




# Tre Maison Dasan



## CLASSROOM VIEWING GUIDE



A STORY OF BOYHOOD  
MARKED BY THE CRIMINAL  
JUSTICE SYSTEM

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## USING THIS GUIDE

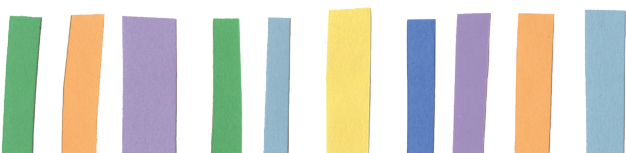
This guide can be used with multiple audiences in an educational setting: educators, students, and the larger school community.

**The guide has been designed and organized to supply facilitators both with suggested guidelines for leading discussions around the film and issues presented, and also critical information on how to best acknowledge, work with, and support children of incarcerated parents in the classroom and community.** Because of the stigma and shame associated with having an incarcerated parent, it is imperative that facilitators be prepared to promote productive healing for students while discussing their experiences.

The Pre-Viewing provides suggested questions for students to reflect on what they know about the issues presented in the film before watching. This pre-viewing reflection is useful to effectively track learning throughout viewing and discussion.

The Viewing section includes guided questions for a close viewing of the film. Some educators may choose to stop the film to discuss some of the questions; others may use one of the sections as a guide for a critical viewing exercise. Others may choose to hold off discussing any of the questions until the film is over. It is our belief that viewers will benefit from being in conversation with others about the film. Depending on the size of the viewing group, a facilitator may choose to begin with written reflection on the questions before engaging in small, or large, group discussions.

The Post-Viewing section of the guide provides post-viewing discussion prompts, as well as suggested in-class and/or take-home activities to continue the students' learning and reflection .



## SYNOPSIS

*Tre Maison Dasan* is an intimate portrait of three boys growing up, each with a parent in prison. Told directly through the child's perspective, the film is an exploration of relationships and separation, masculinity, and coming of age in America when a parent is behind bars.

Tre, Maison and Dasan are three very different boys. Tre is a tough 13 year old who hides his emotions behind a mask of tough talk and hard edges. Maison is a bright eyed 11 year old with an encyclopedic mind and deep love for those around him. Dasan is a sensitive 6 year old with an incredible capacity for empathy and curiosity. Their parents are not incarcerated for the low-level offenses that have become infamous in conversations around mass-incarceration, but their histories and relationships beg many questions about Justice and the lasting and rippling effects of a system at large.

### CONTENT WARNING:

Some strong language. This film may be emotionally triggering for people who have experienced incarceration, parental incarceration/separation or the death of a loved one, or have been the victim of a crime.



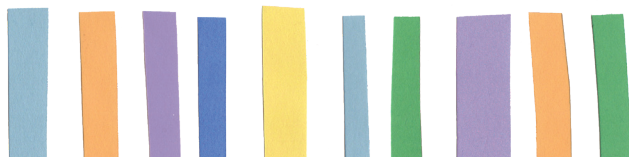
## BACKGROUND

The title, *Tre Maison Dasan*, comes from the names of the three boys at the center of the film:  
Tre (Τρεῖ) Maison (Μεῖ·σλη) Dasan (Δα·σδη).

This is a documentary film, presenting real events and real people. The boys, their families and the prison are all located in Rhode Island. The filmmaker followed Tre, Maison and Dasan for three years of their lives, capturing over 350 hours of footage which was then distilled into the movie you are about to see.

The film portrays an in-person, full contact visiting program, unique to the Rhode Island Department of Corrections. Every Saturday, children can come to the prison in Cranston, RI to visit their parent for up to 4 hours (depending on the security level of the facility), in a designated child-friendly space, without another adult caregiver present. This allows kids and their parent one-on-one time where they can talk, play games, eat lunch, and do activities. This parenting visiting program is separate from regular public visiting hours, which happen during the week at each facility.

Often the first question that arises when talking about an incarcerated individual is, “what did they do?”. In this film, the only way you hear what led Tre, Maison or Dasan’s parent to be incarcerated is if the child asks their parent directly. This is very intentional, as the film is carefully created around the child’s perspective. The specific crime in these cases, and many cases, is not imperative to understanding each child’s relationship with their parent and the effects of their separation.



## THE KIDS



### TRE - 13 YEARS OLD

Tre lives with his mother in an apartment on the west side of Providence, RI. His father, Tyree, is incarcerated at the Men's Medium Security Prison 10 miles from Tre's home. Tre is able to visit every Saturday, though depending on how he is feeling about his relationship with his dad at any given time, he will go less often, sometimes months passing between visits.



