

Lesson Plans – Grades 10-Higher Education: **Video Letters from Prison**



Subject Areas:
Social Studies • Reading & Language Arts • Native American Studies • Ethnic Studies

Procedural Notes for Educators

Film Synopsis

Video Letters from Prison follows the lives of three Oglala Lakota sisters as they reconnect with their incarcerated father via a series of video letters. The Poor Bear girls are not sure they even want to connect—but their mother, Cindy, helps them overcome reluctance and hurt to participate in the letters. The change in her girls is immediate and beautiful. Connecting life's paths, *Video Letters from Prison* is a road flooded with emotions and spiritual growth.

Cultural Orientation

Background Information for Instructors

The film, *Video Letters from Prison*, features an Oglala Lakota family from the Pine Ridge Reservation. Although the lesson plans emphasize fathers and family, you may want to give some background information on the Oglala (Sioux) Lakota Tribe while you are introducing the film or discuss the many issues that Native people in America face today.

If your community has many ethnic groups, you might want to begin by discussing how some groups of people tend to become marginalized based on race, religion, or economic status.

“Marginalized” means that they exist on the edge of mainstream culture with lower economic status and fewer opportunities. While there are many marginalized groups, Indian communities present a different picture. When the first white people came to this continent, there were approximately 50 million people living here in diverse communities all over North America.

Today, there are fewer than a million left. The devastating loss of lives, homelands, hunting grounds and cultural lifeways has tumbled through the generations to the present day with many communities suffering from poverty, alcoholism, heart disease, suicide and many other issues. Historians and scholars have termed this **“historical trauma.”**



Sensitive Information Warning

This subject can be troubling for students who may have a parent incarcerated, a parent missing from the home, or a student who may suffer from anger toward a parent, depression or is experiencing suicidal thoughts.

Teachers, parents and counselors need to be aware of the emotional content of this film and be watchful for any signs of distress of students or children viewing the film. Not recommended for students 6th grade and under.

About The Pine Ridge Reservation

The Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota is the second largest reservation in the country and is home to the Oglala (Sioux) Lakota nation. Nearly fifty percent of the population of Pine Ridge is under 20-years-old. There are many children growing up without a father or being raised by relatives. To the Lakota People, the family and the culture are two critical keys to recovering from the historical events of the past several hundred years.

The film makes several references to traditional Lakota healing and culture. In Lakota culture, the term used to describe the extended family and kinship group is “**Tiyospaye.**” Another common term is “**tewahe**” which describes the way an extended family is treated as family. For instance, your aunt’s children may be considered your own brothers and sisters.

Although historical events have contributed to the difficult issues facing the Lakota people today, there are many signs of a strong recovery. In the fall of 2009, the Oglala Lakota College had a record enrollment of 1,800 students. Programs such as *Lakota Funds* work year after year supporting the residents of the Pine Ridge Reservation in starting and growing strong businesses. Efforts are underway to begin early language immersion programs to sustain and strengthen the Lakota language and culture. Where once the Federal government made traditional ceremonies illegal, today there are over 160 Sundances held on the Pine Ridge Reservation each summer, as well as many other healing and spiritual ceremonies.

Instructors may decide how much research or additional information they want to include based on their course objectives. Links to several articles that may be of interest are provided in the sidebar.

Useful Links and Documents

- www.olc.edu
- www.kiliradio.org
- www.lakotafunds.org
- www.lakotamall.com
- www.pineridgechamber.com
- The American Holocaust: Healing Historical Unresolved Grief (Professional Papers) [http://aianp.uchsc.edu/journal/pdf/8\(2\).pdf#page=64](http://aianp.uchsc.edu/journal/pdf/8(2).pdf#page=64)
- Indigenous People in a Multicultural Society: Unique Issues for Human Services (Article) [http://www.olc.edu/~jolson/socialwork/OnlineLibrary/Weaver%20\(1998\)%20Indigenous%20people%20in%20a%20multicultural%20society%20-%20unique%20issues%20for%20human%20services.pdf](http://www.olc.edu/~jolson/socialwork/OnlineLibrary/Weaver%20(1998)%20Indigenous%20people%20in%20a%20multicultural%20society%20-%20unique%20issues%20for%20human%20services.pdf)

Please report broken links to native@unl.edu.

A Word of Caution

There are many websites that misuse Native issues to scam money from others. Please be sure students who are researching the Oglala Lakota Nation are on sites that are connected to the Oglala Lakota College, the Oglala Sioux Tribe, scholarly research or other reputable information sites.

Objectives and Curriculum Standards

Objectives

Understand the importance of the father's role in the family.

- Key to child's identity
- Essential to child's self-esteem
 - Difficulty in school
 - Increased anger and violence
 - Unhealthy relationships
- Analyze websites chosen by instructor to determine the importance of a father in the family
- Irreplaceable in child's mind

Students will:

1. **Learn** about the roles and responsibilities of parenting.
2. **Explore** cultural differences in roles and responsibilities of parenting.
3. **Analyze** consequences of parenting practices to the individual, family, and society.
4. **Apply** the information learned to themselves as future or present parents.

