

**Prison Voices
Work Book**

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Introduction to the workbook

The purpose of this workbook is to give readers specific suggestions and ideas for expanding their interaction with the writing in *Prison Voices*. Exercises and activities range in difficulty in order to encourage readers at every level to interact with the texts and images, with a focus on meaning as well as on skills development.

Just as the teachers' guide suggests general ways in which to expand thinking about the writing and photos in *Prison Voices*, this workbook offers very specific ideas designed to encourage readers to dig deeper and to bring their own experiences to the themes and content contained within the writing.

Although we hope learners will not use the workbook in isolation, and will have others with whom they read and discuss the texts, many of the activities suggested here can be undertaken individually. Some readers may be in classes or drop-in centers where teachers are also using suggestions from the Teacher's Guide. In either case, every effort has been made to write directions as clearly as possible for this workbook, for those who are using it by themselves.

Begin by reading *Prison Voices* and find the stories that appeal to you. You might choose to read the book from cover to cover, you might be drawn to writing through the photographs, and/or you might be drawn to a particular title or author. The activities are designed to help readers strengthen their understanding of the texts as well as to encourage reflection on the writing – through continued discussion, writing or reading. Many of the exercises include a focus on a particular aspect of language or literacy, but the main concern is on meaning – on helping readers connect their experience to that of the writers and to spur them on to generating their own texts.

Many of the pieces in *Prison Voices* lend themselves well to being read aloud. Some people enjoy reading aloud, while others may feel self-conscious about doing so. If you're studying with a group, you may ask a volunteer to read aloud, invite round robin reading (where each person takes a turn reading a sentence or paragraph) or you may read the piece aloud yourself. Many of us enjoy being read to – and many times we can 'hear' something in a piece of writing that we might not catch if we're only reading it silently.

Some of the pages in the workbook include lines for you to write in your thoughts and ideas. Other pages contain questions that you can answer in a notebook or on a separate piece of paper. The workbook begins with some general questions and writing suggestions about *Prison Voices* and then moves to separate sections about each writer's work.

The expansion exercises and activities suggested here touch upon possibilities that might appeal to adult readers. It is very likely, however, that educators working with this material will bring additional ideas to this work and thereby deepen its range so that readers of *Prison Voices* may well become writers to responding to other writers.

If you've already begun reading the book, take a few minutes to jot down ideas or images that are interesting to you. Why do those ideas stand out? What makes you decide you want to read one chapter first?

Kinds of writing

Prison Voices contains poetry, narratives (personal stories), and fiction (stories from the imagination). It contains interviews with the authors of each chapter, and also makes use of photos.

Are there *genres*, or *different kinds of writing* that you particular like? Some people like to read novels or fiction, for example, because they enjoy imagining different ways of living, or reading about other kinds of relationships, or families or people or places that appear in those stories.

Other people like non-fiction (narratives and biographies – stories of real people's lives, news articles, travel books and different kinds of magazines), because they like learning about other parts of the world, or learning about current events, or sports, or cooking or other things.

Poems offer different ways to express ideas without always saying things directly. Songs, too, express ideas and feelings in different ways.

As you read through the writing in *Prison Voices*, think about how the writers choose to tell their stories – some use poetry, some use narrative. The interviews also give readers more information about each of the writers and their lives.

Think about your own life – something that's important, something about the place you grew up, something about people you know and care about, or something about an ordinary day in your life. Start writing – you can make a list of people you like, and why you like them. Describe what you did this morning. Write about something you like to do, or something you don't like to do. Just start writing. What do you want to say about yourself right now?

More ideas for writing

Describe the writer

Find a photo of one of the writers. Describe the person you see. If you haven't yet read about this writer, imagine what he or she might be thinking about. What do you think the person might like to do, is interested in?

You can also write a caption – a label, or description of the photo.

Make a list of adjectives that describe the writer. (for example, he looks *tired*, she seems *kind*, he has *brown eyes*, she has *long hair*)

What's in a name?