### MAISON - 11 YEARS OLD

Maison's family immigrated to the US from England when his dad was a teenager. When Maison was a year old, his father was sentenced to 20 years in prison. Shortly after his father's sentencing, his mother moved to California, leaving Maison in Rhode Island with his paternal grandmother who he calls "Nana". Maison visits his dad every Saturday, as well as a few additional times during the week during public visiting hours with Nana. Maison is on the Autism Spectrum, and his mind is constantly racing with ideas, images and music. He attends 5th grade at a public school in Pawtucket, RI.



### DASAN - 6 YEARS OLD

Dasan lives with his maternal grandparents in East Providence, RI. His mom is in prison on a 2 year sentence. Dasan spends a lot of time with his cousin, Alivia, who also attends the Saturday visits at the Women's Minimum Security Prison. When Dasan's mom went to prison, she was not prepared to tell her then 4-year-old son where she was going, so she told Dasan and Alivia that she was at a "special school for grown-ups". After Stephanie is released, she will spend 6 months on parole and then 17 years on probation.



## THE ISSUE

1 in 14 children in the U.S. have experienced parental incarceration at one point in their lives. These numbers largely and disproportionately affect poor, African American and Latino families: 1 in 9 Black children, 1 in 28 Latino children and 1 in 57 White children have a parent currently behind bars.

Parental incarceration is recognized as an Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE), and yet it is still a largely misunderstood or unknown when it comes to supporting children at home and in the classroom, and comes with a unique combination of trauma, shame and stigma compared with other adverse childhood experiences.

A misperception exists that children of incarcerated parents are more likely to be incarcerated than their peers, and are predisposed to criminal activity. **There is no basis for this in existing research.** Risk factors for children of incarcerated parents may be related to parental substance abuse, mental health, inadequate education opportunities or other challenges. Parental incarceration also increases the risk of children living in poverty or experiencing household instability, and for children whose mothers are incarcerated, there is an increased likelihood that the children will enter foster care.

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For more information on statistics and research regarding children of incarcerated parents and the criminal justice system, see the following resources:

[A Shared Sentence - Annie E. Casey Foundation](#)

[National Resource Center on Children & Families of the Incarcerated](#)

[Youth.Gov - Children of Incarcerated Parents](#)

[Promoting Social and Emotional Well-Being for Children of Incarcerated Parents](#)

[Stronger Together Handbooks](#)



## KEY TERMS

### INCARCERATION

Confinement in a jail or prison; the act of imprisoning a person or the state of being imprisoned.

### JAIL

Short-term facilities that are usually administered by a local law enforcement agency. People in jail usually have a sentence of less than 1 year or are being held pending bail, pending a trial, awaiting sentencing, or awaiting transfer to other facilities after a conviction.

### PRISON

Longer-term facilities owned by a state or by the Federal Government. Prisons typically hold people convicted of a felony and persons with sentences of more than a year. **PRIVATE PRISONS** are facilities run by private prison corporations whose services and beds are contracted out by state or federal governments. **FEDERAL PRISONS** are run by the Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP) and are under the legal authority of the federal government. **STATE PRISONS** are run by state correctional authorities and are under the legal authority of the state government. \*The parents in this film are all incarcerated in a STATE PRISON.

### “TRAINING SCHOOL” - JUVENILE DETENTION CENTER

A place where young people under the age of 18 years are detained while under the supervision of the department of corrections.

### ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCE (ACE)

A traumatic experience in a person’s life occurring before the age of 18 that the person remembers as an adult. The “**incarceration of a household member**” is one of the nine listed Adverse Childhood Experiences.

### PAROLE

A conditional release from prison to serve the remaining portion of a sentence in the community. Failure to comply with the conditions of parole can result in a return to incarceration.

### ANKLE MONITOR (BRACELET)

A GPS homing device that some people under house arrest, probation or parole are required to wear at all times.

### PROBATION

Community supervision through a probation agency, generally in lieu of incarceration. However, some jurisdictions do sentence probationers to a combined short-term incarceration sentence immediately followed by probation, which is referred to as a split sentence. Failure to comply with the conditions of probation can result in incarceration.

### MASS-INCARCERATION

Extreme rates of imprisonment. Despite making up close to 5% of the global population, the U.S. has nearly 25% of the world’s prison population. Since 1970, our incarcerated population has increased by 700% – 2.3 million people in jail and prison today, far outpacing population growth and crime. Mass-incarceration disproportionately affects people of color and low-income communities.





## ON VISITING

Some assume that the removal of a “bad” (“criminal”) parent will improve the situation for a child. On the contrary, parental incarceration more often intensifies and compounds, rather than alleviates, the challenges children face.