National Curriculum Standards

Language Standards

Multiple Literacies

Students will research, synthesize, evaluate and communicate information in a variety of media and formats (textual, visual and digital).

Reciprocal Communication

Students will develop, apply and adapt reciprocal communication skills.

■ LA 1.1.1

Multiple Literacies: Students will research, synthesize, evaluate and communicate information in a variety of media and formats (textual, visual and digital).



"Well Dad, I did it! I hope you are proud of me. I really wish you could have been here, but I understand that you can't and through Milt you are here. And, I'm just really glad that in some kind of way you got to be a part of my graduation and there was a symbol of somebody—of you being there."

— Jovannah Poor Bear, daughter of Marvin Poor Bear and Cindy Wheeler

- **LA 1.1.2**
Reciprocal Communication: Students will develop, apply and adapt reciprocal communication skills.

Family Consumer Science Standards

- **FCS 6.0**
Evaluate the significance of family and its effects on the well-being of individuals and society.

Competencies

- **6.1**
Analyze the effects of family as a system on individuals and society.
- **6.1.5**
Analyze the role of family in developing independence, interdependence, and commitment of family members.

- **FCS 12.0**
Analyze factors that influence human growth & development.

Competencies

- **LA 6 12.2.4**
Analyze the effects of life events on individuals' physical, intellectual, social, moral, and emotional development.

- **FCS 15.0**
Evaluate the effects of parenting roles and responsibilities on strengthening the wellbeing of individuals and families.

Competencies

- **15.1**
Analyze the effects of life events on individuals' physical, intellectual, social, moral, and emotional development.
- **15.1.1**
Analyze parenting roles across the life span.
- **15.1.2**
Analyze expectations and responsibilities of parenting.
- **15.1.3**
Analyze consequences of parenting practices to the individual, family and society.
- **15.1.4**
Analyze societal conditions that influence parenting across the lifespan.
- **15.1.5**
Explain cultural differences in roles and responsibilities of parenting.

National Education Technology Standards for Students

- **Creativity and Innovation**
Students demonstrate creative thinking, construct knowledge, and develop innovative products and processes using technology.
- **Communication and Collaboration**
Students use digital media and environments to communicate and work collaboratively, including at a distance, to support individual learning and contribute to the learning of others.
- **Research and Information Fluency**
Students apply digital tools to gather, evaluate and use information.
- **Critical Thinking, Problem Solving and Decision Making**
Students use critical thinking skills to plan and conduct research, manage projects, solve problems, and make informed decisions using appropriate digital tools and resources.
- **Digital Citizenship**
Students understand human, cultural and societal issues related to technology and practice legal and ethical behavior.

Procedures & Materials/ Resources Needed by Activity

1 Did You Know?

Procedural Steps: Distribute Student Handout.

Objectives: To learn about the culture presented in the film, as well as important historical events of the Tribe(s) referenced in the film.

Materials/Resources Needed: Student Handout.

Estimated Time Required: 10 minutes.



2 Vocabulary

Procedural Steps: Distribute Student Handout and view the slideshow (available at http://kids.lovetoknow.com/wiki/What_Makes_a_Good_Parent) website. An Answer Key is available at the end of the Lesson Plan for your use.

Objectives: To focus on terms and phrases used in the film that might not be understood by the general public.

Materials/Resources Needed: Student Handout and Pencil/Pen a Computer with Internet access and *Video Letters from Prison* Educational DVD.

Estimated Time Required: 90 minutes for both exercises.

3 Ideas for Action

Procedural Steps: Distribute Student Handout. This is a multi-day exercise. Please refer to handout for additional details.

Objectives: Questions will require thinking about ways to implement lessons learned from viewing the film and collected survey results into a topic of their own choosing to research further.

"When I saw that video, it was like seeing little girls. All of a sudden, they were five-, four-, three-years-old again. You know they were so happy, so elated, they twinkled, you know they really did, and I couldn't believe it...I cried that night, I just cried so hard. I was like, "Why didn't we do this before, why couldn't this have been possible before?"

— Cindy Wheeler,
mother of the three girls
whose father, Marvin Poor
Bear, is incarcerated

Materials/Resources Needed: Student Handout, Note-book Paper and Pencil/Pen, Interview Subjects, Computer with Internet Access, Microsoft Word for Graphing, Large Paper, Markers, Television with DVD Player and *Video Letters from Prison* Educational DVD.

Possible Survey Questions for Answer (available in Answer Key section)

Estimated Time Required: 6 days.



4 Writing Exercise

Procedural Steps: View the film in its entirety or clips of the film. Follow-up viewing by distributing Student Handout and assigning all or part of the questions provided. In particular, this exercise focuses on segment 3:07 to 9:29 of *Video Letters from Prison*. This segment deals with some of the consequences of adult decisions that affected their children's self-esteem. It also addresses the concerns that led to the project.

