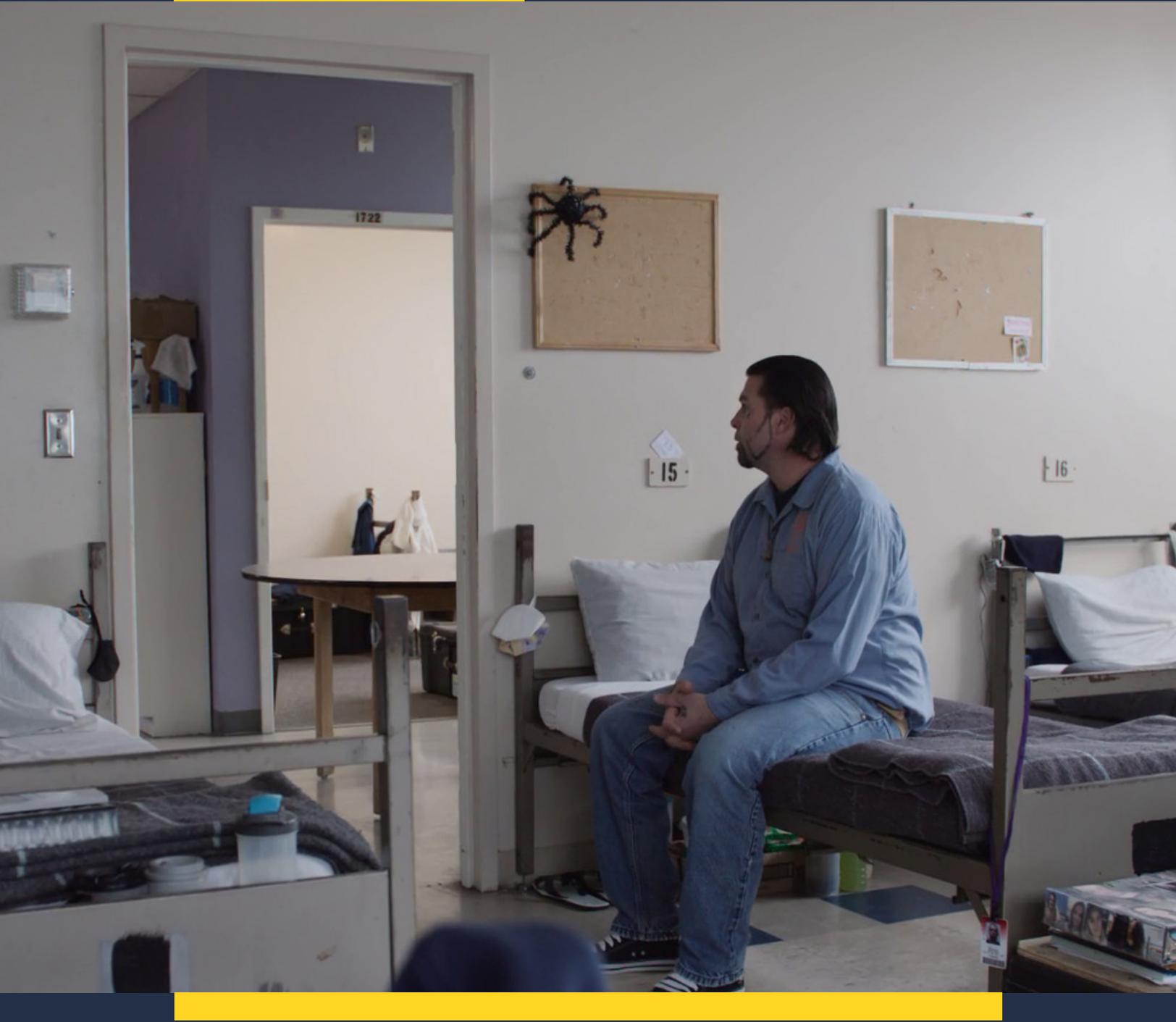


# Classroom 4

A FILM BY EDEN WURMFELD



POV

DISCUSSION GUIDE



...of the prison system in the United States...  
...in the 1980s and 1990s, when...  
...by emphasis and...  
...of criminal justice...  
...became the symbol of opportunity and mobility, an



Jimmy

Humble

HUMOR

honest

CARING

Kind

Alone

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# Film Summary



*Classroom 4* is the story of an award-winning professor teaching “The History of Crime and Punishment” inside a prison to a class of both free students and incarcerated students. It explores the true cost of mass incarceration and the power of human connection to transform society.

