer when I was sixteen. I was hoping it would do it again. So I read, lost every day sitting by my tent, while warblers swung in the leaves overhead and brittle worms trailed their inches over the wiggly dirt at my feet, and I read every night by candlelight, while barred owls called in the forest and pale moths nosed round nosed round my head in the clearing, where my light made a ring.

Moths kept flying into the candle. They would hiss and recoil, lost upside down in the shadows among my cook pans. Or they would swing their wings and fall, and their hot wings, as if melted, would stick to the first thing they touched — a pan, a lid, a spoon — so that the stung moths could flutter only in tiny areas, unable to struggle free. These I could realize by a quick flip with a stick; in the morning I would find my cooking stick gilded with tom flecks of moth wings, triangles of shiny dust here and there on the aluminum. So I read, and boiled water, and replenished candles, and read on.

One night a moth flew into the candle, was caught, burnt dry, and held. I must have been staring at the candle, or maybe I looked up when the shadow crossed my page; at any rate, I saw it all. A golden female moth, a bignona one with a two-inch wingspan, flapped into the fire, dropped abdomen into the wet wax, stuck, flamed, flizzled, and died in a second. Her moving wings ignited like tissue paper, enlarging the circle of light in the clearing and creating out of the darkness the sudden blue sheen of any sweater, the green leaves of jeweled by my side, the darkest red trunk of pine. At once the light contracted again and the moth's wings

vanished in a fine, foul smoke. At the same time, her six legs clawed, curled, blackened, and ceased, disappearing utterly. And her head jerked in spasms, making a spattering noise; her antennae crisped and burnt and her heaving mouthparts cracked like pistil fire. When it was all over, her head was, so far as I could determine, gone, gone the long way of her wings and legs. Had she been over, or did? Had she nosed and laid her eggs, had she done her work? All that was left was the glowing horn shell of her abdomen and thorax — a fragment, partially collapsed gold tube jammed upright in the candle's round pool.

And then this moth-essence, this spectacular skeleton, began to act as a wick. She kept burning. The wax rose in the moth's body from her soaking abdomen to her thorax to the jagged hole where her head should be, and widened into a flame, a saffron-yellow flame that robed her to the ground like an immolating monk. That candle had two wicks, two flames of identical light, side by side. The moth's head was fire. She burned for two hours, until I blew her out.

She burned for two hours without changing, without bending or leaning — only glowing within, like a building fire glimpsed through allowhatched walls, like a hollow stain, like a flame-faced virgin gone to God, while I read by her light, knitted, while Ransbald in Paris burnt out his brain in a thousand poems, while night pooled welly at my feet.

And that is why I believe those hollow crips on the bathroom floor are moths. I think I know moths, and fragments of moths, and ships and tatters of utterly empty moths, in any state. How many of you, I asked the people in my class, which of you want to give your lives and to give your lives and to give your lives, or cigarettes, or the closeness of the faces all around me. (Is this what we live for? I thought; is this the only final beauty: the color of any skin in any light, and living, human eyes?) All hands rose to the question. (You, Nick? Will you? Margaret? Randy? Why do I want them to mean it?) And then I tried to tell them what the choice must mean; you can't be anything else. You must go at your life with a brocade. ... They had no idea what I was saying. (I have two hands, don't I? And all this energy, for as long as I can remember. ... I'll do it in the evening, after skiing, or on the way home from the bank, or after the children are asleep. ...) They thought I was raving again. It's just as well.

I have three candles here on the table which I disentangle from the plants and light when visitors come. Small usually avoids them, though once she came too close and her tail caught fire once; I rubbed it out before she noticed. The flames move light over everyone's skin, draw light to the surface of the faces of my friends. When people leave I never blow the candles out, and after I'm asleep they flame and burn.

Incarcerated responses

"The source of my inner-turmoil, as I read her pause, was due to this being what I miss the most, the subaudibles of life. These are the things I wish I could go back and take the time to describe their value to my heart. The way my wife would hold her coffee mug with two hands in the morning, my son's dresser drawers always opened, the way a hug from my children felt, the way my wife fit perfectly under my chin as we embraced. Of course I miss life's 'big' stuff, but more so, it's the little stuff I miss most of all... the subaudibles of life." -Inmate #13

'The Death of a Moth'

13

Literature, in and of itself is an amazing entity. The notion that profound thoughts and abstract emotions can be conveyed to another, simply by the way one structures certain word combinations together, is striking. Not only can the writer convey this in a way that provides the reader understanding, but also depending upon the point of view of the mind used, the author can also manipulate the reader to think these thoughts, feel these emotions. One could proclaim that this allows literature to be viewed as 'alive'. Or maybe it's that this reciprocal relationship between writer and reader taps into a hidden place within the reader that then embraces life views in a different way, a way that they hadn't done so before they read the written canvas, leaving them changed in some way.

It is this dynamic that allows for one person to read a selection and gain a certain perspective, while another reads that very same selection, yet may embrace a completely different perspective.

While reading "The Death of a Moth", represented a life passion, purpose, or represented inspiration. For Annie's sake was to write. It took her to go back to sole interior inspection, until she again that passion & desire that once again ignites golden beauty of a candle with two words could be that Annie was going the ideas, 'moths', floated around, but for

that one idea, that inspection she needed, that golden winged moth, caught fire and burned brightly. She was back!