Objectives: Utilized to bring out the emotions and thought process of the student after viewing the film or a clip of the film.

Materials/Resources Needed: Television with DVD player, Student Handout, Notebook Paper, Pencil/Pen, computer with Internet Access.

Estimated Time Required: 45 minutes.

5 What Would You Do?

Procedural Steps: Distribute Student Handout and lead group discussion after the students have a moment to brainstorm answers. View *Video Letters from Prison* segments 14:46 to 18:29 and 21:09 to 26:00 and 30:03 to 35:02 which describe life on the reservation for Marvin and Cindy growing up. Students will compare the information in these segments with the information from their dialogue with students on a reservation.

Objectives: Serves as a group discussion prompt of what you would do if faced with a

certain scenario that is posed to the student as it relates to the film.

Materials/Resources Needed: Student Handout, Notebook Paper, Pencil/Pen and a Computer with Internet Access.

- International Pen Friends
Box 290065
Brooklyn, NY 11229-0001
www.ipf.net.au
- Kids Meeting Kids
380 Riverside Drive
New York, NY 10025
(212) 662-2327
<http://kidsmeetingkids.com>
- World Learning
Kipling Road
Battleboro, VT 05301
(802)257-7751
www.worldlearning.org
- Sincerely Yours Pen Pals
PO Box 2940
Philadelphia, PA 19141
(215) 548-2283
www.sincerelyyourspenpals.com

Estimated Time Required: 1 hour.

6 Art Exercise

Procedural Steps: Distribute Student Handout and any needed art supplies.

Objectives: To inspire and motivate the use of artistic expression.

Materials/Resources Needed: Student Handout, Notebook Paper, Pencil/ Pen, Children in Group Setting, Adults in Group Setting, Sketch Paper, Magazines and Newspapers. Suggested Reading: *The Relationship Cure* by John M. Gottman, PH.D. and Joan DeClaire.

Estimated Time Required: 1 hour.

7 Digital Exploration

Procedural Steps: View the NAPT online Educational Digital Resources as selected for the activity offerings you select.

Objectives: Utilize NAPT's online Educational Digital Resources for such items as viewable film clips, producer interview podcasts, interactive games, etc. that emphasize the message that is being brought to students from the film. This activity is designed to help develop critical thinking skills in students by analyzing websites for their quality.

Materials/Resources Needed: Computer with Internet access, Notebook Paper, Pencil/ Pen, Video Camera, Video Editing Software, Computer and Video Editing Guide.

Estimated Time Required: 1 hour.

8 Physical Education Exercise

Procedural Steps: Distribute Student Handout.

Objectives: To build upon teamwork, as well as mental and physical health and/or nutrition.

Materials/Resources Needed: Pencil and Paper.

Estimated Time Required: 25-35 minutes.

9 In Review

Procedural Steps: Distribute Student Handout.

Objectives: Offers takeaway facts that students should have learned and should remember after completing the offered lesson plan activities. These takeaways come full-circle to the outlined Objectives in the Procedural Notes for Educators

Materials/Resources Needed: Student Handout, Note-book Paper and Pencil/Pen.

Estimated Time Required: 15 minutes.

Educator Assessment

1. Student Assessment

- Did the students show an understanding of the roles and responsibilities of parenting?
- Did the students present their ideas clearly as they commented professionally on the website blog?
- Was the student survey written in an appropriate manner and results tabulated and reported?
- Did the student communicate with students from another culture?



2. We'd Love to Hear From You

- Please take a moment to complete our Educational Survey online at www.visionmaker.org/edusurvey.

3. Additional Resources to Consider

- Suggested Readings:

The Ten Basic Principles of Good Parenting
Steinberg, Laurence, New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004

"The Ten Basic Principles of Good Parenting is a map for the journey through parenthood, a book parents can read and then return to whenever they start to lose their way. Concise and authoritative, written with warmth and compassion, it is not only an intelligent guide to raising a happy, healthy child; it is also a guide to becoming a happier, more confident parent." [Book review from http://books.google.com/books?id=IRFk9Ld-oi0C&source=gbs_navlinks_s a]

- Links

- a. <http://www.familyresource.com/parenting/parent-education/8-essential-parentalresponsibilities>
provides information on the basic responsibilities of parents to be used to research 8-10 roles and responsibilities of parents
- b. <http://www.examiner.com/x-5513-Charlotte-Family->

Communication-Examiner~y2009m4d8-What-is-a-parents-role-in-a-childs-life

provides information on the role of a parent in a child's life and how that role plays an important part of the child's self-esteem and direction as an adult.

- c. <http://parenting.families.com/blog/10-ways-to-be-a-positive-role-model>

a blog written by Theresa McIntyre, a stay-at-home mom of three in Kuna, Idaho. This site encourages parents to be role models for children.