# Using This Guide

This guide is an invitation to dialogue. It is based on a belief in the power of human connection and designed for people who want to use *Classroom 4* to engage family, friends, classmates, colleagues, and communities. In contrast to initiatives that foster debates in which participants try to convince others that they are right, this document envisions conversations undertaken in a spirit of openness in which people try to understand one another and expand their thinking by sharing viewpoints and listening actively.

The discussion prompts are intentionally crafted to help a wide range of audiences think more deeply about the issues in the film. Rather than attempting to address them all, choose one or two that best meet your needs and interests. And be sure to leave time to consider taking action. Planning next steps can help people leave the room feeling energized and optimistic, even in instances when conversations have been difficult.

For more detailed event planning and facilitation tips, visit <https://communitynetwork.amdoc.org/>.

## LETTER FROM THE FILMMAKER

*Dear Viewer,*

*As a filmmaker, you sometimes find yourself in moments where the energy in the room is so charged, so palpable, that you wonder if that very energy can be captured, if it can be conveyed through the lens of a camera and shared with those who will experience it from a distance. Witnessing the [Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program](#) in *History 238: Crime and Punishment in the United States* was nothing short of extraordinary. This was one of those moments. The chemistry between the incarcerated and free students was unmistakable, and it was my great privilege to help shape that footage and translate the profound power of their interaction into something meaningful for a broader audience.*

*Through exercises like the wagon wheel, the film bears witness to a transformation—a deepening sense of community, trust, and understanding. I watched as these students from different walks of life opened up to one another, finding creative ways to communicate across the barriers of their different life experiences. It was an exchange, yes, but it was more than that—it was a reminder of our shared humanity, of the connections that can be made even in the most unlikely of places.*

*Professor Reiko Hillyer and I have been friends since childhood, so I've been hearing about this class for years. When we set out to capture this experience, we weren't sure whether it would become a documentary. What mattered was the act of documenting these people coming together—learning, challenging one another, and growing together. Even if it was just for archival purposes, it felt important and meaningful.*

*But as we filmed, something shifted. The enthusiasm from the students, their desire for the footage to be shaped into a film, and the undeniable power of their collective story made it clear: this was more than just a class. It was a story that not only deserved to be told, it needed to be told; a story that could resonate far beyond the walls of that classroom.*

*Our hope is that this film will do more than just shed light on the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program. We hope it will challenge viewers to think critically about mass incarceration in the United States and to consider its impact on individuals and communities. And perhaps, most importantly, we hope it will inspire a deeper appreciation for the kind of teaching we see from Professor Hillyer—teaching that’s not just about imparting knowledge, but about fostering curiosity, understanding, empathy, and the potential for transformation.*

*Thank you for watching,  
Eden Wurmfeld (Director)*

## COMMON CONCEPTS & LANGUAGE

### **Carceral (Logic/Systems):**

According to the philosopher Michel Foucault, the term “carceral” refers not only to prisons, but to a much broader system of power that disciplines, monitors, and regulates people’s behavior across everyday life in invisible ways through surveillance, rules, and routines, and normalizes these characteristics in everyday structures. This is a type of power and logic that teaches everyday people to police themselves and one another (not only in prisons and courtrooms).

### **Justice-Impacted:**

This language is used to describe individuals or communities whose lives have been affected by involvement with the criminal legal system (a term reformers use instead of “criminal justice system” because they assert that

the system often fails to deliver justice, functioning instead as a legal framework designed to mete out punishment rather than fairness) and is used instead of “criminal” or “convict” to place emphasis on the systems, rather than the people affected by the systems.