Look through the table of contents. Choose a title – don't read the piece but think of all the things that the title suggests to you. (If you've read everything, find a title that grabs your attention).

Talk to someone about the title, about what it could mean.

Write your own short story, narrative or poem using the title as your inspiration.

Do some freewriting - explore what the writing could be. Freewriting is just what it sounds like – you write for 5 or 10 minutes (or longer, as you get the feel for it). You don't lift your pen from the paper. If you feel stuck, write, "I feel stuck." The idea is to just let your ideas flow – without worrying about spelling, or grammar – it's a way to get yourself started. You might throw out much of what you write – or you might go back and re-work it, or just use pieces of it.

It's a good technique for getting started, especially if you're not yet sure what you want to say.

Write to an author

Although most of the authors of *Prison Voices* are no longer in prison, you might want to write a letter to one of them (even if you can't send it). Tell the writer what you learned from his or her writing, or ask questions about the writing. Do you share any experiences? What do you want to say to the author? What do you want to know about him or her that you didn't learn from reading the writing or the interview? other ideas?

Brief biographies

Next to the photo of each writer, is a brief biography – facts about the author, including age, crime, sentence and place of incarceration. After you've read about the person in the photo, make a new biography about him or her. List other facts about the person.

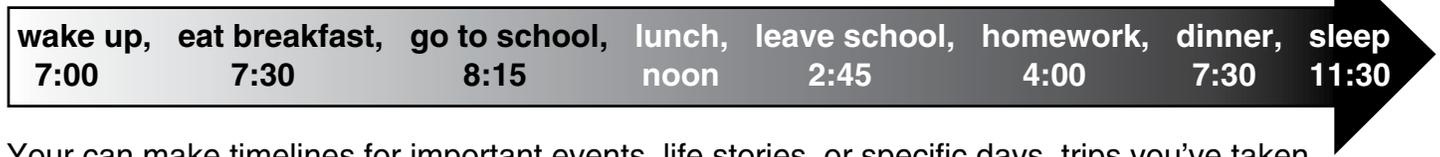
Think about your own brief biography. What things about your life you would include? Start with a list of important things and see if any of them inspire you to write more.

Think about other places where you see brief bios (baseball cards, and magazines, for example) – how would you write your own brief biography for an entertainment magazine? A sports card? A personal ad? As part of a cover letter for a job application?

Playing with language – Throughout the workbook, you'll find suggestions for different kinds of writing. You might think about working with some of the poems, especially, as a way of thinking about writing your own poetry. Read the poems aloud. Listen to the rhythm. Think about the meaning of the words. Try substituting some of your own ideas or words – to change a poem and make it tell your story. Or play with songs you know – change to words to your words and try telling a story in song.

