

Chapter Two

Reading: *Doing Time -- And Learning*

Warm-up: With a partner or in small groups, discuss the following questions.

1. What do you know about prison life? Are all prisons in the US the same? What is prison life like outside the US?
2. What exactly is the purpose of incarceration?
3. If you have been inside any prison for any reason and feel comfortable enough to talk about it, do so now (you don't have to mention names).
4. What privileges do inmates receive? Do they deserve them? Should anything be done to improve the lives of men and women serving prison terms? **If yes**, what should be done? **If no**, why not?
5. Should a man or woman in prison be given a college education? **If yes**, why? **If no**, why not?

As you read the editorial *Doing Time -- And Learning*, **highlight** or underline the writer's **main idea** (if it is stated) and **major supporting details**. This will help prepare you for writing a summary.

DOING TIME - AND LEARNING

I spent about a year in jail - Greenhaven Correctional Facility to be exact - a men's maximum security prison in the sleepy upstate hamlet of Stormville, New York. Unlike many other prisons, Greenhaven's no country club. Nobody goes there for accumulating too many unpaid parking tickets. No, the cells there are filled with men found guilty of crimes of a much more serious nature, like drug trafficking, armed robbery and murder.

So what was I, a twenty-seven year old, law abiding female doing in a place like that? I was teaching English. I was part of a group hired by Marist College, the Jesuit school that was the first in the country to offer degree programs to prison inmates.

Some might say, "Why should my tax dollars pay for a criminal to go to college when I can't afford to send my own kids without loans?" Others remind us that prisoners in the US have it great compared to their counterparts in foreign countries where conditions are often deplorable, so why should we do more? Reasonable people can quibble over what kinds of prisoners should have the privilege of getting a college education, how programs should be funded, etc., but there is no doubt that education should be offered to inmates who qualify.

First, what is the mission of a "correctional" facility? What does it mean to "correct" someone? Shouldn't part of the process be aimed at helping prisoners become and remain productive members of society? Many inmates sincerely want to turn their lives around - for good - and one way to help them do that is to give them a very essential hand up. Perhaps some prisoners would have taken very different paths in life if they had had the tools and opportunities afforded to others. Education plays a huge role in a person's growth and development. It gives him/her something to work with upon release, and a high school or G.E.D. diploma is just not enough today.

Second, numerous studies done all over the US show that the recidivism rates for inmates who earn degrees are much lower than those of their uneducated peers. To those who scoff at the idea of spending even more money on prisoners, think about this: prisoner education has real economic benefits as well. "[S]imply attending school behind bars reduces the likelihood of re-incarceration by 23%. Translated into savings, every dollar spent on education returns more than two dollars to the citizens in reduced prison costs." Steurer et al.

Finally, we are a society that values human life. We root for and try to help underdogs. We believe in second chances, we love comebacks and second acts, and we forgive. It's who we are. What better way is there to live up to these values than give prisoners the chance to return to the human family - and stay there.

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Post Reading Activities

Vocabulary Log: Make a list of any unfamiliar words from the reading. Next, write down what you think the word means. Then check the dictionary meaning of the word and write it down.

General Topic: In a few words, what is the general topic of the editorial?

Main Idea: Write down the main idea/central point of the reading. What one message does the writer want you to take with you from the reading?

Summary: In the space provided, summarize the editorial.

Paraphrase: In the space provided, use your own words for another summary.

Talk Back: What do YOU think about this topic? If you had an opportunity to talk to the writer, what would you say? In the space provided, respond to what you have read. If you agree with some or all of the writer's points, explain why and give **your own** reasons - Add to the conversation. If you disagree with or question any of the writer's points, explain why and give your point of view. Support your claims with evidence or examples drawn from what you have read, observed, learned in school, and/or personally experienced. (Use your own paper if you run out of room.)