### **Recidivism:**

Commonly used to measure the tendency for someone with a prior conviction to become re-involved with the criminal legal system. While often narrowly defined as being convicted of a new crime after serving a sentence, the term is frequently applied more broadly to include re-arrest or re-incarceration that may result from parole violations rather than new criminal activity. These violations can stem from barriers faced by formerly incarcerated people, including hyper-

policing, employment discrimination, and the criminalization of poverty. Though presented as a neutral metric for measuring a “propensity to commit crime,” recidivism rates actually reflect how the carceral system expands its reach and creates obstacles to successful reentry.

### **“Inside/Outside”:**

In the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program, the terms “inside student” and “outside student” are used as a conscious attempt to stay away from terms like “inmate”, “convict,” or “AIC (Adult in Custody).” All students who prefer to have a say in the terminology used to describe them agreed to this language.

## **Prison Abolition:**

A movement that calls for ending imprisonment as a primary response to social problems and harm, while building alternative systems rooted in community accountability, restorative justice, mental health care, education, and addressing root causes of crime such as poverty and inequality. Abolitionists critique prisons as inherently dehumanizing and ineffective, arguing they perpetuate cycles of violence and marginalization rather than creating safety. The movement envisions a society that prioritizes prevention, healing, and transformation over punishment and isolation, fundamentally reimagining how communities respond to harm and support those most affected by it.

## **Prison Reform:**

Prison reform is the movement to improve prison conditions, re-

duce overcrowding, promote reintegration through rehabilitation, and implement alternatives to incarceration, focusing on humane treatment, mental health, education, job training, and fair sentencing, with goals of creating safer communities and reducing the social/economic costs of mass incarceration. Key areas include ending mandatory minimum sentences, promoting diversion programs, improving inmate healthcare, and ensuring accountability within prison systems.

## **Community:**

A social unit of people sharing common characteristics (like place, interests, identity, or culture) who interact and feel a sense of belonging or collective identity, often acting together for shared purposes, extending beyond just geography to include virtual spaces and shared experiences like profession or beliefs. It's defined by relationships,

shared perspectives, and a sense of "us," whether in a neighborhood, an online group, a professional field, a classroom, or a prison setting.

## **Detention Facilities:**

Institutions designed to confine people held by the state for legal, administrative, or disciplinary reasons. They restrict freedom of movement and daily autonomy, often through surveillance, controlled routines, and regulated contact with the outside world. While detention is commonly associated with punishment, these facilities also serve other functions, such as pretrial holding, immigration processing, or juvenile custody. Conditions, legal protections, and stated purposes vary widely, but all detention facilities operate within systems of coercive control. Here are some types of detention facilities:

## **Immigration Detention Facilities:**

Facilities that hold non-citizens during immigration enforcement or removal proceedings. Detention is considered civil, not criminal, and people may be held even if they have not committed a crime. These facilities are operated by federal agencies or private contractors and are often characterized by legal uncertainty, prolonged detention, and limited access to legal counsel, despite the absence of a criminal sentence.

## **Jails:**

Short-term detention facilities that are typically run by counties or cities. They hold people awaiting trial, sentencing, or transfer to another facility, as well as those serving shorter sentences (often under one year). Because many people in jails have not been convicted, jails function as a critical but often unstable point of confinement within the

legal system, marked by rapid turnover and limited services.

## **Juvenile Detention Facilities:**

These facilities confine minors who are accused or adjudicated within the juvenile legal system. These institutions are typically framed as rehabilitative rather than punitive, emphasizing education, counseling, and behavioral intervention. However, they still involve confinement, surveillance, and discipline, and young people held in these facilities experience many of the same restrictions on freedom as adults.

## **Prisons:**

Long-term confinement facilities operated by state or federal governments. They hold people who have been convicted of crimes and sentenced to incarceration, typically for more than one year. Prisons are designed around extended custody, with structured labor, programming, and

security regimes, and they emphasize punishment, incapacitation, and, in some cases, rehabilitation.

## **Minimum-Custody:**

Refers to the lowest level of security classification within detention or correctional systems. People in minimum-custody settings are considered to pose a low risk of violence or escape. These facilities typically have fewer physical barriers (such as fences or locked cells), greater freedom of movement, and more access to work, education, family contact, and community programs. Minimum custody is often framed as supporting rehabilitation and reintegration, though access is usually limited by eligibility rules related to sentence length, offense type, disciplinary history, and institutional assessments.