Visits with parents (in most cases) can help heal the pain of the loss, and are critical to children’s well-being, however visiting opportunities can be few and far between due to the distant location of prisons and the costs associated with visits. Though specific quantitative research around the larger effects of visiting is limited, there is some evidence that contact visits and other visiting practices that provide opportunities for family interaction can help heal parent-child relationships, mitigate the trauma associated with parental incarceration, and reduce recidivism.

Correctional agencies offer different types of parent-child visits, including video conferencing, in-person visits (with or without contact), and extended family visits:

**Video-conferencing** allows visitors to communicate with loved ones through a web-based application similar to Skype. When used supplementary to in-person visits, video-conferencing has been shown to increase contact between children and their parents. However, 74% of jails that adopted video-conferencing also banned in-person visits, and due to high costs (up to \$13 for a 30 minute call) video-conferencing can actually limit a child’s accessibility to their parent when replacing the in-person options.

**Non-contact visits** place a physical barrier (such as glass), between incarcerated parents and their children.

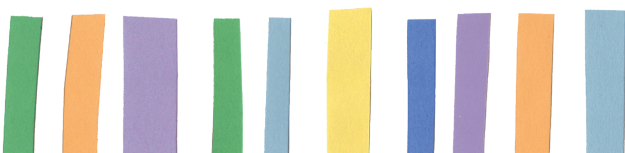
**Contact visits** allow children and parents to physically interact with each other, often in a designated visiting room.

**Extended family visits** allow children and immediate family members longer visits, which may last overnight in facilities designated for this purpose.

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For more information on statistics and research regarding visiting:

[Parent-Child Visiting Practices in Prisons and Jails: A Synthesis of Research and Practice](#)



## SUPPORTING AN EFFECTIVE DISCUSSION: STUDENTS

To openly discuss the film and the issues presented, it is imperative to create a safe classroom environment for all students and to consider the impact of the classroom climate on students' willingness to engage with the film.

Think about the setup of the room. It is often helpful to move chairs into a circle, or to sit on the floor in a circle. This way, everyone can see each other and speak to the whole group. Decide how you would like participants to join in the discussion, i.e. raising hands, going around the circle (allowing people to pass), use a talking stick.

If necessary, you might create a classroom "contract" *with your students* to underscore the importance of respectful conversations. You might want to adapt the following suggestions for your particular setting:

Listen with respect. Try to understand what someone is saying before rushing to judgement.

Make comments using "I" statements

Use non-judgemental language - avoid terms like "criminal" "convict", "felon", "prisoner", and "inmate" to describe someone's parent. Instead use, "incarcerated mom/dad/parent" and "incarcerated/formerly incarcerated person".

Respect privacy - do not share stories that are not your own outside of the classroom.

If you don't feel safe making a comment or asking a question, write the thought down.

If someone states an idea or question that helps your own learning, say "Thank You".

If someone says something that hurts or offends you, don't attack the person. Acknowledge that the comment hurt your feelings and explain why.

Put-downs are never okay.

If you don't understand something, ask a question.

Think with your head and your heart.

Share talking time – provide room for others to speak.

Do not interrupt others while they are speaking.

Write down your thoughts if you don't have time to say them during our time together.

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Consider the following teaching strategies for structured conversations about the film:

[Barometer](#)

[Learn to Listen / Listen to Learn](#)

[Fishbowl](#)

[Save the Last Word for Me](#)

[Iceberg Diagrams](#)

[Town Hall Circle](#)

(Teaching strategies from [Facing History and Ourselves](#))



## SUPPORTING AN EFFECTIVE DISCUSSION: TEACHERS

Because of the stigma and shame involved with the experience of parental incarceration, it is critical that teachers create an environment that is safe and supportive for students who may be vocal about their situation, but also for those who may not have shared with their teachers and peers that they have a parent in prison.

In the film, Maison and his dad have a conversation about children affected on both sides of a crime. There may also be children in your classroom who have been victims of crimes, or whose loved ones have been victims of crimes. It is important to create a space where these children are also supported while acknowledging that other children do not bear responsibility for their parent's actions.

### **NOTIFY STUDENTS AHEAD OF TIME:**

You may consider notifying your students (and even parents/guardians) before the film is shown in class. This notice will give students who may be significantly triggered by the film and the conversations it promotes to either prepare for, or opt out of, discussions.

### **USE HUMANIZING LANGUAGE:**

When speaking about a child's parent, avoid terms like "convict", "felon", "prisoner", and "inmate", or overly institutional language like 'visitation.' Instead use, incarcerated mom/dad/parent, incarcerated person, or simply, "moms", "dads" and "people," and more humanized terms like 'visiting'.