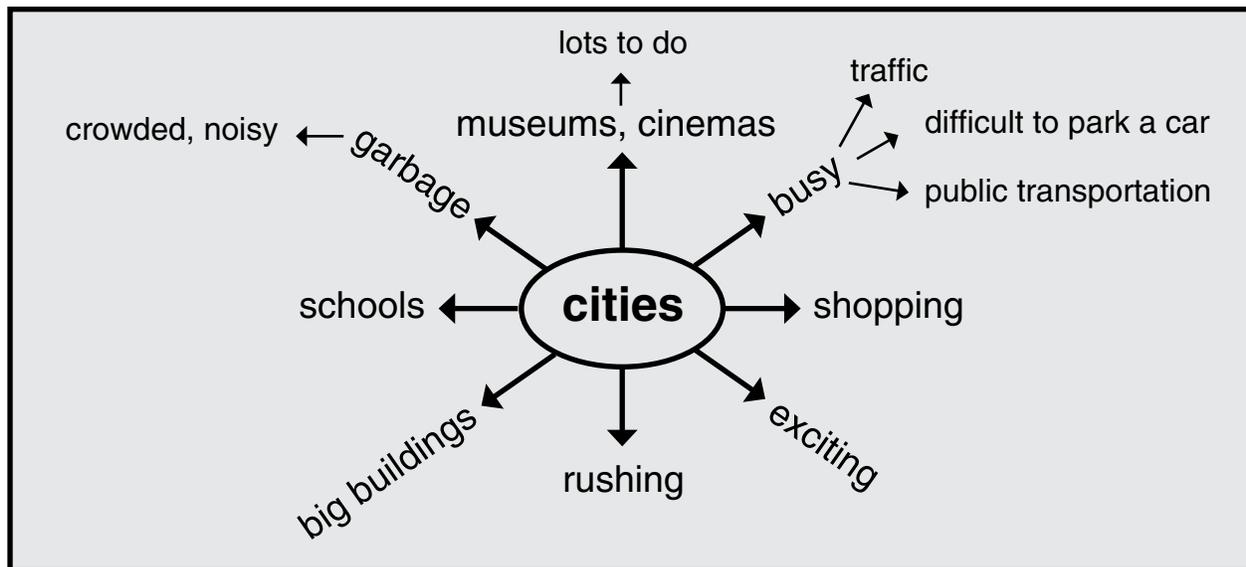
Making lists – another way to get started with writing is to just make lists of words and ideas. You might never use these lists – or you might go back to them to develop a thought in your journal, in a letter to a friend, in a short story, poem or narrative. Listen to language all around you. What are people saying? What are you saying? Stories and ideas are everywhere.

Time lines – sometimes a making a time line can help you organize your ideas, or list events in chronological order (what came first, what came second, then third, fourth, etc.). For example, if you wanted to make note of your daily routine, you might make the time line like this:



You can make timelines for important events, life stories, or specific days, trips you've taken – anything. Making a time line can help you remember what you've done, and/or give you a way of putting down ideas that you might later use for other writing.

Word maps – sometimes people use single words to help them organize ideas. For example, if you want to write about cities, you might put the word cities in the middle of the page, and then draw lines from that word to other words or ideas connected to cities.



The word map is another way of brainstorming – just getting words down on paper, to capture ideas. You can use it to get your ideas in one place, especially if you're not sure what the focus of your writing might be, and/or if you just want to get as many ideas down as quickly as possible. (Freewriting is also a different way of getting ideas down quickly – this is more of a sketch of ideas).

Rebecca Reid *BROKEN WINGS*

Look at the photos in this chapter and write three things that might be true about Rebecca Reid.

Write three things you know about Rebecca Reid from her writing.

In *Broken Wings*, Rebecca Reid asks, “Where did my dreams go?” How do you think she was feeling when she wrote this poem? Do you think her dreams have changed? What would you say to her about the changes in her life – and in her dreams? What would you say about your own dreams?

Thinking about advice

In her narrative, Rebecca offers advice to people diagnosed with HIV. This advice is probably also useful to people experiencing difficult times in their lives.

If you are reading this and you are suffering inside because you have recently been diagnosed with HIV, this is my message to you: You need to deal with your emotions. Sometimes it will feel like they are hitting you all at once, but every pain heals in time. Don't numb your feelings with drugs, or isolate yourself, or shut yourself down. Reach out to someone you can confide in; let yourself go through every step of the grieving process. In the end, you will have a better handle on your thoughts and yourself.

Do you agree with Rebecca's suggestions? What advice has been helpful to you when you've had a hard time? What advice have you given to other people?

Is there advice that isn't helpful?

Ways of giving advice – which are more helpful than others? Why?

I think you should...

If I were you, I would...

You might want to...

Why not try to ...?

What would help you ..?

You really shouldn't ...

Have you thought about..?

Could I suggest that you ...?

You really must ...

You know what really helped my friend with the same problem ...?



James Wrigley *ME, MYSELF, AND THE OTHER GUY*

Look at the photos in this chapter and write three things that might be true about James Wrigley.

Write three things you know about James Wrigley from his writing.

In his narrative, James Wrigley writes,

“Now I am a man who somehow wishes he could demand your forgiveness. But the truth is I should only get attention enough to stop it from happening to another, an example, if you will, of what not to do.”