## **Maximum-Custody:**

These facilities are designed for people classified as high risk due to safety, behavioral, or security concerns. These facilities feature extensive physical barriers, strict movement controls, and constant monitoring. Daily life is highly regimented, and opportunities for social interaction and programming are limited.

## **Supermax (Administrative Segregation):**

These facilities or units represent the most restrictive form of custody. People are typically confined to single cells for most of the day, with minimal human contact and tightly controlled movement. Placement is often administrative rather than punitive, though it functions as a form of extreme isolation and has been widely criticized for its psychological effects.

# Film Participants

## **Professor Reiko Hillyer-**

A Lewis & Clark College educator and longtime facilitator with the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program, and author of *A Wall is Just a Wall: The Permeability of the Prison in the Twentieth-Century United States* (Duke, 2024). Her commitment to prison education, community activism, and meaningful reform was instrumental in re-establishing the Inside-Out program at CRCI in the years following the pandemic.

Since the creation of this film, six additional semesters of Inside-Out courses have taken place, covering subjects such as history, poetry, theater, English, art expression, and more. Through her leadership, determination, and unwavering belief in the transformative power of education, Professor Hillyer has inspired fellow faculty members to join the effort (often while navigating immense logistical and institutional challenges). Because of her work, the Inside-Out prison exchange program has become a consistent, stable, and enriching educational opportunity for incarcerated adults at Columbia River Correctional Institution.

## **Nick Fiveoaks-**

A formerly incarcerated student and central figure in the film, who has remained deeply involved with the project since his release. He

has traveled with the program to screenings, participating in post-film Q&A sessions and offering audiences a rare and powerful firsthand perspective. Nick brings warmth, generosity, and thoughtful honesty to every discussion, speaking openly about his experiences in the Inside-Out classroom and the process of creating this film. His voice continues to shape how viewers understand the impact of education, collaboration, and connection across the walls.

## **“Inside” Students-**

Christopher, Davorea “Dee”, Ivan, James, Jason “Chops”, Jimmie, Joey, Josiah, Justin, Kyron “KT”, Leo B, and Nick “Yogi”

## **“Outside” Students-**

Alicia, Anthilia, Ethan, Evelyn, Frances, Gardner, Hanadi, Lena, Leo C, Lily, Maddie, Madeline, Molly, Sophie, Venus, and Rafael.

# Key Issues

*Classroom 4* is an excellent tool for outreach and will be of special interest to people who want to explore the following topics:

- Prisons as environments intentionally designed to isolate people
- The deep divide between “inside” and “outside” communities
- A look behind the walls and statistics
- Education as a transformative force in dehumanizing spaces
- Trust and vulnerability in prison
- The emotional challenges of incarceration beyond physical confinement
- The healing and humanizing impact of connection and community
- Creativity and storytelling as acts of resistance and empowerment
- Breaking stereotypes and challenging assumptions
- The possibility of community flourishing even in restrictive conditions

# Background Information

## **Incarceration in Oregon and the Limits of Prison Programming**

Oregon incarcerates 494 people per 100,000 residents across prisons, jails, immigration detention, and juvenile facilities. In other words, the state locks up a higher percentage of its population than nearly any other democratic nation. The prison where this film takes place, Columbia River Correctional Institution (CRCI), a minimum-security men's facility, does offer several meaningful programs. But those opportunities are limited, and their effectiveness is often shaped—and sometimes constrained—by staffing restrictions, Department of Corrections policies, and inconsistent access to resources.

The CRCI website paints a picture of an uplifting and transformative environment, and while that portrayal is true, it is only one side. What remains largely unseen are the daily challenges: underfunded programs, a shortage of materials, frequent cancellations, and the impact of security interruptions that can derail even the most promising initiatives. The program featured in this film is one of the rare exceptions—an opportunity that has survived inside the facility with relatively few disruptions and has genuinely contributed to learning, growth, and transformation. Still, it represents only a small slice of what could be possible. It is one of the few programs that allows for deep, community-based education—the kind that invites people to reflect, connect, and imagine new futures.