- d. <http://www.articlesnatch.com/Article/A-Parent-s-Role-In-A-Child-s-World/1037881>

An article written by Gen Wright about the role a parent plays in child development.

- e. www.rubistar.4teachers.org

A collection of rubrics for all types of multimedia projects. Also can create an original rubric if so choose.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Video Letters From Prison Activity 1: Did You Know?

About the Pine Ridge Reservation and the Oglala Lakota

The Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota is the second largest reservation in the country and is home to the Oglala (Sioux) Lakota nation. Nearly fifty percent of the population of Pine Ridge is under 20-years-old. There are many children growing up without a father or being raised by relatives.

To the Lakota People, the family and the culture are two critical keys to recovering from the historical events of the past several hundred years. The film makes several references to traditional Lakota healing and culture.

In Lakota culture, the term used to describe the extended family and kinship group is “**Tiyospaye**.” Another common term is “**tewahe**” which describes the way an extended family is treated as family. For instance, your aunt’s children may be considered your own brothers and sisters.

Although historical events have contributed to the difficult issues facing the Lakota people today, there are many signs of a strong recovery. In the fall of 2009, the Oglala Lakota College had a record enrollment of 1,800 students.

Terms to Remember:

Tiyospaye

Extended family and kinship group

Tewahe

In Lakota culture, the way an extended family is treated as immediate family

Programs such as Lakota Funds work year after year supporting the residents of the Pine Ridge Reservation in starting and growing strong businesses. Efforts are underway to begin early language immersion programs to sustain and strengthen the Lakota language and culture.

Where once the Federal government made traditional ceremonies illegal, today there are over 160 Sundances held on the Pine Ridge Reservation each summer, as well as many other healing and spiritual ceremonies.

Historical Timeline of Major Events

1804	Lewis and Clark encounter the Great Sioux Nation.
1851	The first treaty created to allow The Oregon Trail to cross the plains and the mountains. The treaty was broken by immigrants almost immediately.
Dec. 16, 1862	Thirty-eight Santee (Sioux) Dakota Indian men hanged in Mankato, Minnesota. This was the largest mass hanging in United States history.
1865-1869	Red Cloud's War. Red Cloud led a band of Lakotas and other tribes and defeated the U.S. Army that was trying to establish a trail across prime hunting grounds (also known as the Bozeman Trail).
1868	The Treaty of 1868 (also known as the Ft. Laramie Treaty). This is the only time in American history that the U.S. Army sued for peace. The Treaty established the boundaries of the great Sioux Nation which included The Black Hills (He'Sapa).
1874	Gold is discovered in the Black Hills and the 1868 Treaty is annulled.
June 25, 1874	Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse defeat George Armstrong Custer at Little Big Horn, also known as Custer's Last Stand. This was an armed engagement between combined forces of Lakota and Northern Cheyenne against the 7th Cavalry Regiment of the U.S. Army. Custer had been sent to Little Big Horn to try and calm down the Indians over the stealing of their lands.
December 30, 1890	The Wounded Knee Massacre. Over 300 Lakota people including women and children were murdered by the 7th Cavalry. The 7th Cavalry were the soldiers that fought with Custer when he was killed.
June 18, 1934	The Indian Reorganization Act, also known as the Wheeler-Howard Act or informally as the Indian New Deal, was a U.S. Federal legislation which secured certain rights to Native Americans, including Alaska Natives. The Act tried to transform Tribes from a Tio-spaye form of government to an elected "representative" government, but in the end, the American Indians were able to return to local, self-government. The net result was that grassroots people were left out of the decision making processes and were thrust into poverty that continues today.
Summer, 1964	Olympic runner, Billy Mills, an Oglala Lakota from Pine Ridge Reservation won the 10,000-meter race at the Olympic Games in Tokyo. Mills was the first American to win that race—and he did it in record time.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Video Letters From Prison Activity 2: Vocabulary

Exercise 1: Vocabulary Predictability

Prior to viewing the film *Video Letters from Prison*, please take a moment to write a definition for each of the vocabulary words and phrases listed below. Use your prior knowledge to write what you think each word or phrase means. After viewing the film *Video Letters from Prison*, go back and write down what you think the vocabulary word or phrase means now. If you changed your prediction after viewing the film, identify the clue words that helped you with the definition.