What do you think? Is it possible to learn from another person’s mistakes? Have there been people or events in your own life that helped you in some way to avoid a mistake? Are there people that you might be able to set an example for yourself?



In his interview, James talks about writing, deleting and rewriting over a period of several months. Computers are great for helping writers make changes quickly – but sometimes it can be interesting to leave a “bad” piece of writing and start over – to keep a record of rough drafts and ideas over time. Sometimes, it’s just satisfying to delete something altogether and start fresh.

How do you like to write? Do you keep a journal? If you do, what motivates you to write regularly?

If you don’t, what would encourage you to start writing one? Think about starting small – recording ordinary events (meals, conversations with people, the weather, even) and then try to write a little bit more every day. For many people, writing helps make ideas clear, or gives us a chance to “say” something to somebody – without necessarily actually speaking to them.

Do you think that writing about his crime was helpful to James Wrigley?

Myles Bolton *PRISON AIN'T MUCH OF A PLACE*

Look at the photos in this chapter and write three things that might be true about Myles Bolton.

Write three things you know about Myles Bolton from his writing.

Myles Bolton talks about respect in his writing and in his interview. What does respect mean to you? Who are people that you respect? Why?

Prison Ain't Much of a Place

Prison is a place: where the first prisoner you see looks like an All-Canadian College boy, and you're surprised.

Later you're disgusted because people on the outside still have the same prejudices that you used to have.

Prison is a place: where you write letters but can't think of anything to say. Gradually you write fewer and fewer letters then finally stop altogether.

Prison is a place: where the flame in every man burns low. For some it flickers weakly, flashing brightly every once in a while but just never seems to burn as it once did before.

Prison is a place: where you hate through clenched teeth, where you want to beat, kick and punch. Then wonder if the psychologists know what they're talking about when they say you hate yourself.

Prison is a place: where you learn that not one person on this miserable planet needs You.

Prison is a place: where one can go for years at a time without the touch of a human hand; it may even be several months without hearing a kind word laced with love or affection.

It's a place where all your friendships are shallow and you know it.

Prison is a place: where you hear about a friend's divorce and can't recall if you even knew he was married.

Prison is a place: where you wait on a promised visit; when it doesn't come you worry endlessly about an accident. Then when you find out the real reason why they never came, you're glad it wasn't serious. But you're bitter 'cause such a small thing kept them from coming to see you.

Prison is a place: where you see men that you respect, then you start to wonder if you like them or not.

It's a place where one strives to remain civilized, but as you lose your footing you do nothing but watch.

Prison is a place: where if you're married, you watch your marriage die.

It's a place where you learn that absence does not make the heart grow fonder but blacker. And you stop blaming your woman for wanting a real live man, instead of just a fading memory of one.

I know that prison is a place where you go to bed before you're tired, then pull the blankets over your head even when you're not cold.

Myles Bolton talks about what a prisoner “is supposed” to look like.

How do you feel about his description of a prisoner? What words would you use to describe what a prisoner is supposed to look like – would you use some of those same words? Would you use different ones?

Make a list of all the words that you would use to describe a prisoner.

If you can, ask other people to make lists of words that they would use to describe a prisoner.

How are the lists similar or different?

<hr/>	<hr/>



You might want to use words from your list, or from Myles Bolton's poem, or from other people's lists, to make your own poem about prison, or to create a short story or essay describing what prison is – and maybe, what it isn't.

Think about: **who describes** what prison is. How is an inmate's description different from or similar to a description written by a guard? by a visiting relative? by someone on a jury?

Myles Bolton uses repetition of the words "prison is a place" to create rhythm in his poem, and also as a device that allows him to make a list of ideas about prison into a thoughtful piece of writing. His perspective, or point of view, reflects his feelings while he is inside.

From your own perspective, complete the sentence, "Prison is a place ..."

Think about the point of view of a friend or family member who visits, someone you know who hasn't been inside a prison, or another person in prison. How would they complete the sentence?