Colleges such as Lewis & Clark and Portland Community College (PCC) have begun expanding educational opportunities, with PCC even launching an annual pre-apprenticeship program in the trades. These developments matter, but they are not enough. Minimum-custody facilities like CRCI house adults in custody for five years or less, a population that could benefit profoundly from timely, robust educational and vocational support. Yet these are precisely the facilities where programming is most limited. If Oregon hopes to reduce recidivism and create meaningful pathways home, facilities like CRCI must offer more—more access, more resources, more chances for people to build skills and community. Programs like the one documented in this film show what’s possible. The challenge now is to ensure they are not the exception but the beginning of real, sustained change.

## **Prisons Designed for Isolation**

The physical architecture and daily routines of prison life are structured to limit contact, reduce autonomy, and discourage meaningful relationships. This environment makes connection difficult, even though connection is essential for healing and rehabilitation. The sad reality is that this disconnect causes more problems than it fixes. There are many people who have lost everyone and everything in prison when it comes to a “community.” This loss of hope is so profound that inmates, or Adults in Custody (AICs), start to accept that their reality is set in stone and that they may as well be the criminal everyone already views them as.

There is a profound social and psychological separation between incarcerated individuals and the world beyond prison walls. Outside students often enter with preconceived notions shaped by media, stigma, and distance. Inside students, in turn, often feel forgotten or dismissed by society. This is not cohesive for true rehabilitation. If ideas of worthlessness and the inability to change one’s behavior are reinforced every day, it is

extremely easy to become jaded and unable to change. People in prison often start to dread visits with family and push others away—not because they don’t enjoy seeing them, but because when visits end, they are reminded of the disconnection they face daily. They may start to disconnect deliberately to avoid the feelings of hopelessness in their daily lives.

Discussions of incarceration are often abstract, focused on numbers, policies, or headlines. This film restores humanity to those living through it by highlighting the lived experiences, emotional realities, and untold stories of incarcerated adults whose voices are rarely heard. It gives hope and community back to those who participated in this program. This allows AICs to feel purpose, the ability to start healing, and the idea that maybe—just maybe—they can change themselves. As documented in the film and through participant testimonies, this is exactly the kind of transformation that occurs when incarcerated individuals connect with their micro-community. Outside students who welcome and encourage inside students build their confidence, accept them for their flaws, and support them on their journey to become better.

## **Education as Transformation**

Learning together offers more than knowledge; it restores dignity. In a place designed to reduce people to numbers, education becomes a lifeline. Inside that classroom, individuals were no longer defined by their circumstances; they were thinkers and creators. The simple act of studying together pushed back against the dehumanizing narratives that so often shadow incarceration. In prison, vulnerability usually comes at a cost. Yet both inside and outside, students chose to speak openly, sharing memories, fears, hopes, and creative ideas. That courage to be seen—to let others in—became a quiet revolution.

It created a foundation for trust, the very thing the prison environment tries to discourage. And when trust finally took root, something powerful followed: people began to reimagine who they were and who they could become. Education offered more than skills or information; it offered a sense of possibility. Friendships formed around shared learning brought a rare feeling of belonging and validation. For many, it was the first time in a long time that someone truly listened, believed in them, or expected something meaningful from them. In that space, students rediscovered parts of themselves they thought were lost.

The process of creating a film and collaborative play together made that transformation even more tangible. It allowed participants to reclaim their voices and shape their own stories. In a system that often silences and erases, turning lived experience into art became an act of healing and empowerment. Their stories were no longer hidden; they were illuminated. Despite the rigid schedules, surveillance, and institutional barriers, the classroom grew into a small, resilient community. It showed that education is not just informative; it's transformative. It has the power to expand humanity in places meant to confine it, proving that even within walls designed to separate, learning can build bridges that change lives.

## Sources:

Oregon Department of Corrections. *"Prison Locations."* Oregon.gov, <https://www.oregon.gov/doc/about/pages/prison-locations.aspx>.