### **RESPECT STUDENTS' PRIVACY:**

Some caregivers choose to not tell children that their parent is incarcerated, instead explaining the absence by saying the parent is sick, away at work or college, or serving time in the military. If a teacher knows that a child has an incarcerated parent, the teacher should be careful not to discuss that information with the child unless confident the child has already been informed.

### **FOLLOW UP:**

If a teacher notices that after the screening, a student is acting out or experiencing strong emotions, the teacher should be sure to check in with that student, and alert the school social worker. One way teachers can let their students know that they are a supportive resource for their students with incarcerated parents is to share the Children of Incarcerated Parents Bill of Rights (found on the next page) with their students, and post it visibly on the classroom wall.

\*During these discussions, it may be helpful to have another teacher or adult in the room. This may also present an opportunity to introduce your school's mental health counselor or social worker, so students know where they may seek support, if they need it.

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See the following guidelines to inform your responsibility as an educator:

[Children of Incarcerated Parents: Tip Sheet for Teachers](#)

[Creating Safer Spaces for Children of Incarcerated Parents](#)

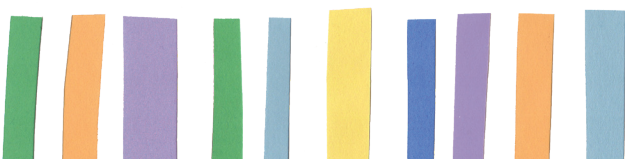
## CHILDREN OF INCARCERATED PARENTS BILL OF RIGHTS

In 2003, the San Francisco Children of Incarcerated Parents Partnership (SFCIPP) developed a “Bill of Rights” for Children of Incarcerated Parents to address concerns, challenges and trauma that children face from the point of the arrest, to the sentencing, to the incarceration of a parent. The full Bill of Rights can be viewed in more detail here: [Children of Incarcerated Parents: A Bill of Rights](#).

\*A printable version of the Bill of Rights for the classroom can be found on the next page.

### I HAVE THE RIGHT...

1. To be kept safe and informed at the time of my parent’s arrest.
2. To be heard when decisions are made about me.
3. To be considered when decisions are made about my parent.
4. To be well cared for in my parent’s absence.
5. To speak with, see, and touch my parent.
6. To support as I face my parent’s incarceration.
7. To not to be judged, blamed, or labeled because my parent is incarcerated.



# Tre Maison Dasan

CHILDREN OF INCARCERATED PARENTS

## A BILL OF RIGHTS\*



1. I have the right **TO BE KEPT SAFE AND INFORMED AT THE TIME OF MY PARENT'S ARREST.**
2. I have the right **TO BE HEARD WHEN DECISIONS ARE MADE ABOUT ME.**
3. I have the right **TO BE CONSIDERED WHEN DECISIONS ARE MADE ABOUT MY PARENT.**
4. I have the right **TO BE WELL CARED FOR IN MY PARENT'S ABSENCE.**
5. I have the right **TO SPEAK WITH, SEE, AND TOUCH MY PARENT.**
6. I have the right **TO SUPPORT AS I FACE MY PARENT'S INCARCERATION.**
7. I have the right **TO NOT TO BE JUDGED, BLAMED, OR LABELED** because my parent is incarcerated.
8. I have the right **TO A LIFELONG RELATIONSHIP WITH MY PARENT.**

## PRE-VIEWING

To most effectively track learning throughout viewing and discussion, it is worthwhile to have students reflect on what they know about the issues presented in the film before watching. Consider the following survey questions for students to answer out loud, or journal about before watching the film:

- What do you think are the experiences of children who are affected by the incarceration of a parent?
- What do you think of parents who are in prison or jail? What do you think of children who have parents in prison or jail?
- Do you think children should have access to their parents while they are incarcerated?
- What do you expect to see in the film we are about to watch?
- Without naming specific names, how many kids do you know who have an incarcerated parent or family member? Does that number seem high or low? Why do you think that is?



## VIEWING

*This section includes guided questions for a close viewing of the film. Some educators may choose to stop the film at certain points to discuss some of the questions; others may use one of the sections as a guide for a critical viewing exercise. Others may choose to hold off discussing any of the questions until the film is over. Depending on the size of the viewing group, a facilitator may choose to begin with written reflection on the questions before engaging in small, or large, group discussions. For suggestions on leading an effective discussion, see [page 10](#) and [page 11](#).*

### PART ONE

At the very beginning of the film, we are introduced to three boys. Describe Tre, Maison and Dasan? How are they different? How are they similar?

In Tre's introduction, he is flipping through pictures in his wallet of people in his family. What is a common theme between these photos? How do you think the losses (deaths) in Tre's life affect his decision making later on?