Taking it further: what would you want to tell someone who doesn't know anything about prison? What do you think people outside the prison system should know about it? Write *Prison is a Place* for teenagers, tax payers, children, teachers, or for another group you think should know more about prisons.

Resources

Are there posters or flyers around the learning center where you study that advertise classes? Do prisons have pamphlets that describe programs? Are these advertising tools? You could write a handbook, possibly contrasting the stated rules (the rules the prison has written down) with those which are unwritten (the things you 'just know').

WOMEN OF THE HEALING LODGE

Are you familiar with the Healing Lodges?

The Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) says this about the Okimaw Ohci Healing Lodge (CSC website, http://www.csc-scc.gc.ca/text/facilit/institutprofiles/okima_e.shtml):

The Healing Lodge is premised on principles which promote: a safe place for Aboriginal women offenders; a caring attitude towards self, family and community; a belief in individual plans for women that they themselves have developed; an understanding of the transitory aspects of Aboriginal life; an appreciation of the healing role of children who are closer to the spirit world; pride in surviving difficult backgrounds and personal experiences.

The security policies and procedures are premised on the principles that women offenders, while generally having high needs, are not necessarily high-risk offenders. Where women do present risks, the danger tends to be to themselves through self injurious behaviour. The creation of an environment that affords residents and staff a high level of safety, security and comfort is imperative and has been accomplished through dynamic security and supportive staff and community intervention.

The Healing Lodge accommodates Aboriginal women for all or part of their sentence, therefore women may be admitted directly upon sentencing, revocation, or transfers from other facilities.

The Aboriginal Initiatives Branch also provides this information about Aboriginal healing lodges (http://www.csc-scc.gc.ca/text/prgrm/correctional/abissues/know/6_e.shtml):

CSC is working towards meeting some of the Aboriginal-specific accommodation needs of Aboriginal federal offenders, through the establishment of healing lodges. CSC currently operates or funds Aboriginal communities for 9 healing lodges across Canada. They are developed and operated in partnership with Aboriginal communities. The majority of staff members, including the Directors, are of Aboriginal descent. Preliminary research demonstrates that they are providing appropriate safe reintegration results.

What do you think about the idea of the Healing Lodge?

What do you think are the most important ideas about the Healing Lodge?

List ways in which the Healing Lodges can be helpful to the women who stay there.

In what ways are the Healing Lodges similar to other prisons in Canada? How are they different?

Are there ideas you see in the description of the Healing Lodges that might be useful in other prisons? Are there ways that other prisons could use these ideas to help inmates?

One important element in the Healing Lodge idea is respect for Aboriginal tradition. Do other prisons also have ways of helping inmates draw from other sources of spiritual learning and healing?



Look at the photos in this chapter and write three things that might be true about Lori-Anne Cope.

Write three things you know about Lori-Anne Cope from her writing.

In her narrative, and in her letter to cocaine, Lorri-Anne Cope expresses her thoughts about her addiction generally, and about the ways that cocaine affected her life specifically.

What had she liked about cocaine? What changes did she make in her life – during her days of using and after she had come to prison?

Is there a thing or a person in your life that you've left behind – or tried to leave behind – because of its negative impact on your life? Do you know someone who has been harmed by an addiction or by another person?

Write your own letter to the person or thing that caused you (or someone you know) harm. Think of the ways that a negative thing (like drugs or a bad relationship, for example) might seem attractive, the ways that that negative thing changes lives, and the ways to try to leave that negative thing behind.

If you're stuck, maybe start by thinking about Lorri-Anne's letter. What points did she make about what she'd liked about cocaine? How had it hurt her? How did it change her life? How did she find a way to "say good-bye?"

Look at the photos in this chapter and write three things that might be true about Michelle Belcourt.

Write three things you know about Michelle Belcourt from her writing.

Michelle Bellecourt's "Healing Journey" describes contrasts in her life. Throughout the poem she speaks of the changes she experiences. She writes:

Looking back in the past when I was a child, Realizing I was what you call a little wild

No longer caring what people think, The walls around me started to shrink.