Additional Resource: "What Makes a Good Parent?" Slideshow
http://kids.lovetoknow.com/wiki/What_Makes_a_Good_Parent

Accountability:

Predicted Meaning: _____

After Viewing: _____

Clue Words: _____

Consistency:

Predicted Meaning: _____

After Viewing: _____

Clue Words: _____

Expectations:

Predicted Meaning: _____

After Viewing: _____

Clue Words: _____

Parental Responsibilities:

Predicted Meaning: _____

After Viewing: _____

Clue Words: _____

Parental Roles:

Predicted Meaning: _____

After Viewing: _____

Clue Words: _____

Unconditional Love:

Predicted Meaning: _____

After Viewing: _____

Clue Words: _____

Source: Adapted from CarrolltonFarmers Branch ISD – Social Studies found on:
<http://esu4vocabularystrategies.wikispaces.com/Graphic+Organizers+for+Vocabulary>

Exercise 2: NAPT Blog

Per the slideshow “What Makes a Good Parent?” as referenced above, the top takeaways are as follows:

1. **Make Kids a Priority** – Listen to them, encourage them and spend interactive time with them.
2. **Stand United** – Talk over expectations and discipline strategies with your spouse. Set up basic rules so that both parents know not only what to respect, but how to respond when situations arise.
3. **Establish Routines** – By establishing a routine, you help teach children to know what is expected and provides a sense of order and security.
4. **Love Unconditionally** – It is important for children to feel loved. Loving your child includes showing them attention and spending time with them.
5. **Hold Your Child Accountable** – It is important to hold your children accountable for their behavior because no child behaves or does the right thing 100% of the time.
6. **Teach Responsibility** – Teach children to pick-up after themselves and to also realize that they are responsible for their own actions.
7. **Make Time for You** – As a parent if you don’t take time for yourself, you won’t have the energy to do what needs to be done.

Log on to www.nativetelecom.org and set up a student user account. Write a blog 100 words or more about your opinion of the value of a family and whether you agree or disagree with the items listed above as top takeaways about “What Makes a Great Parent?” Comment on two classmate’s blogs by agreeing or disagreeing in a professional manner with their posts.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Video Letters From Prison Activity 3: Ideas for Action

Exercise 1 (Day 1): Survey

Step 1: Please answer the following discussion question:

Do you feel that good parenting practices will lead to “good” children?
Follow with a short discussion on student opinions.

Step 2: View the film *Video Letters from Prison* in its entirety.

Step 3: Please answer the following discussion question:

What is the role a father should play?

Step 4: Please answer the following discussion question:

Divide up into four groups within your classroom. Brainstorm survey questions for three minutes that you could present to peers, adults and other members of your community. Appoint a spokesperson and a recorder. Grab a large sheet of paper and come up with as many survey questions as you can in three minutes.

After the three minutes are up, Group 1 and so on will read one of their survey questions that they feel would fit best on the survey. If another Group has the same question as your group, mark it off your list of possible survey questions and read aloud your second choice survey question. By the end you will have questions the students could use for a survey.

Exercise 2 (Day 2 & 3): Surveys in Action

With the survey questions you came up with as a class from day one, present your survey to classmates, adults, community members and younger students for their responses via a variety of online methods such as Google Group, Twitter or you could survey them with a paper printout of the survey questions.

Exercise 3 (Day 4): Graphing Your Results

Group the responses you received in your survey questions into generalized groups. Take these generalized group results and create a graph to illustrate them.

Next, as a class, discuss what your Group’s overall survey results were.

Exercise 4 (Day 5 & 6): Further Exploration

After discussing the results of your survey in Exercise 3, choose a topic of interest that you noticed within the survey. Create a research plan as outlined below to focus on the topic.

My selected topic of interest: _____

Step 1: Research

Where can you go for additional research on your topic of interest?

Step 3: Prediction

What do you predict that your research findings will state about your topic of interest?

Step 3: Conclusion

Write a 250 word essay on what you learned about your topic.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Video Letters From Prison Activity 4: Writing Exercise

1. View *Video Letters from Prison* segment 1:50-6:45 which deals with some of the consequences of adult decisions that affected their children's self-esteem.
2. Immediately following viewing of the segment take 5 minutes to journal your impressions of the video segment.
3. As a class, discuss the parenting decisions made in the film and how they affected the individuals involved: the parents, the children, and the culture they lived in.
4. Compare and contrast this video clip referenced above with the slideshow viewed previously in Activity 2: Exercise 2: http://kids.lovetoknow.com/wiki/What_Makes_a_Good_Parent~1

Regarding:	Similarities	Differences
Roles of Parents as a Unit		
Role of a Father		
Role of a Mother:		
How the Children are Affected		
Crisis Situations		
Children's Self-Esteem		
Reflections on Past Events		
Routines		
Accountability		
Responsibility		

5. Write a 300 word essay about your conclusions of the effect of parental discipline on a child's self esteem.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Video Letters From Prison Activity 5: What Would You Do?

