



Changing Lives: Working with Literature in an Alternative Sentencing Program (Critical Narrative)

Taylor Stoehr

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Changing Lives recounts the experiences of a dozen men on probation in Massachusetts who took classes for three months to read and talk about great works of literature. The men explored the writings of Malcolm X, Leo Tolstoy and Anton Chekhov, amongst others. In these writings the men discovered many issues relating to their own lives, such as substance abuse, family breakdown, poverty and racism. The lessons create a safe space for reflection and earnest conversation, in which the students no longer have to bluff or be cool, guarded, or evasive. And because the classroom puts them on equal footing with authority figures - teachers, probation officers and even judges - a new social awareness begins to emerge. Changing Lives shows how reawakening moral consciousness and a fresh commitment to society is essential if probationers are not to cycle endlessly through the limbo of street life and jail time.

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