Knowing that I couldn't do this alone, My attitude has taken a different tone.

What do you think helped Michelle make these changes? Think about her life **before** coming to the Healing Lodge and **after**. (For example, **Before** the Healing Lodge, Michelle _____; **after** coming to the Healing Lodge, she _____). List as many before and after contrasts as you can.

Are there things that have changed in your life? List those. Do you have your own healing journey? You might think about it as a time line as a way to get your ideas down before writing about your journey – or about another time of changes in your life.

Look at the photos in this chapter and write three things that might be true about Maxine Friesen.

Write three things you know about Maxine Friesen from her writing.

Maxine Friesen writes about her learning from the Horse Program, and the many things she learned from Elders.

It seems that Maxine (and many of the writers in *Prison Voices*) was able to think about her life in different ways during her time at the Healing Lodge, and was ready to learn from her experiences there. Many writers talk about how prison helped them. Maxine lists some very specific events and people who helped her along the way.

What do you think are the most important things she learned? Why?

Sometimes people just aren't ready yet to learn, or to make changes in their lives. What makes learning easier for you? What makes it more difficult?

To get started, think about all the different kinds of things you've learned – from small things (like learning to tie a shoelace or ride a bike) to bigger and more difficult challenges. What made you decide to learn something? Were you forced to learn it? Did you choose to learn it? How or what helped you? How?

Have you been able to teach someone something? Write about that experience – what did you teach? Who were you teaching? How did you feel about it?



Jermaine Oshane Wilson *LOVE AND STEEL*

Look at the photos in this chapter and write three things that might be true about Jermaine Oshane Wilson.

Write three things you know about Jermaine Oshane Wilson from his writing.

Jermaine writes about missing Jamaica. Make a list of things or people you miss. Make a list of things or people you don't miss. Try writing your own poem, maybe following his model, or create your own poem or narrative.



One of Many

Who I am; a lonely voice surrounded by steel bars and stone walls.

I'm not special because of the deeds I've done or the status I might hold among my peers. There are hundreds of men and women who have had harder times, spent more years, seen and done things I've only dreamed of. It's true I've been incarcerated since I was twelve, in and out of prisons and institutions thereafter until now.

Sitting down looking at my iron toilet and sink, the precious metal bins that hold the few garments and articles I hold dear, pictures and cards are a reminder of a life lost, left behind. Phantoms, ghosts of yesterday that seem to possess their own life. A time lost to me.

I have long since become accustomed to the thud and clang of iron doors opening and closing. The hum of electricity and the power it contains. I don't even notice the red night lights that glow every hour the cops do their walks. I look out my window and listen to the hum of the electrical fences and the few hundred rounds of ammunition let off by semi-automatic machine guns every day. The bars in my window divide the sky into a grid, while the gun towers and barbed fences silhouette the blue sky. I listen to the birds and watch them soar the skies, riding the wind, twisting and twirling above the structure that holds me captive.

This is who I am, a fragment of a person I once was. Beaten, lost in an alien system that separates me from the things I hold dear. Yet there is a light in all my darkness, a stranger who has healed me. Having someone who cares and loves you more than you love yourself is a struggle, yet I'm willing to face today stronger. My wife, Empress, inspires me to write masterpieces -- this coming from a man who has no high school credits -- yet I manipulate words that swirl into your subconscious like a lost art. This poem is dedicated to my wife, and my daughter Empress, "Em'N'Em." It's about trying to live inside and out of the stone walls and steel bars. It's called "Intoxicated."

Jermaine Oshane Wilson writes about himself and describes his feelings in *One of Many*. Using the words that he used to begin each paragraph, write about yourself:

Who I am

Sitting down

I have long since

This is who I am

How do you think people see you?

Do you think people outside of prisons make generalizations about people inside?

Mario Auger *UN ENFANT DE 7 ANS (A CHILD OF 7 YEARS)*

Look at the photos in this chapter and write three things that might be true about Mario Auger.

Write three things you know about Mario Auger from his writing.