Dasan was able to visit his mom every week while she was incarcerated for two years. How do you think this access to his mom affected their reunion when she was finally released? How do you think this reunion might have been different if Dasan had not been able to see his mom every week?

Similarly, Maison talks about how often he sees his dad vs. how often he sees his mom. What struck you about this scene? Describe Maison's relationship with his dad. Describe Tre's relationship with his mom. What are some emotions you sense from Tre in the scenes with his mom? What do you think is causing those emotions? How is he presenting those emotions physically?

When Dasan's mom is talking to her Parole Officer, she tells him not to say the J-A-I-L word. When she went to prison, she told Dasan that she was going to a "special school for grownups". He was 4 years old. Parents will often tell their child that they are away at work, in the military or in a university instead of the truth about their incarceration. Why do you think she lied to Dasan about where she was? Do you think it was okay for her to lie or do you think she should have told him the truth from the beginning?

Even though Dasan visited his mom in prison, he still thought she was away at school. How do you think visiting his mom under this impression affected the way Dasan thought about schools?

Watch the scene where Maison and Tre visit their dads. How are their relationships different? What do their relationships with their incarcerated fathers teach you about the boys themselves?



## VIEWING CONTINUED...

Describe the visiting room where Tre and Maison visit their dads. What stands out? What do you see kids doing with their parents? Imagine that Maison and Tre had to visit their dads with thick glass between them, or in a facility that didn't allow them to touch each other. How might their relationships be different? How do you think a different visiting environment might change Maison and Tre?

Imagine that Maison and Tre had to visit their dads with thick glass between them (Fig. 1), or in a facility that didn't allow them to touch each other. How might their relationships be different? How do you think a different visiting environment might change Maison and Tre as people?

In this scene, Maison and his dad have a conversation about why his father is in prison. Describe Maison's body language throughout this scene. How do you think Maison feels about his father and why he is incarcerated? Do you think his dad handled this conversation well? How so, or how not? How did you feel when you found out why Maison's father is in prison? Did it change your perception of him? In what way?

Describe Tre's conversation with his dad in this scene. What does this conversation teach you about Tre? What does it teach you about his relationship with his father?

Describe Maison's relationship with his grandmother, "Nana". How does she help him cope with his anxiety? How does his relationship with Nana compare to Tre's relationship with his mom?

In the montage where the kids are going to sleep, what is different about Tre's scene than the other two boys?

## PART TWO

In the scene where Maison is at school, he describes being diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome (now recognized as Autism Spectrum Disorder). Does this information help you understand anything about Maison? Does it change your perception of him in anyway?

Why do you think Dasan's mom was "nervous" to tell her son the truth about being in prison? Who do you think she was trying to protect by not telling Dasan the truth before?

Describe Dasan's body language in this scene. What does it tell you about how he feels about this conversation?

How does Stephanie use language to tell Dasan where she was? List some ways that she is using language that is child-centered. Do you think this language helped Dasan understand the situation?





## VIEWING CONTINUED...

Dasan keeps asking his mom “what did you do?” Why do you think he wants to know why his mom went to prison? How do you think he feels when he finds out? How did you feel about Stephanie when you found out why she went to prison? Did it change your perception of her? In what way?

When Dasan’s mom is describing why she was angry at the neighbors, she mentions that they had set her car on fire. How do you think Dasan feels knowing that his mom spent two years in prison for starting a fire, but that other people who have done similar things didn’t have to go to prison? Do you think this is fair? Why or why not?

At the end of their conversation, Dasan says he feels sad. Why do you think he feels this particular emotion? How does his mom respond? Do you think it is important for Dasan to be able to talk about and express his emotions?

In this scene, Tre finds some marijuana in his drawer and smokes it. How did this make you feel about Tre? How does his mom respond when she comes home? Did this scene bring up any questions for you?

Describe the way Tre and his mom speak to each other. What does this tell you about their relationship?

During their argument, Tre leaves the house. Why do you think he left the house? Do you think this was a good idea for Tre?

Describe Tre’s emotions when he is in the psychiatric hospital with Joyce and his mom. What does he tell us is causing these emotions?

Does this scene change your perception about Tre and his mom’s relationship? Why or why not?

While Tre is in the hospital, he writes a letter to himself. Describe the letter. How did this letter change your perception of Tre? Did it help you understand anything about him that you may not have before? If so, what?

When Tre is reading a letter to himself he says, “I just gotta get my head together, otherwise I’m going to end up like my dad. He always tells me, you’re going to be dead or in prison... I **know I got disabilities, but that can’t change me for who I am.**” How do you think Maison and Tre define their mental health differently?

Often, Maison references his Autism as a reason he can do certain things, while Tre often references his “disabilities” as a reason he can’t. What do you think causes this difference in how they see themselves and their capabilities? Are you more like Maison or more like Tre in this way? Why?