Though it was the surface that the reading was leading me to, something she was calling to me, something that troubled the inner-one with the rhythm of hunger pains whose hunger is too far from breakfast.

One I finally reached the site, I realized what spoke home... unobtainable! Delicately, these sounds in the background that we scarcely tune out, but forever, and mostly miss all together. It's the hum of an air conditioner, the methu drink of a fan, tiffins outside. It's the sounds all around us, that unless we make a concerted effort, we pay them no mind.

As I read Annie's plain, stark description of the melancholy & seemingly unimportant, I realized there are also 'subaudibles' in life. She looked at an ordinary spider web, yet with pauses, she looks at it and embraces it in a way most never would, and even fewer ever would. The way we all wish we could do it life, stop and truly appreciate, relish, and notice the moments we usually pass by without a thought.

The source of my inner-turmoil, as I read her pause, was due to this being what I miss the most, the subaudibles of life. There are the things I wish I could go back and take the time to describe their value to my heart. The way my wife would hold her coffee mug with two hands in the morning, my son's dresser drawers always opened, the way a hug from my children felt, the way my wife fit perfectly under my chin as we embraced. Of course I miss life's 'big' stuff, but more so, it's the little stuff I miss most of all... the subaudibles of life.

Incarcerated responses

"In the past I did more than 10 straight years in solitary confinement, where I watched the people around me go stark, raving mad. I watched them break and become as animals, I watched them kill themselves and get medicated into the walking dead. I cannot tell you how many people I watched devolve there, while I grew and matured there. Very few people did that - were benefitted in any way from the experience. -Inmate #24

Response to Man's Search for Meaning by #24
I will struggle with my response to the reading and your insightful questions. Not because I find the concepts hard to grasp but because my understanding is so vast but my eloquence lags far behind Frankl's. I believe a narrow focus will serve better here than even attempting to share my total understanding, and I will try to avoid digressions.

Yes, I agree that suffering is a necessary and unavoidable part of life and that there can be value in suffering. We suffer hunger and thirst and know what and how to truck, we suffer to learn what to eat or not to eat. We suffer decay and eventual death. We suffer for caring for other people who themselves suffer, and cause suffering in us. Beyond these there are circumstances which cause great suffering, like concentration camps, poverty, or being stuck with people who don't brush their teeth and won't shut up. It is suffering that causes people to find the strength, wisdom, or intelligence to deal with it, or get out of it. In my opinion is strength, wisdom, or intelligence which make for which enhance their joy, appreciation, and use of pleasure, and make them better able to deal with it. In the extreme is analogous to the way one sweats and shivers, but with the proper quills it also produces diamonds, suffering can do that, many if easier. Not. But some, with the

shores and shores. Oh, yes, for many getting up and going through their days is commendable, as it can take a strength and courage many these cannot grasp or master. Do you understand that you can only enjoy as much as you suffer? The lower the line, the higher the highs. It may seem aspirational that it is so, but it is an awfully beautiful thing.

Frankl's ideas applicable? Yes. In the past I did more than 10 straight years in solitary confinement, where I watched most of the people around me go stark, raving mad. I watched them break and become as animals, I watched them kill themselves, and I watched them get medicated into the walking dead without the appetite. I cannot tell you how many people I watched devolve, unable to cope with isolation, while I grew and matured there. Very few people did that, were benefitted in any way from the experience. I can't begin to tell you how that suffering inspired me... gladdened me, enhanced my life, and what it made me aware that I'm capable of.

IV. Individual and group analyses of incarcerated responses

Thread: Re-visiting Mr. Guy's "The Escape Attempt"
Post: Re-visiting Mr. Guy's "The Escape Attempt"
Author: Lauren Lowe

Posted Date: November 2, 2015 2:18 PM
Status: Published

I forget how it came up in class, but I thought the idea of revisiting and analyzing Mr. Guy's essay was intriguing. Though none of us—aside from Dr. Cohen—have been in direct correspondence with Mr. Guy, we've discussed him so extensively that he often feels like a tangible participant in the course. On a pedagogical/communicational level, I think that's a kind of awesome. On the other hand, I sometimes feel as though we get caught up in the version of Mr. Guy that we believe him to be. I think that it's important to pause and pull back every so often to interrogate our own limited perspective.

As such, I did take some time to read over Mr. Guy's essay and a couple of his preceding correspondences one again. Something that I thought was interesting to note was how my reactions to his writing differed from my initial reading to this past one. When we first discussed it as a class, we lauded his writing abilities and intellectual capacities. I think most of us were both a little surprised and impressed with the eloquence of his letters, and I do still think his writing skills should be commended. However on this second read through, I realized that some of Mr. Guy's word/phrase choices struck me as a bit peculiar. I noticed this in particular in his April 9th letter to Dr. Cohen. For example at the start of the letter, he says, "Please be advised that the faculty staff members were really impressed with you and your ideas." While there's nothing glaringly incorrect or "bad" about this sentence, I find his use of the phrase, "Please be advised," to be odd. With an introduction like that, I would expect the rest of the sentence to contain some sort of advice (ie. "be advised"). What he says though seems more like positive news he wanted to share. The tone of his introductory clause doesn't quite match with what follows.