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Prison Policy Initiative. *"Oregon Profile."* Prison Policy Initiative, 2024, <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/profiles/OR.html>.

Staudt, Sarah. "The myth of the 'revolving door:' Challenging misconceptions about recidivism." Prison Policy Initiative, 5 Feb. 2025, <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/trainings/recidivism.html>.

# DISCUSSION PROMPTS

## Starting The Conversation

Immediately after the film, you may want to give people a few quiet moments to reflect on what they have seen. You could pose a general question (examples below) and give people some time to themselves to jot down or think about their answers before opening the discussion. Alternatively, you could ask participants to share their thoughts with a partner before starting a group discussion.

- How did watching this film challenge your views of people who are incarcerated?
- What struck you as the most impactful part of this film?
- Were you surprised by the emotions and vulnerability shown by the incarcerated students? If so, what scene did you connect with the most?

## EXPERIENCES OF DISCONNECTION AND LOSS

- When an inside student said he “can’t even remember the last time he called any friends or family,” what emotions did you experience?
- Can you imagine the thought of it being easier to cut contact than talk to others?
- Have you ever felt a similar disconnection in your own life?

# REFLECTING ON THE CARCERAL SYSTEM

- How did this film challenge your views of the carceral system?
- How do you think these classroom interactions and moments of vulnerability reshape assumptions about incarceration? About education?

# Resources

A list of relevant social movements, non-profits, and organizations.

## Portland Community College Pre-Apprenticeship Trades Skills Program

The Portland Community College pre-apprenticeship trades skills program is a six-month program that allows incarcerated people at Columbia River Correctional Institution (CRCI) to learn trades skills while earning college credit. The course is split into two cohorts: the first three months focus on studying and building skills in math and safety, while the second three months emphasize hands-on learning. During this phase, skills such as wiring and carpentry are taught by union trades workers. Anyone interested in getting involved should reach out to Ms. Sarah Mooney at CRCI.

## Growing Gardens

Growing Gardens is a nonprofit organization that helps facilitate garden programs inside prisons and has recently partnered with CRCI to support a peer-led beekeeping program certified through the Washington State Beekeepers Association. If you or someone you know would like to help support one of the first peer-led programs at CRCI, you may consider donating or contacting Growing Gardens.

## The Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program

The Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program partners with local colleges across multiple states to facilitate classes like the one shown in this film. Without this program, this film—and the impact of these courses—would not have been possible. Those interested in volunteering or supporting the expansion of courses like this one can learn more through the program’s website, linked above.

# Credits & Acknowledgments



## About the Author

Hi everyone, my name is James Andrew Reed. I spent five years incarcerated at Columbia River Correctional Institution, and during that time, the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program became one of the most meaningful parts of my life. I took five semesters of Inside-Out classes, worked as a teaching assistant for other incarcerated students, and showed up every chance I had. Once I got a taste of what real education and real community felt like, I couldn't get enough.

When I think back to the version of myself who walked into that first class with Professor Reiko Hillyer, it feels like a different lifetime. Something shifted in me that day, a kind of hunger woke up. I wanted more: more learning, more connection, more purpose, more life. From that moment on, education became my therapy and my anchor.

I enrolled in every program available, pushed myself to grow, and worked relentlessly to rebuild the parts of my life I had broken.

Today, I have the privilege of continuing that journey as a free person. I get to share my story not because it's perfect, but because it's real. I hope that someone struggling with addiction, incarceration, or deep hopelessness might hear it and believe that change is possible for them too. If anything I went through can bring even one person a little light, then none of it was for nothing.

This program didn't just help me, it transformed me. I am here because people showed up for me when I didn't know how to show up for myself. The students and faculty from Lewis & Clark, the instructors at PCC, the counselors at CRCI, my family who refused to give up on me, and the incredible friends I've met along the way. They all held me up until I learned how to stand again.

I'm living proof that people can change. That healing is real. And that sometimes, all it takes is one open door, one classroom, or one person who believes in you to start rewriting your entire life.

Change is always possible. Always.

## DISCUSSION GUIDE PRODUCERS

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