Telling stories

Mario Auger writes many stories for his children. His story about lies teaches an old lesson about telling the truth – maybe it's a variation on the story about the boy who cried wolf. Mario, however, makes the story his own, by changing details and having animals as the main characters of his story, instead of people.

Do you have a favorite story – one that you've heard many times, one that might be a story you thought of yourself, or one that you might have read and remembered? Try to write the story in your own words – for a specific friend, or a child you know or for someone you might be writing to. If you feel stuck, think of an old story - maybe from the Bible, or a fable or fairy tale you're familiar with. Change the details, if you like – or invent a whole new story. Think about the **audience** (the person or people you're writing the story for) as you write. How is a story for a young child different from a story you might tell to a teenager? To someone much older than you? What would happen if you told the same story in different ways?

Mario Auger compares his early years at school with his return to school in prison. Do you think that adults have more motivation than children to learn?

How is school different for children and adults? Make two lists:

Children

Adults

Children	Adults

Write about the differences, using **comparative adjectives** (for example, older, younger, more enthusiastic, easier, harder, etc.).



THE WRITERS' BLOCK: Jon Brown *GRAPE JELLY*

Look at the photos in this chapter and write three things that might be true about Jon Brown.

Write three things you know about Jon Brown from his writing.

In “Ten Hours in the Valley,” Jon Brown describes his transfer from one institution to another. Although the events occur in a relatively short period time, the writer describes them in vivid detail – touching on all the sense (sight, sound, touch, taste, hearing).

After you’ve read the piece, go back through it, and try to group the descriptions by the sense or senses they bring to mind. (For example, he hears the “persistent hum of the fluorescent overhead lighting,” the loudspeaker booming, metal grinding metal.) Although he doesn’t say anything about the sound, you can also almost “hear” the sound of the “new set of jewelry ... belly chains” and also “hear” guards and inmates, sirens and buzzers in the background throughout the story.

Now write your own description – of a meal, of a visit, of an ordinary morning (or whatever else you’d like to write about) – paying attention to sound, sight, smell, touch and taste as you write. Do these elements make your writing more vivid and interesting? Try writing a ‘flat’ description of your cell or your room; then try to write that same description paying attention to all five senses.

After you’ve done this writing, go back one more time and think about how you were feeling when you wrote – do your feelings come through in the choices you make about how you describe things?

Now read “Grape Jelly” – aloud, if you can. What feelings and senses come through?



THE WRITERS' BLOCK: Mike Oulton *FIVE BUCKS'LL GETCHA BURNED*

Look at the photos in this chapter and write three things that might be true about Mike Oulton.

Write three things you know about Mike Oulton from his writing.

Mike Oulton writes about professional prisoners in “Five Bucks’ll Getcha Burned.” What does the term “professional prisoner” mean to you?

In his interview, he talks about important things for surviving in prison. What do you think are the most important things for surviving in prison? Are those things different from or similar to surviving outside of prison? How are they different? How are they alike?

Mike Oulton describes what seems like an ordinary day, but provides a great deal of detail about the people and things around him. What are the things he notices about his surroundings – the meals, his cell, the man who wanted to borrow money?

What do you notice about the people you see every day? What about the places where you spend time? Write a description of a person or place, paying close attention to details that you might not usually notice.



Orville Young *WHAT WENT WRONG*

Look at the photos in this chapter and write three things that might be true about Orville Young.

Write three things you know about Orville Young from his writing.

Orville Young describes his life with his grandparents in Jamaica, and later his life with his mother in Canada. What differences does he describe between living with his grandparents and living with his mother in Canada?

Thanh Phuong Nguyen *THE MIND OF A CRIMINAL*

Look at the photos in this chapter and write three things that might be true about Thanh Phuong Nguyen.

Write three things you know about Thanh Phuong Nguyen from his writing.

“Jack” Nguyen writes many short narratives about his life, often about very specific things that happened to him, and about the people in his life. Which of his stories do you like? Which are interesting to you? Why?