## VIEWING CONTINUED...

When Maison's mom visits, she spends her last night at her friend's house. Describe Maison's response to this. Do you think he is being honest about his feelings? How or how not?

### PART THREE

Describe the role of family in both Dasan and Maison's lives. How are their families different? How are they similar? How do you think Dasan and Maison's support systems differ from Tre's? How do these support systems affect each of them?

In the "Interview of the Month" describe Maison's relationship with his dad? Describe a moment when you hear Maison expressing himself like a child in this scene. Describe a moment when you hear Maison expressing himself more like an adult in this scene?

Maison tells his dad, "Don't call yourself a Felon". Why do you think he dislikes his dad using that word to describe himself? Do you think words like "Inmate", "Convict", "Felon" or "Prisoner" are dehumanizing? Why or why not? Suggest some alternative ways to refer to Maison's dad.

At the end of this scene, Maison and his dad discuss the challenge of Justice - that crime affect families and communities in devastating ways, but incarceration also affects families and communities in devastating ways. Maison's dad asks, "Do you think everyone involved becomes a victim?" What is your response to this question?

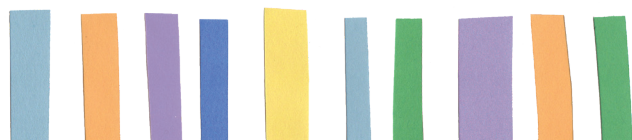
Describe Tre's language and tone of voice in the scene after his apartment is broken in to. How did the way he was speaking make you feel? What emotions do you think are behind the way he is speaking? When you feel these kinds of emotions, how do you express them? How did you learn to express your emotions in that way?

Think back to Tre's first rap at the beginning of the film. How have the lyrics changed from that song to the one playing while he is on the way to visit his dad?

Describe Tre's body language when his dad is talking to him in this scene. What do you think this body language is expressing? Do you think he is listening to his father? Why or why not?

During this conversation, Tre's dad begins to cry. How did this make you feel about Tre's dad? Do you think it is easy for men to express their emotions in this way? Why or why not?

Describe the difference between Tre's emotional response with his mom in the scene before and in this scene with his father. Why do you think Tre expresses himself differently with his father than with his mother?



## VIEWING CONTINUED...

When Tre says he thinks he is a good person on the inside, but maybe not on the outside, what do you think he means by this? Can you relate to this? How? What do you think Tre needs to be able to see himself as a good person on the outside *as well as* on this inside?

Describe the scene when Dasan goes camping with the Cubscouts Troop. How did this scene make you feel about Dasan? How did it make you feel about the other boys?

Describe the body language of the three boys in the fight. Who, in your eyes, was being the most aggressive? How so?

A common response when a person gets hurt in a situation like this is, "Boys will be boys". Do you agree with this response? Why or why not? Do you think the camp counselor handled this situation well? If not, what could he have done differently?

Describe Dasan's mom's response to the fight. Do you think a father would have handled the situation any differently? How so?

Dasan was one of only two children of color in his boyscouts troop, and his mom was the only parent of color, and the only mother on the trip. Do you think it affects children like Dasan to be the only child of color in a group like this? Have you ever experienced being the only person of your race or gender in a group of people? Did it affect you? How so? Do you think diversity is important in education? Why or why not? How do you make others feel welcome in your classroom or friends groups?

Describe your emotions during the scene when Tre's mom passed away.

After his mom's death, Tre was placed in foster care and lived in group homes. During this time, he joined a gang that was notorious for acts of violence in certain areas of Providence. Knowing what Tre has gone through, what do you think makes kids susceptible to gang involvement? What types of vulnerabilities do you think gang leaders might take advantage of in recruiting young people?

Tre is no longer part of the gang, and is now living with a foster family, going to school and applying for jobs. What do you hope for Tre? If you could write a letter to him, what would you say?



## POST-VIEWING REFLECTION

*After the film, some students may be feeling strong emotions. It may be a good idea to take a short period of time to have students reflect and journal about what they experienced watching the film. If any student needs to take some time to process their emotions, consider having a private space available for quiet personal reflection.*

*Consider the following post-screening questions to prompt preliminary personal reflections:*

- List the emotions you felt while watching the film. Circle the ones you felt the strongest.
- What questions do you have after watching the film?
- Reflecting on the questions you answered before watching the film, what did the film show you that you didn't know before? What surprised you? Would you go back and change any of your answers to the Pre-Viewing questions, now that you've seen the film?
- Do you connect personally to one of the characters more than the others? Which one, and how? If not, why do you think that is?