1. Compare the definitions of problem and crisis. What do they have in common? How are they different? Which word would describe the situation faced in the early years of the Poor Bear family? List examples of problems and crisis that you see in the film.
2. Why does family unity help solve problems? How does working together help find solutions? Describe ways that this family worked to overcome their problems.
3. What are some of the feelings that were expressed both verbally and nonverbally by members of the family? (Trust, joy, hope, frustration, anger, grief, etc.)?
4. List events in the lives of this family that lead to changes in family composition and influenced their family life. (Alcoholism, extended family members moving in, divorce, poverty) Why does this often cause conflict?
5. Discuss with classmates the roles of family members such as aunts, uncles, grandparents, etc. had in this family. To what extent do you differ in your interpretation of these? How do you account for this? Where do people get their ideas about what a certain role should be?
6. Recall the disciplining of young Marvin Poor Bear. Do you see any differences in how children were treated between the generations? Has there been a change in how we address this type of abuse? What are the differences in child rearing among different ethnic groups, different cultural backgrounds, and different lifestyles?
7. Think about some of the small crises you endured in your early school years: the first day of school, being teased or called a horrid name, being told you weren't good enough to play on a team, told you couldn't be a member of a group. Share some of these experiences with your classmates. Have many of you experienced similar things? What did you do? How did you feel?

Suppose the same kind of situation occurred now. Would you still react the same way? Would you feel the same about it? How did the young Poor Bear girls describe their feelings when asked about their father? Were they embarrassed? How did those feelings change after meeting him? Why?
8. Describe the differences between Cindy Wheeler—mother, and Marvin Poor Bear—father. Both parents faced alcohol addiction. What factors influences the choice that each of them made to quit or continue? Once Marvin is released from prison, what resources need to be available to him to insure that he does not return to the behavior that sent him to prison?

9. Try to improve communication between yourself and your parents. Look for times when you can sit down together and discuss anything, not just problems and personal concerns.

Develop the habit of sharing thoughts and feelings, until you feel comfortable enough to share personal concerns. What have you learned from this video that could improve relationships in your own family?

10. No one plays a bigger part in the lives of children than their parents. The person they are to become begins with the family, probably from the day a newborn baby is brought home. That power continues, to a lesser or greater degree, whenever children have contact with their parents. Support this statement with examples from the video.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Video Letters From Prison Activity 6: Art Exercise

Understanding the Face

In *Video Letters from Prison*, you probably recognized that a person's face is the most suitable part of the body for expressing emotion. For example, the wide-eyed expressions on the faces of the Poor Bear family members as they shared their letters demonstrate just how powerful those emotions are.

There are many reasons why we hold back from expressing how we really feel, especially when we encounter feelings of anger, sadness and fear. We want to prevent ourselves from the hurt that often accompanies these feelings. Just because we try to conceal them, does not mean that our feelings don't show. Facial expressions "don't lie."

Exercise 1

Observe young children in play situations at home, at the park, or in school. Note their facial expressions as they interact with their play group or classmates. What do they convey?

Exercise 2

Describe different ways you see children expressing their feelings. For each of these, comment on how this affects the child, other children or the adults.

Explain how the situations witnessed above are handled by the adults or other children and give your own evaluation of their effectiveness.

Exercise 3

Choose one of the emotions that has been discussed. Role-play for the class a situation in which a child, a teenager and an adult might express this emotion. See if your classmates can guess the emotion you are portraying.

Exercise 4

Make simple sketches or clip cartoons or pictures from magazines or newspapers that show various emotions. Discuss what their facial expressions look like, and describe the feelings associated with the pictures.

Exercise 5

Think about a particularly emotional incident you've had with a loved one, or with somebody important in your life. What do you remember about the expressions on the other person's face?



Name: _____

Date: _____

Video Letters From Prison Activity 7: Digital Exploration

Exercise 1: Your Video Letter

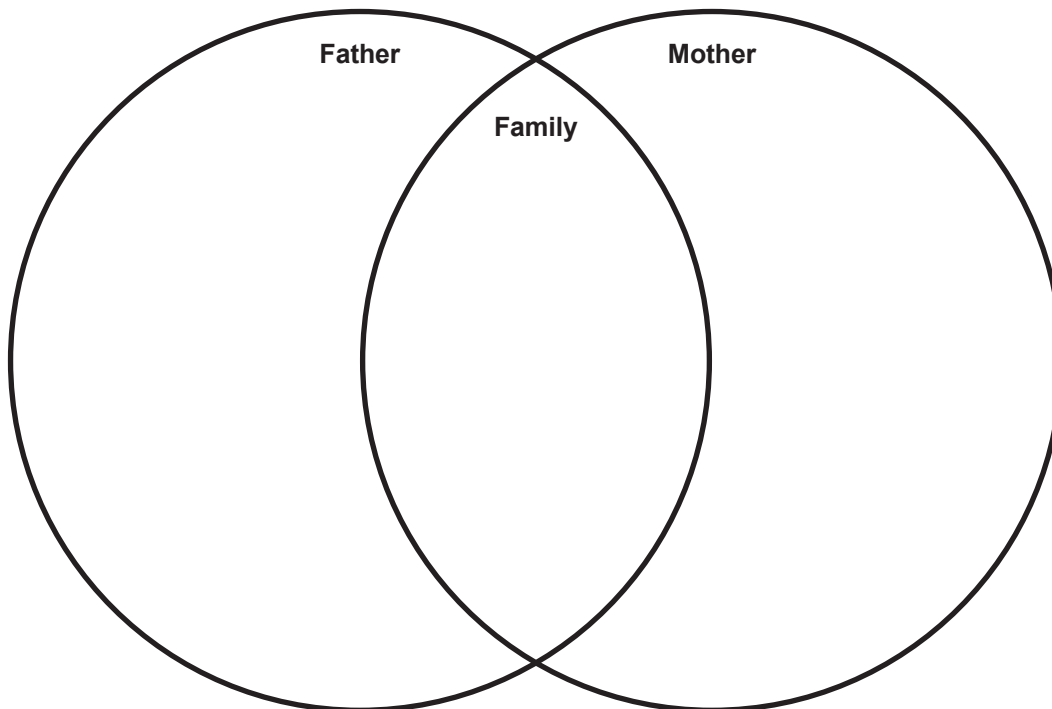
Create a video letter to a parent or grandparent. This can be to a parent not in the home or to a parent as a way of appreciating the role the parent has played in the student's life.

