



LESSON PLAN

Freedom to Change



RELATED FILM

Path of Freedom

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Key Idea

The United States contains twenty-five percent of the world’s prison population. Innovative rehabilitation programs offer effective tools to help prisoners re-enter society and stay out of prison.

Background

The film, *Path of Freedom*, explores an innovative approach to rehabilitating prisoners at John J. Moran Medium Security Facility, a Rhode Island men’s prison. Fleet Maull, a former inmate and founder of the Prison Mindfulness Institute (PMI), teaches basic meditation techniques at Moran, empowering prisoners to take responsibility for their lives. In 1989, while serving a 14.5-year mandatory minimum prison sentence for drug smuggling, Maull founded the PMI and led a twice-weekly meditation group in the prison chapel. Today, his focus includes programs for prison guards and administrators to help transform the corrections system as a whole.

According to a 2014 National Research Council report, United States incarceration rates have more than quadrupled in the last four decades, bringing the effectiveness and growing costs of our prison system under increasing scrutiny. As stated in the report, the U.S. now has the highest incarceration rate in the world, housing approximately 1 in 100 adults on any given day.

Innovative programs, like the PMI, bring meditation, art, theater, and dance into prisons. Their methods and techniques, designed to help inmates develop insight, impulse control, empathy, and improve decision-making, are often founded on evidenced-based approaches to social emotional learning. Studies have shown that addressing cognitive and psychological patterns within inmates supports prosocial behavior after inmates are released, reducing recidivism, or the act of repeating criminal behavior.



Film: 10 minutes

Class: 60 minutes

SUBJECT AREAS

HIGH SCHOOL

- English Language Arts
- Modern World Studies
- Psychology

COLLEGE

- English
- History
- Philosophy
- Psychology
- Sociology

THEMES

- Social justice
- Freedom versus restriction
- Social and emotional learning

MATERIALS

- Online access to the film
- Equipment for showing film

PREPARATION

- None



Connections to National Standards

Common Core English Language Arts. SL.9-10.1 and SL.11-12.1. Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9-10 [or 11-12] topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards. D2.Psy.2.9-12. Investigate human behavior from biological, cognitive, behavioral, and sociocultural perspectives.

Next Generation Science Standards. HS-LS2-8. Evaluate the evidence for the role of group behavior and individual and species' chances to survive and reproduce.

Lesson

SETTING THE STAGE

Ask students if they have heard of meditation or mindfulness. Ask them to describe what they know. One definition of mindfulness, provided by the Greater Good Science Center is the ability to maintain a moment-by-moment “awareness of thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations, and surrounding environment.”

Tell students that they will engage in a five-minute mindfulness activity. Ask them to sit comfortably at their desks. Have students close their eyes and take a few deep breaths. Ask them to:

- Bring their attention to the physical sensations of their bodies. For example, ask them to put their feet on the floor, their arms or hands resting on their desks or legs, and pay attention to their breathing.
- Ask students to simply sit in their chairs, aware of how they feel. Tell students they should not be concerned if their mind wanders (either with their thoughts or outside noises.) They should try to return their attention inwardly to their breath and sit quietly.



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After the exercise, ask students the following questions: Was it easy for you to stay still and quiet? Why or why not? Ask students to select an adjective that describes how they felt before the exercise and how they felt afterwards.

*Note to teacher: For additional tips on mindfulness practices based on your class size, please visit the following article provided by [The Greater Good Science Center](#).

ENGAGING WITH THE STORY

Explain that students will watch a film that takes place inside a medium-security men's prison in Rhode Island. Some of the men interviewed in the film have been incarcerated for violent crimes, including murder. Fleet Maull, the main character in the film, served a 14.5-year mandatory minimum sentence for drug smuggling in the 1980s. He now teaches meditation to prisoners.

Ask students to take note of their own observations and thoughts while watching the film. What evidence from the film shows ways in which meditation is used as a tool? How does meditation affect the prisoners' lives?

Delving Deeper

After viewing the film, lead a discussion with such questions as:

- How do the four prisoners introduce themselves in the beginning of the film? What were the crimes they committed?
- "A lot of times, what lands people in prison and what brings them back is a lack of good problem solving skills and good communication skills," said Fleet Maull in the film. What might be some everyday problem solving or communication skills he is referring to? How might these skills allow a person to make good choices in lieu of bad choices?
- How would you summarize the prisoners' reflections about meditation?



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- One prisoner explained, “Freedom before I came here was just another word.” What does freedom mean to you? Maull believes that freedom can be found while being in prison. Do you agree? Why or why not?
- Roberta Richman, assistant director of rehabilitative services, asks, “What circumstances did they have to survive on the street to bring them to where they are now? Do we want to save those lives or do we want to discard them?” What do you think? Do you think programs such as these could have value? If so, how?
- What if this program didn’t exist for these prisoners? What might happen?
- If you were asked to rename this film, what title would you give it?

Reflecting and Projecting

Give students one of the following reflective writing prompts to demonstrate their understanding of the story. (Note for teachers: Just as quotes from a book or text are used to prove an analytical thought, students use the film to justify their reasoning.)

1. Nelson Mandela, the former President of South Africa from 1994-1999, was imprisoned for 27 years for his revolutionary work in protest of apartheid, a system of racial segregation in South African. Mandela said, “To be free is not merely to cast off one’s chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others.” Write a paragraph explaining what Mandela might have meant by this quote using personal experience from your own life or someone you know. What evidence from the film supports your point of view? (CCSS.ELA.SL.9-10.1 and SL.11-12.1)
2. Some schools across the country are integrating mindfulness education programs into their curricula. Studies have shown that these programs can reduce hyperactive behavior, enhance the school climate, and improve student attendance. How might a mindfulness program benefit you, other students in your school, and your school environment? Do you think issues, such as bullying, could be improved by this program? Why or why not? (C3.D2.Psy.2.9-12)



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3. The U.S. has the highest documented incarceration rate in the world with approximately 1 in 100 individuals currently in prison. In the film, Fleet Maull said, “If we really want to reduce crime, if we really want a safer and healthier world, we have to be willing to look at the causes and conditions from which harmful behaviors arise in the first place—both at the individual and social level.” Do you agree with Maull? Why or why not? Do you think society should forget these individuals or try to help them even if they are in prison for life? In a paragraph, explain your position. (NGSS.HS-LS2-8)

Resources

Emily Campbell, “[Research Round-Up: Mindfulness in Schools.](#)” Greater Good, October 10, 2013.

(Infographic) “[Incarceration in the U.S.: Dissecting The World’s Largest Prison Population.](#)” Boston University.

Michel Martin interviews Laura Bates, “[Teaching Shakespeare In A Maximum Security Prison.](#)” NPR, April 22, 2013.

Kelly House, “[In ‘mindful studies’ class, Wilson High School students learn to cope with teenage stress.](#)” *The Oregonian*, October 15, 2014.

[Prison Mindfulness Institute.](#)