If this seems unhelpful, well, it is. I know. I only noticed it because it's the same sort of pattern I often see in student writing when I'm tutoring at the writing center. Slightly out of place phrases like the ones Mr. Guy sometimes uses tend to indicate to me that a student has been referring to a thesaurus while writing. In the hopes of making themselves sound more eloquent, students sometimes look up more complex-sounding words in the thesaurus without looking up actual definitions. This can lead to phrases that are, at a bare minimum, okay to use but that are just not quite right. I'm not entirely sure what the implications of this are when we apply it to Mr. Guy, but for me it makes me curious about how exactly he's keeping his reading/writing skills sharp.

With that all said, I don't think his intelligence is really up for debate. The rhetoric at play in his essay is perhaps unsurprising, but nevertheless well executed. While he's obviously biased in his stance on the prison situation in the States, his essay makes a strong play for sympathy from his readers. I think he does an excellent job of appealing to our sense of pathos, ethos, and logos. (Hello, English 101, it's been a long time.) Opening the essay with a short narrative moment from his perspective does well to connect with readers. Combined with the erudition visible in writing and the logic of his argument, he presents himself as a likeable fellow, distancing himself from traditional notions we may have of inmates. His description of "wielding a pen and paper as if they were the sword and shield of a higher calling" is a pretty turn of phrase that introduces a noble cause—one that readers like us are likely to support. (And haven't we? Isn't that what this very course centers on?) Much of his essay also centers on fair criticisms of recently passed legislation. This 1) shows that he's done his research (ethos) and 2) explains a logical opposition to those laws (logos). A lot of what he says about the laws are points that have come up in our own class discussions. He writes in a way that makes him a sympathetic character. I'm inclined to think that this is by precise design.

One thing that I thought was interesting to think about is the sentence where he mentions that "A new bill prohibited life-sentence inmates from receiving federal education grants for college; courses ended shortly thereafter." In and of itself it's a rather straightforward, factual statement. However, it also produces some interesting questions to discuss when regarding prison reform. If these programs have been cut, then what is the alternative? Does there need to be an alternative? Surely, if rehabilitation is the prison system's primary objective, then education must be an important part of that process. (Last week as part of continued peer reader training, I read an article from *Harper's Magazine* that I think might be pertinent to this discussion. [Here's the link to the PDF](#)—the part I'm referring to is by East Shorris on pages 13-2.) If anyone has time to look at it, I'd be interested in hearing your thoughts.)

At the crux of the issue, I think, is the notion of rehabilitation and our nation's inability/refusal to commit to it. Which, okay, it's a morally and politically complex issue to consider. I think it's important to note that the fact that we have life sentences with no minimum suggests that there is really no attempt whatsoever at rehabilitating those inmates. Everything else that follows—specifically, the lack of decent educational programs—seems to be a symptom of how we regard those inmates. I can admit that I don't have a solution, but I do think that's a critical point that prison reform needs to consider and address.

Joseph Denshaw
Lauren,

I like how you took the time to go back and read Mr. Guy's correspondence again. I'll admit that's something I didn't consider, and probably would be a good exercise for me, as well—to challenge some of my assumptions and get a better idea of who Mr. Guy really is. I think that perhaps we were so surprised first, because we had relatively low expectations for someone in Mr. Guy's position (i.e. someone spending a majority of their life in prison). I guess, with our expectations set so low, we were willing to overlook some of the awkward phrasing that you alluded to. While some sentences may sound a bit out-of-place, I agree with your assessment that Mr. Guy is an intelligent guy and is someone whose passion for education and prison reform is contagious.

I definitely agree with the fact that prison reform won't go anywhere without determining if we truly want to rehabilitate prisoners or segregate them from the other "law-abiding" citizens. As it stands right now, I think the census is "no." With that being the case, the general view of prisoners will continue to diminish, and any funds dedicated to their betterment (e.g. for classes) will dry up.

FYI: Lauren, the link that you posted doesn't work (or at least it didn't for me)

(Post is Unread)

Thread: Re-visiting Mr. Guy's "The Escape Attempt"
Post: Re-visiting Mr. Guy's "The Escape Attempt"
Author: Rachel Bomyse

Posted Date: November 4, 2015 1:07 AM
Status: Published

Hi Lauren, I appreciate your insight rereading the correspondence with Mr. Guy. I agree some of his letters seem deliberate. You say, "He writes in a way that makes him a sympathetic character," but I wonder, who wouldn't? I don't want to fall into the belief that "all prisoners are manipulative," and think that Mr. Guy's precision is a perfect example of this. I would think that anyone, whether in prison or not, would write with their own interests, and naturally speak from a place that subliminally seek sympathy.

recidivism. Our policies come from what we value. Our nation doesn't rehabilitate or the idea that people who commit crimes can change. Consequently, we see these programs start and then stop. I only hope program will promote some change, even just on the level of the indi

(Post is Unread)

Thread: Re-visiting Mr. Guy's "The Escape Attempt"
Post: Re-visiting Mr. Guy's "The Escape Attempt"
Author: Emily Sullivan

Posted Date: November 4, 2015
Status: Published

Hi Lauren and Rachel,
I liked reading your exchange about analyzing Mr. Guy's character from writing. The deliberate nature of the letters struck me the first time I and came into clearer focus over the past few days upon re-reading a about your post, Lauren. I like how you draw parallels to your student Writing Center! It's a very earnest type of writing from how I see it.