Exercise 3: Essay

Create a 300 word essay or video blog your essay and submit to your instructor based off your Venn Diagram findings below.

Exercise 2: Venn Diagram

Complete the Venn Diagram below with thoughts that come to mind when thinking about the role of a mother and father as it applies to a family.



Name: _____

Date: _____

Video Letters From Prison Activity 8: Physical Education Exercise

Exercise 1: The Human Knot

The family is a complicated unit. In order to grow strong, we need to learn how to communicate with one another and work together—even when it is difficult. The following exercise is a physical activity designed to encourage both “coming together” and “untangling” ourselves when life gets complicated.

Instructions:

1. Divide into small groups of six to eight people.
2. Each group stands in a tight circle.
3. Place your hands into the center and close your eyes. Each hand must link with another participant's hand. Once everyone is holding two other hands, you can open your eyes.
3. Now, you have to “untie” yourself as a group from knot without anyone letting go of the hands they are holding.

Source: *Diversityanddialogue.com*, a site no longer operating but offering its resources to others.



Exercise 2: Reading the Body and Face

It is important in life to become a good observer of others. We can learn a great deal by observing what we see without judging or assuming that certain expressions mean certain things.

Part 1:

1. Choose a partner and stand opposite one another.
2. Choose one of student to be the observer and the other to be the one being observed.
3. As the observer, study how the other person is standing, looking and positioning his/her hands, etc.
4. As the observer, take a mental picture of the partner's whole body and face.
5. Next, the observer should close his or her eyes. Your partner should make a very subtle change in their posture.
6. As the observer, open your eyes and try to identify what has changed in your partner's stand, look, etc.
7. Do this several times making more and more subtle changes to challenge the observer.
8. Now switch roles. The observer becomes the one being observed.

Part 2:

It is easy to make assumptions—and sometimes often wrong ones—about what an expression, tone of voice, or posture means when we observe it. In part two of this second exercise, you'll need to use only sensory descriptions to describe the changes that your partner is displaying. You are not allowed to label it until after you have reported on what you see. Then you can ask what emotion your partner was displaying.

1. Repeat the above exercise, but this time your partner will intentionally express an emotion such as sadness, fear, anger, etc. with their face or body.
2. As observer, note only what you see in the physical changes of the face or body (color change, muscle changes, eyes or eyebrows, lines, etc.) or your partner.
3. When the observer has finished reporting, the partner can then explain which emotion they were thinking about or attempting to display. Discuss whether the signals that the observer was reading were aligned with the emotion the partner was displaying.



Name: _____

Date: _____

Video Letters From Prison Activity 9: In Review

Top 8 Takeways to Remember

The word “families” has been used to help identify the following key points to take away from *Video Letters from Prison*:

- 1 **Family** values, culture and historical background are three primary influences on the work of the family.
- 2 **Appreciate** your family, your history, and its cultural traditions, as they have made you the person that you are.
- 3 **Make** a point to celebrate both the differences and the similarities between all families, regardless of race or structure.
- 4 **Involvement** of fathers in the lives of their children is critical to their healthy self-esteem and direction into adulthood.
- 5 **Letters** can be used as tools to communicate feelings with others that may be too difficult to share verbally.
- 6 **Investigate** school and community resources that are available to teens and families who are facing difficult challenges.



- 7 **Explore** interpersonal communication skills that can be used to help overcome problems and strengthen relationships.
- 8 **Sit down** and visit with, or write a letter to a person from another country, another social class, or a different culture/ethnic group.

Credits

About the Author(s)

Jerlyn Hohnholt teaches Family and Consumer Science at Maxwell Public School in Maxwell, Nebraska, for grades 7-9. She also teaches Child Development for grades 11-12. Hohnholt is an advisor for Family Career and Community Leaders of America (FCCLA) and received her Bachelor's in Vocational Home Economics from Kearney State College and a Master's in Human Resources and Family Science from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Hohnholt has served as a chapter adviser for 26 years and has been teaching for 30 years. Her students are very involved in the national program known as STAR (Students Taking Action with Recognition) by doing community service and fundraising for local groups in the North Platte and Maxwell communities in Nebraska.