## POST-VIEWING DISCUSSION

Use one or more of the following prompts to have a group discussion about the film. To get the conversation started, have students share some reflections from their post-screening journaling (you may want to go around the circle and have everyone participate).

Trust is an important part of relationships, particularly between children and their parents or guardians. Identify moments in the film where you saw the kids trusting, and moments where you felt they weren't trusting the adults in their lives. How was trust displayed, or not displayed in these scenes? Discuss the difference between Maison and Tre's relationship with their fathers. Does one trust their parent more than the other? How can you tell? Discuss the scene where Dasan's mom tells him the truth about being in prison. How did you see the truth affecting Dasan in this scene? How do you think telling the truth will affect their relationship going forward? Do you think Dasan trusts his mom?

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Review the Children of Incarcerated Parents Bill of Rights ([page 12](#)). Reviewing each Right, identify and discuss examples from the film when one of the children did or could have used their rights as Children of Incarcerated Parents. *For example: At the beginning of the film, Maison says "Me, my Nana, my dad and my mom are going to have to have a big discussion sometime in May about where I'm going to live". This is an example of Maison being involved in a conversation where decisions are being made about him (Right #2). It is important for Maison to have a voice in this conversation because leaving Rhode Island would mean he wouldn't be able to see his dad.*

It could be useful to compare and contrast this bill of rights with the [Declaration of Independence](#) and/or the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#). Have students consider why it was necessary to enumerate these rights.

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Compare and contrast how each of the boys see themselves. How does having an incarcerated parent affect them similarly? How does the experience affect them differently? What are the other factors in their lives that contribute to the way they feel about themselves and others? Do you relate to one of the boys more than the others? How so?

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Consider revisiting the questions asked in the previewing section. How has the film impacted the way you think about the impact of incarceration on children and families? How has it impacted the way you think about parents who are incarcerated?

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What could your school learn from the three boys in the film? How does your school support children of incarcerated parents? How can your school do better to support children of incarcerated parents? How will this support impact those students who have experienced parental incarceration?



## ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITY: INTERVIEW WITH AN ADULT YOU CARE ABOUT

When asked what his favorite memory with his dad was, Maison once reflected, “that time we interviewed each other... because not a lot of kids get the opportunity to talk to their parents like that and I learned a lot about him”.

### GOAL:

Practice listening and asking questions of adults. Building relationships with family members, guardians or mentors.

### ASSIGNMENT:

Interview someone in your family or an adult that you are close to (in person or over the phone/facetime if they are far away). Choose someone you wish you knew better and write 5-10 questions you want to ask them. If you can, record the conversation either with audio or video. Here are some example questions you could ask:

- What was it like growing up when you were my age?
- How has the world changed since you were my age?
- What is something you are most proud of in your life?
- Tell me about a time you made a mistake. What happened?
- Who is someone who has supported you in your life? How have you felt supported by that person?
- What is something that made you very happy in your life? What is something that made you very sad?
- Is there anything you want to ask me?

After the interview, write some reflections to the following questions:

Which questions were you the most comfortable asking and why? Which questions were you the least comfortable asking and why? What surprised you about this conversation? What did you learn about this person that you didn't know before? Do you see this person differently in any way now that you know more about them? What's something you didn't ask, that you wish you had? If you had this conversation in person, how do you think this experience would have been different if you had been talking to the person over the phone or on a video conference? If you had this conversation on the phone, or in a video conference, how would the experience have been different had you been in person?



## ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITY: LETTER WRITING

### GOAL:

To have students reflect on relationships between themselves and those around them, on ideas of responsibility, and on their place and position to support themselves and others in their community.

### ASSIGNMENT:

When Tre is in the psychiatric hospital, he writes a letter to himself. In the letter, he talks about things that have caused him pain, but also about the responsibility that he has to take for his own actions. Write a letter to one of the following people:

#### TRE

Write a letter to Tre, in which you acknowledge the pain he has experienced in his life, and give him some advice on how to overcome that pain in order to meet his goals. What kind of support can you offer Tre? What kind of support should he look for in others?

#### SOMEONE CLOSE TO YOU

Write a letter to someone who has either helped you or hurt you. If that person has helped you, tell them the impact they had on your life through the help they provided. How did their actions make you feel in the moment? How have you paid that help forward to others? If the person has hurt you, without attacking them, explain the pain that you felt because of the hurt they caused. Tell the person how this pain has affected you. Why do you think this person acted the way they did? Do you forgive them? If not, what do you need from them in order to feel forgiveness? If so, how do you hope your relationship will move forward?

#### YOURSELF

Write a letter to yourself in which you identify a mistake you've made, and a goal you want to achieve.

What caused you to make the mistake? What emotions were at play during your decision making process that led to this mistake?