In terms of rehab and change, I feel that it's a never-ending moral dilemma as we to judge how someone's changed, but those on the "outside" a to be the only ones able to judge the safety of a person and their beliefs makes me think of the challenge of the brain in understanding the brain. Self-reflection is inherently biased and difficult. I like your final point about hoping that our program can promote change. I think that it's possibility!

(Post is Unread)

Thread: Re-visiting Mr. Guy's "The Escape Attempt"
Post: Re-visiting Mr. Guy's "The Escape Attempt"
Author: Lauren Lowe

Posted Date: November 5, 2015
Status: Published

Pointing out our own low expectations is a very interesting part of this that I didn't think of even while re-visiting Mr. Guy's essay. I think that's definitely an

Thread: Re-visiting Mr. Guy's "The Escape Attempt"
Post: Re-visiting Mr. Guy's "The Escape Attempt"
Author: Lauren Lowe

Posted Date: November 5, 2015 12:48 PM
Status: Published

I don't want to fall into the notion that "all prisoners are manipulative" either, and I hope that's not how my post came across. I definitely just thought that it was interesting to note the relative mastery of rhetoric displayed in the language of Mr. Guy's essay.

Your point that our policies come from what we value is a crucial piece in the prison reform conversation, I think. It's difficult. How do we change the policies if we can't change the values? Can we change the values? What's it going to take? I think it's definitely going to be an ongoing conversation for years to come.

(Post is Unread)

Thread: Re-visiting Mr. Guy's "The Escape Attempt"
Post: Re-visiting Mr. Guy's "The Escape Attempt"
Author: Lauren Lowe

Posted Date: November 5, 2015 12:51 PM
Status: Published

Okay it looks like these responses are about to get difficult to follow. I probably should've put names at the top—this is in response to your post, Emily. I would agree that we're dealing with a never-ending moral debate here in regards to rehabilitation and change. What you're saying about bias in self-reflection actually made me think about how difficult it must be to be objective in terms of rehabilitation as well. That is to say, who gets to decide when someone is officially rehabilitated? How would they know? Is there ever going to be a way to keep bias out of it?

V. Individual responses to incarcerated responses

Thread: Response to Responses
Post: Response to Responses
Author:  Larissa Bundziak

Posted Date: November 10, 2016 1:25 AM
Status: Published

Dear Fayette Students,

I first would like to thank you for taking the time to engage with our class at Drexel and for your thoughtful responses. Prior to sending you each reading, we discuss the material in hopes that it will generate both discussion in your class and internal thought exploration. Personally, I could not have been more thrilled to read each of your individual responses to the passages. I entered this Prison Reading course with the belief that this would be a mutually beneficial project—we would share some of our favorite written pieces with you, and you would share your insight and opinions with us. Your answers have confirmed my belief, as reading your responses offered me a broader perspective on causes of addiction, the persona of Jonathan Livingston Seagull, the correlation between economic status and health, and the complexity in *The Elegance of the Hedgehog*.

I am a communications student at Drexel, and the courses I take offer much opportunity for open discussions. Although we have an interesting and diverse student population, I have found that the range in our backgrounds is not extraordinarily widespread. This reason, among many, is why I jumped at the opportunity to take this course and engage with students who maintain a different perspective than me or anyone in my classes at Drexel. I sincerely appreciate how insightful all of your responses were, and how you incorporated your experiences and circumstances into them. I cringe at the idea of looking at the world through a narrow and filtered perspective. I constantly strive to learn more about other people, expand my ways of thinking, and examine situations from alternative perspectives. Your raw thoughts and opinions on addiction, morality, and improvement to our health circumstances allowed me to do this. I thank you.

As my other classmate your class is run. For Dr. Cohen and Dr. Br hours each week and

we plan to send you, and your responses. Do you analyze the passages only individually, or do you engage in class discussion as well? Although I generally prefer to work and explore my thoughts individually, I have found dissecting literary work with peers and comparing perceptions of it to be extremely rewarding. I hope your class structure allows for group discussion, and if it doesn't, I hope you feel strongly enough about the passages to initiate conversation about it still.

Thank you again for your thoughtful and enlightening responses. I hope you find this project as rewarding as I do. I look forward to the rest of the course and continuing to work with you!

All the best,

Larissa

Thread: Letter to Fayette
Post: Letter to Fayette
Author:  Steven Blumberg

Posted Date: November 9, 2016 6:11 PM
Status: Published

Dear Fayette Students,

The responses you presented us from the readings our class sent were truly remarkable. Both in the speed of your replies and the clear high level thinking that went into them. I was personally very moved by the high-level of vocabulary and manual handwriting skills the majority of you possess which is something many in my generation have quickly started to lose. Speaking on behalf of our whole class here, we were elated to read the well thought out and sometimes controversial responses to our readings which showed a clear originality and personality to your writings.