Nancy Barr teaches Family and Consumer Science at Lewiston Consolidated School in Lewiston, Nebraska, for grades 7-12. Barr has been teaching for six years and she received her Bachelor of Science degree from University of Nebraska.

Barr sponsors a local community outreach club at Lewiston called the LCS Club (Leadership, Character and Service Club). The club sponsors three blood drives each year, an annual food drive, provides Valentine's Day balloons to the communities of the Lewiston school district, collects donations for the Make-a-Wish Foundation and provides leadership opportunities for all members.

Jamie Lee, who served as the Writer of *Video Letters for Prison*, is an author and a former instructor at the Oglala Lakota College, where she taught for five years. Lee has a Master's in Human Development and has been a communications trainer and an educator for the past 30 years.

Her stories and articles have appeared in *The South Dakota Review*, *Winds of Change Magazine* and several other anthologies. She has published three non-fiction books along with one novel and a collection of writings from Oglala Lakota College students. Her first novel, *Washaka: The Bear Dreamer*, was a PEN USA finalist in 2007. Lee has written over 70 documentary programs including public radio's landmark 52-part Native music series, *Oyate Ta Olowan: The Songs of the People*.

About the Producer/Director

Milt Lee is a sound and film artist who has worked most of his life to further the interests of Native Americans across the country. He is an enrolled member of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe.

With his wife, Jamie, Milt Lee produced and distributed a 52-part series for PRI and AIROS called *Oyate Ta Olowan: The Songs of the People*. These award-winning documentaries on traditional Native American music were funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB), the National Endowment for the Arts and AIROS. In 2007, he was named a Bush Artist Fellow and used the time to produce *Video Letters from Prison*, his first full-length film documentary about three Lakota girls who connect with their incarcerated father via "Video Letters."

About VisionMaker Video

VisionMaker Video, a service of Native American Public Telecommunications, Inc. (NAPT), with major funding from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) is the premier source for quality Native American educational and home videos. Profits from video sales are invested in new NAPT productions. NAPT shares Native stories with the world through support of the creation, promotion and distribution of Native media.



VisionMaker Video 

Hollow Bone Films
hollowbonefilms.com

Answer Key - Activity 2: Vocabulary

Accountability: The quality or state of being accountable; especially an obligation or willingness to accept responsibility or to account for one's actions. (Source: www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary)

Consistency: Agreement or harmony of parts or features to one another or a whole; harmony of conduct or practice with profession. (Source: www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary)

Expectations: The act or state of expecting; anticipation (Source: www.merriamwebster.com/dictionary)

Parental Responsibilities: All the rights, duties, powers and responsibilities that by a law a parent of a child has in relation to the child and his or her property. The concept was introduced by the Children Act of 1989, replacing custody. Parental responsibility is automatically conferred on both parents if married, and on the mother alone if not. An unmarried father can acquire parental responsibility either by agreement with the mother or applying to court for a parental responsibility order. (Source: <http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1O49parentalresponsibility.html>)

Parental Roles: The guiding of a child into adulthood, teaching them how to survive in the world. In addition to providing love, a parent must teach fun and responsibility in a balance. (Source: http://blog.lib.umn.edu/frede145/Thoughts/2006/01/the_role_of_a_parent.html)

Unconditional Love: A term that means to love someone regardless of the loved one's qualities or actions. (Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conditional_love)

Activity 3: Ideas for Action / Survey Questions

Sample Questions for Student Survey

1. Do you believe the role of the father is pivotal in the lives of his children?
 - a. Strongly Agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Disagree
 - d. Strongly Disagree
 - e. No Opinion
2. Do you perceive a strong father role in a family unit will:
 - a. Increase a child's self-esteem
 - b. Decrease a child's self esteem
3. Do you feel that children of incarcerated parents share a stigma and shame not felt by other children?
 - a. Strongly Agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Disagree
 - d. Strongly Disagree
 - e. No Opinion
4. Do you feel that an absent parent can affect a child's self-esteem?
 - a. Strongly Agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Disagree
 - d. Strongly Disagree
 - e. No Opinion
5. Do you feel that an absent parent contributes to increased juvenile delinquency, school absenteeism, and difficulty in learning?
 - a. Strongly Agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Disagree
 - d. Strongly Disagree
 - e. No Opinion
6. Do you feel that the role of the father can be assumed by any male figure in the mind of a child with an incarcerated father?
 - a. Strongly Agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Disagree
 - d. Strongly Disagree
 - e. No Opinion
7. Do you feel that a strong relationship can exist or be established between an incarcerated parent and his/her child while in prison?
 - a. Strongly Agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Disagree
 - d. Strongly Disagree
 - e. No Opinion