



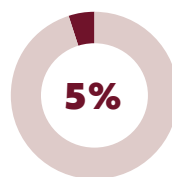
Finding the Humanities in Prison

The state humanities councils work with prisons across the country. Learn more at statehumanities.org.

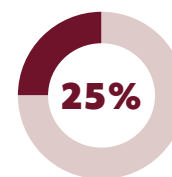
Want to tackle illiteracy in prisons?

It's hard to do without books. Prisons contain startling numbers of illiterate inmates but still struggle to provide reading materials and educational opportunities. In the United States, 75 percent of state prison inmates did not complete high school or can be classified as low literate. While in prison, nearly a quarter of those will earn their high school equivalency, but only one third of prisons offer a way for inmates to continue their education past that point.

America jails more of its citizens than any other country.



of the world's population



of its prisoners

A person's ability to read is a powerful predictor of their involvement with the court system, and literacy is directly linked to a prisoner's odds of recidivism. And yet, many inmates struggle for access to even the most basic reading materials or the resources to help them improve. The need is clear, and so is the response, which is why the state humanities councils have developed innovative solutions for getting books and teachers to prison, cultivating a life of the mind, and marshaling support outside of prison walls.

“ Discussion and dialogue outside of prison walls are a crucial part of bettering our criminal justice system. ”

Thanks to **New Hampshire Humanities**, men and women at state and county prisons can participate in *Connections*, a program that provides books and trained instructors to those wishing to improve their reading abilities.



Case in Point

Can prisons be good neighbors? **Humanities Kansas** and the Lansing Historical Museum answer that question in the short documentary, *The Kansas State Penitentiary: An Institution and a Neighbor*, which offers a fascinating and intimate portrait of a small town, its prison, and a century and a half of cooperation.



Incarcerated parents send a book and a recording of themselves reading it to their children in order to prompt discussion during later visits and reinforce the importance of reading in the family. In nearby Massachusetts, *Changing Lives Through Literature* has offered access to a literature seminar as an alternative to prison time for the past 25 years. The program got started with the help of **Mass Humanities**, and the results have been remarkable: participants have demonstrated a sizable reduction in recidivism rates and the program's success has been replicated in more than seven states as well as England and Canada. **Indiana Humanities** operates *Novel Conversations*, a free statewide lending library that sends sets of books to prisons and other organizations across the state, and is a sponsor of *States of Incarceration*, a nation-wide effort to discuss America's mass incarceration.



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Discussion and dialogue outside of prison walls are a crucial part of bettering our criminal justice system. America jails more of its citizens than any other country. We have five percent of the world's population, but 25 percent of its prisoners.

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Statistics like these demand context, discussion, and attention, and that's what the **North Carolina Humanities** Council offers with *None of the Above: Power, Privilege, and the School-to-Prison Pipeline*. This program gives communities across North Carolina a forum to talk about prisons and American life, ask difficult questions, and better understand the relationship between poverty, race, education, and incarceration. And because the state councils understand that these issues extend to the community and its law enforcement, they also host programs like **Wisconsin Humanities' Building Trust: Law Enforcement, the Media, and You**, which give stakeholders a chance to speak, explain their work, and learn from one another. This approach is mirrored by **Illinois Humanities**, which recently created *Envisioning Justice*, an ambitious series of programs designed to engage Chicago's diverse populations with conversation about the local impact of incarceration; focus attention and prompt action on criminal justice reform; and ultimately create the conditions for lasting change.

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