To go in deeper to each reading that I sent I will start with the convenience store piece. The vast majority of the responses were in favor of putting fresh produce in convenience stores and hoped it would continue which I have to agree with. The reasoning why they were not fully working or needed more external help was where the views became very intriguing. Student #2 I really connected with your idea that it will take a maturation of the new generation to start to appreciate healthier foods better and realize that "mom was right" to eat better. I also felt that your response and the Student who we didn't get a number from. In the federal government needs to work more closely with communities to allow for a more accessible and ethical thoughts on price elevation of healthy foods, way for communities to get their produce. I enjoyed that many saying that the real issue was not fruit consumption but holistic approach to healthy living. Student #21 put it importance of exercise and active lifestyles. Lastly I en business themes brought up in your responses. A major income families understand the value of healthy food, sensitive and will make their buying decisions more of dollar rather than health value at a premium. Student idea that complementary items need to be more available. Something like a cinnamon pear crisp might sell much pear. Student #3, I found it intriguing to read about your

cigarette marketers years ago and how it could be used to get people "hooked" on healthy food. I wonder how kids who were told apples were the new cool thing would react in today's society. Overall, the responses you guys gave to me were excellent and very well thought out. They went above and beyond what I had hoped for and were a clear step above what I might receive from a freshman class of economics majors here at school!

Reflecting on the Jonathan Livingston Seagull responses really got my mind running. I valued the diversity of ideas and appreciated the different mindsets that went into each response. As a class you guys, just as ours was here, very split on the meaning of this book and its value. Some of you called Jonathan a psychopath, while others praised him for choosing personal freedom. Student #13, yours was the first I read and was one that got our minds thinking in class. You and a few of your other classmates really opened up the new mindset that the author had biased this story toward Jonathan without the clear thoughts of the flock to compare the story alongside with. Maybe a sequel will need to be made on the debates of the flock as Jonathan grew up! Student #19, your answer to the "better off in isolation" question really stood out to me. You critiqued the writing on not going further into the human emotions of the story like love, loneliness, and compassion which led you to feel less connected as it was written in the eyes of a bird. Student #25, your pro con list allowed for a fair

Thank you all for the responses, each one got me thinking in a different way and for two stories that have changed the way I think, I am thankful that you all were able to comment on it as well. Many of you shared similar views which is

ation may have worked for Jonathan, in your that may not have worked for the other gulls. A lent #7 and #3, your connection with JLS's mbing the ladders and not elevators" was a think about in personal growth and reaching assessment that had Jonathan been more ck, he would have received better results was an ot thought about and something that many of possible. What if Jonathan had played the ight that have changed the outcome? To the ber, I felt that the idea of Jonathan making the his personal life to the fullest were well put.) "conform to the average mundane life of other true meaning of life." Student #2, I found your it was best for the flock that Jonathan went e few students who said Jonathan needed to be

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why I only highlighted a few responses so that I would not be redundant in my grading.

This class for me has been an important one in my education. To work with the students in my seminar at Drexel University and your class in Fayette Prison has shown the value of continued education and more opportunities. As students here, many of us get caught up in day to day busy work and forget to take time to think about many of the issues we brought up in your readings, isolation, personal health, happiness, hard work, addiction, etc. and we also forget that you all are excited to learn and grow also as you clearly showed in this class.

A few questions I have for you all at this point:

How was the class set up? Were you all together to discuss the readings, in groups, alone?

Did you enjoy the readings? What could be done to make them more interesting?

Look forward to hearing back soon, enjoy the other readings!