How can you support yourself to meet the goal you have set for yourself? What kind of support do you need from others, and how will you go about finding that support?

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### ALTERNATIVE PROJECT FOR STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS OR DIFFERENCES:

Using colored pencils, make a drawing from the perspective of Tre - how might he express himself creatively?

Write a poem or Lyrics that communicate how you have empathy for Tre's situation.



## DEBATE: A WORLD WITHOUT PRISONS?

### GOAL:

To have students reflect on the meaning of “justice” and the realities of mass-incarceration in America. To think creatively about strategic solutions to the complex problems presented by the criminal justice system in the U.S.

### SUGGESTED TEACHING STRATEGIES:

[Barometer](#)

[Town Hall Circle](#)

### SUGGESTED ACCOMPANIED READING / RESOURCES:

[“Mass Incarceration: The Whole Pie 2019”](#) - Prison Policy Initiative

[“Are Prisons Obsolete?”](#) by Angela Davis, 2003

[“The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness”](#) by Michelle Alexander, 2010

### ASSIGNMENT:

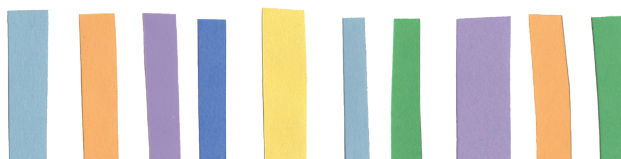
Do you think Prisons are an effective form of justice? Choose one side of the debate to explore and argue for or against prisons as a form of punishment. Consider the following points:

If you are arguing for prisons:

- What does “Justice” mean to you? How do prisons contribute to Justice?
- There are proven disparities in the demographics of people who spend time in prison, and for how long. How do prisons address these disparities in positive or negative ways?
- What is the role of rehabilitation in prisons and justice?
- If prisons are an effective form of punishment, is there anything about the system as it exists that need improvement? Suggest some creative ways we might address these issues.
- Research prison systems in other countries - particularly Sweden and Germany. Compare and contrast to the system in America.
- Consider the economic cost of Prisons in America (See: [Prison Spending in 2015](#), Vera Institute of Justice).

If you are arguing against prisons:

- If we didn't have prisons, some people would still commit crimes, need mental health support, or drug abuse counseling. Create an alternative vision to prison that addresses these issues.
- Consider all the factors that contribute to a person's incarceration and the decisions they make: socio-economic status, race, age, disabilities. How does your alternative to prison address these factors?
- Research prison systems in other countries - particularly Sweden and Germany. Compare and contrast to the system in America.
- Don't be afraid to address difficult moral/ethical problems in your argument.





## RESEARCH PROJECT: KNOW YOUR LOCAL DOC

### GOAL:

By researching both statistics and visiting practices, students can understand how incarceration is affecting their local communities.

### SUGGESTED RESOURCES:

[“Mass Incarceration: The Whole Pie 2019”](#) - Prison Policy Initiative

[Federal Bureau of Prisons](#)

[Lists of United States State Prisons](#) - Wikipedia

[Map Prisons in the United States](#) - R and Census

### ASSIGNMENT:

Do a research assignment into your local jails and prisons. Use the following questions to inform your report:

- How many Jails, State Prisons, and Federal Prisons are in your state?
- How many people are currently incarcerated in these facilities? Compare this number to the population of your city or state. What percentage of the population is incarcerated?
- Where is the closest prison to you? What are their visiting guidelines for families? If you cannot find visiting guidelines for the facility, do you think this might be a problem for families?
- Are there any local organizations that work specifically with children of incarcerated parents in your area?
- From your research, what do you think the criminal justice system is doing right in your area? Where do they need to improve?
- Identify one specific problem you found in your research and come up with a creative solution to this problem.



## ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITY: COLLATERAL EFFECTS

### GOAL:

To have students reflect on their larger community and how one person's decisions reverberate out to effect many others.

### ASSIGNMENT:

Imagine that you, or someone close to you, was incarcerated. Make a flow-chart with that person at the center and radiating out from them, all the people who would be affected by their incarceration. Under each person, write how you think this situation would affect their emotions, work, finances and relationships with others. Radiating out from each of the people directly affected, identify the people who would be directly affected by those people's emotions and/or physical situation.

- How many people did you end up with on your flow chart?

- If the person at the center of your chart was incarcerated, how would it overall affect your community?

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### SUGGESTION:

Get creative with your flow chart! Use colors to distinguish immediate family from friends or acquaintances. Add photographs, or use collage to make your chart more personal.



FIG. 1



*Some prisons require visitors to talk to their loved ones by telephone, through a thick, glass barrier.*