Immediate Results

Incarcerated Participants

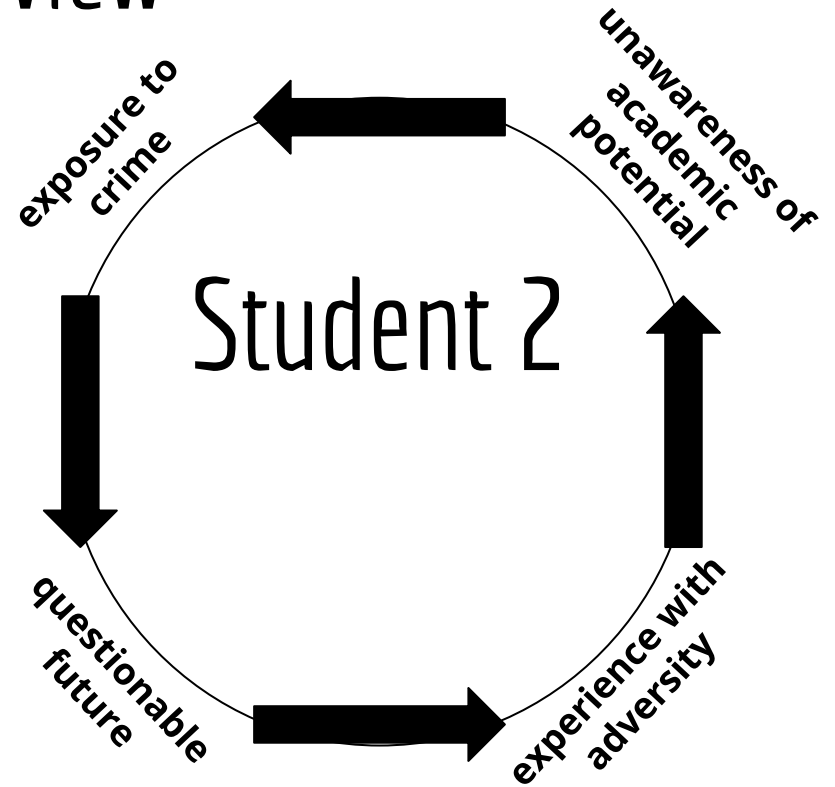
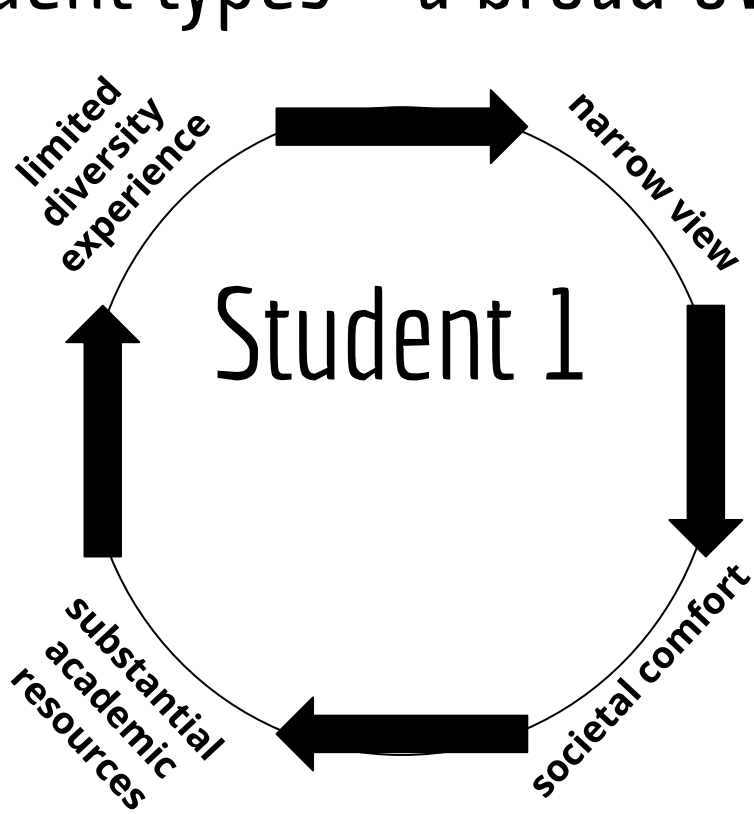
- rehabilitation opportunities
- access to textual material (fiction, non-fiction, news, opinion pieces, etc.)
- structure/discipline

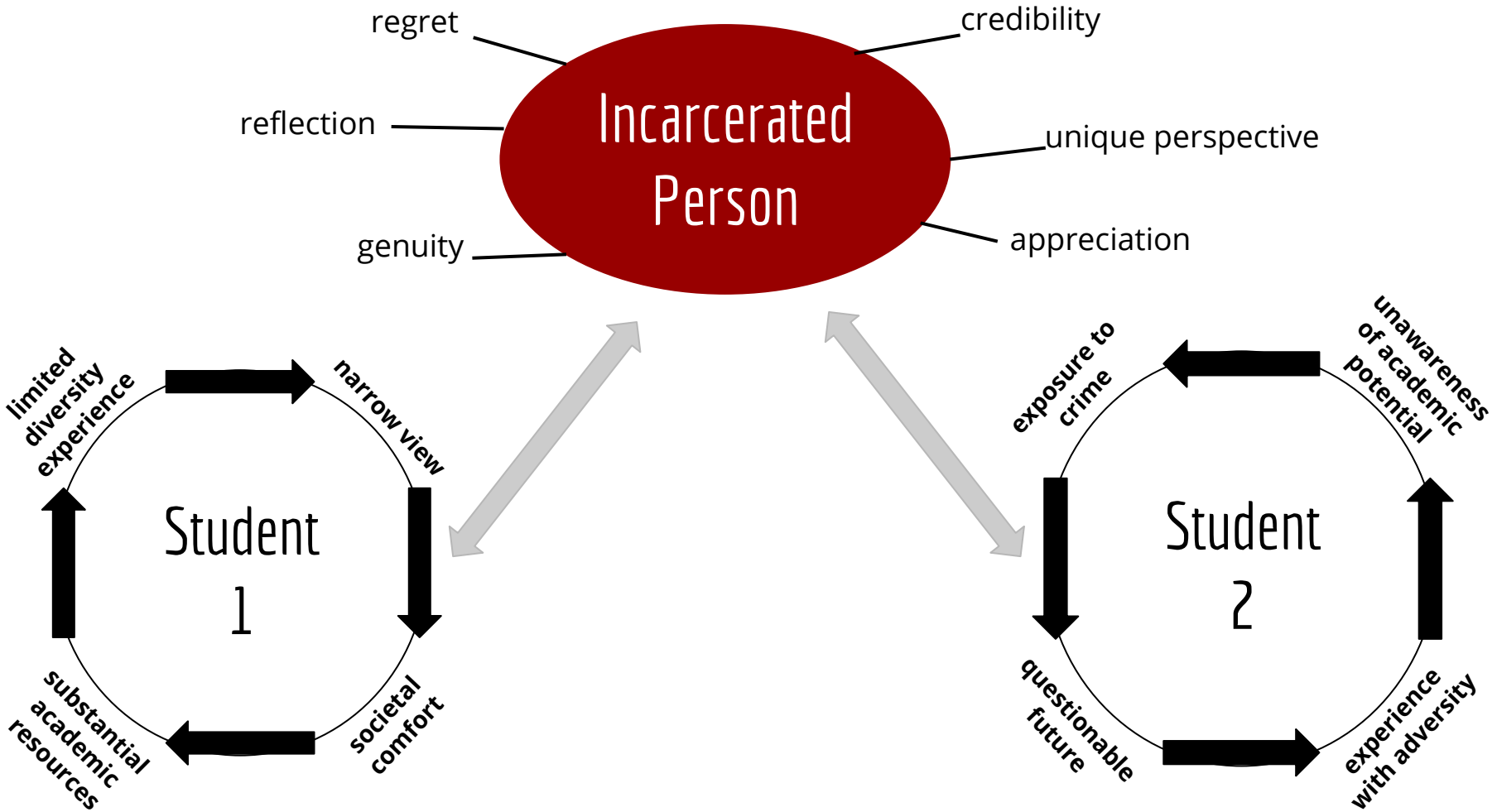
Student Participants

- alternative perspective
- self-exploration
- writing and reading skill development

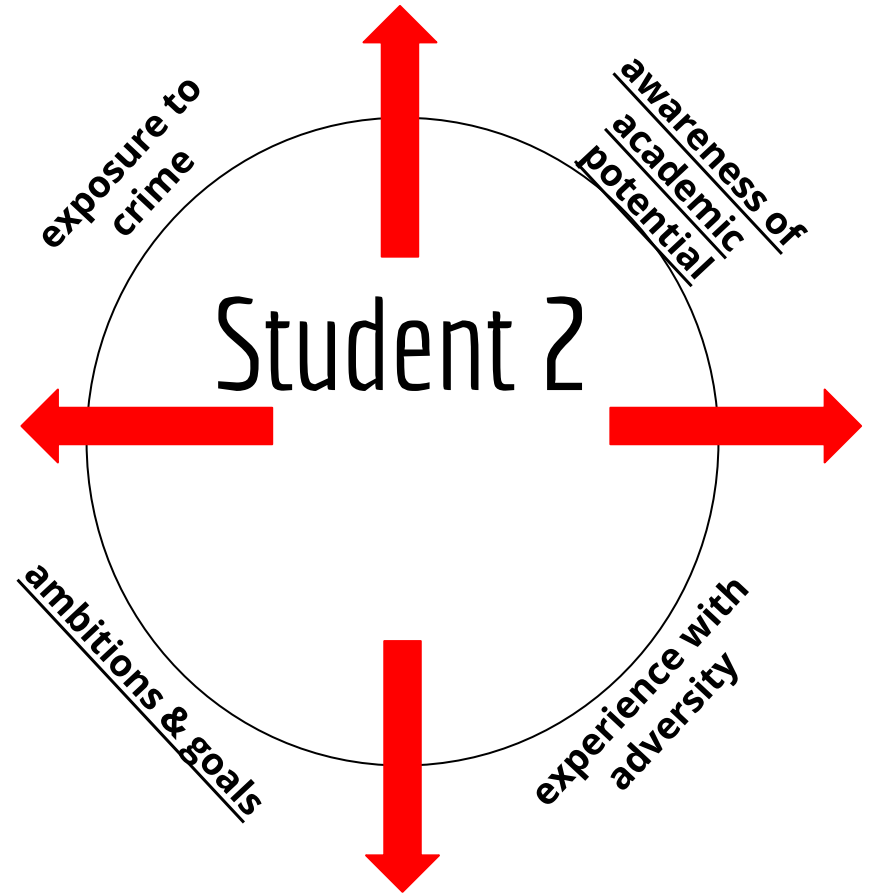
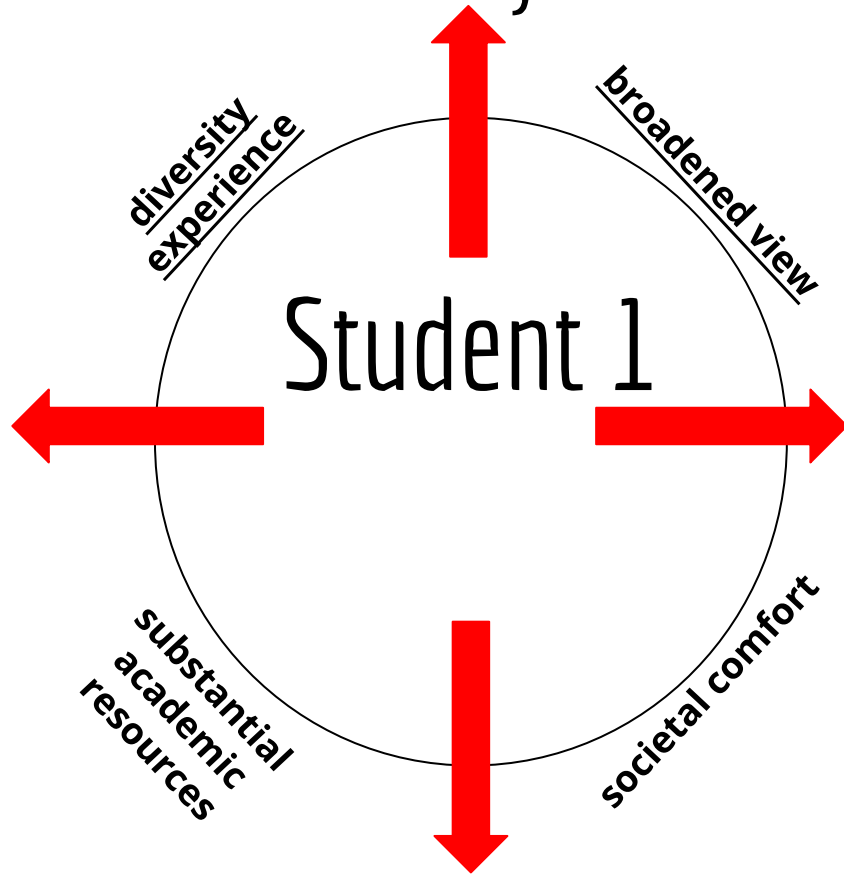
- community engagement
- insight into criminal justice system
- sense of educational value/impact on others

Student types - a broad overview





Outcome: broken cycle



Proposed Structure

1. Each student in the “outside” class selects a short reading to send to a group of inmates, along with a brief introduction and questions for discussion and written responses.
2. The students present their selections to the entire class, providing an opening for feedback - concerns, questions, and constructive criticism. This is to ensure no material is sent that is potentially offensive, unsafe, or inappropriate in any way. It also allows the students to engage with and learn from the material in advance of the inmates. ***
3. Once approved by the class and the instructor(s), the readings are sent by an instructor or the administrative office to an official at the prison.
4. A prison official receives and distributes the material to a selected group of inmates. The inmates complete the readings, use the given questions to hold discussions, and prepare written responses.
5. A prison office or the administrative office sends back the responses to the school. Responses are either scanned and sent via email to an instructor or administrative office, or sent via mail to a PO Box.
6. The instructor distributes the inmates’ responses to the class. Upon reviewing each individual response, the students engage in discussion about what they received.
7. The students each prepare collective responses to the inmates, igniting far-reaching dialogue, resulting in an in-depth learning experience. Responses are sent following the above procedure.

Safety Precautions

- All participants identified by numbers, rather than names
- Educational institution or prison name are not disclosed to either party
- Use of a PO Box
- Optional use of mediator between institutions

Richard Guy's final letters

“Incarceration at least has the beneficial aspect of letting a person see the world with fresh eyes, the way an artist does. Because of you, my belief in humanity has been greatly reinforced. Hopefully this was as beneficial and rewarding for you as it was for all of us here.”

Richard A. Guy
Box 9999 #AP6877
LeBelle, PA
15450

December 19, 2015

Dear Drexel Students,

On behalf of the inmate students here at SCI Fayette, I would like to express my deepest appreciation for your participation in the 2015 Drexel Prison Literacy Project.

Hopefully it was as rewarding and beneficial as it was for all involved here. Not only did it provide a venture into higher education, but it also epitomized that there are benevolent young people who care about those who are incarcerated.

Please allow me to briefly pass some sage advice along to each and every one of you....whoever coined the phrase "Life isn't fair", was probably having a bad day. The truth of the matter is that life is fair, it is just paved with hurdles, speed bumps, potholes and detours.

We all play the hand that we are dealt in life and strive to do our best. Too often we live with a illusion when we think that there is a short cut to success. Well, not only is there no short cut, there is not even a straight line to it. The road to success zig-zags. You will surely be tested, frustrated and knocked down, but if you properly utilize your natural intelligence and Drexel education, work hard in life and persevere when needed... you will succeed in life.

Best of luck to each and every one of you!

Sincerely,

Richard A. Guy

Richard A. Guy
Box 9999 #AP6877
LeBelle, PA
15450

December 19, 2015

Paula,

the conclusion of the 2015 Drexel Literacy Project here at SCIFayette, I would like to truly thank you for all of your efforts and determinations to bring the program.

It was not for your resolve and firmness of purpose, the program would have happened and the inmates here would never have experienced such writing and educational experience. Greatly appreciated all the logistical support you provided as well.

In my years working in correctional education departments, I have never seen a program better appreciated and received by prisoners, and on behalf of them, thank you so much.

Because of the initial resistance of the educational staff here was a major obstacle in and of itself, so praise there as well is due to you.

On a personal note, it has been a great pleasure and honor to have worked with you. Several days ago it dawned on me that during the entire process I never really got to know such about you aside from the academic work, but in a quite unique way, I did not need to know much because we both cut from the same mold. I have found that aspect of our friendship quite refreshing.

Incarceration at least has the beneficial aspect of letting a prisoner see the world with fresh eyes, the way an artist does. Because of you, my belief in humanity has been greatly reinforced.

Sincerely yours,

Richard

Publicity

- "A Course of Revelations" *Philly.com*, by Dr. Paula Marantz Cohen
 - <http://mobile.philly.com/beta?wss=%2Fphilly%2Fopinion&id=364712891>
- "Prison Reading Project Opens Eyes on Both Sides of the Bars" *Drexel.edu*
 - <http://drexel.edu/now/archive/2016/January/Prison-Project/>